

**"We" does
not exist**

secondary communities—
art and democracy

001



WALL TEXT 1.

Society allows (and maybe expects) the artist
-unlike the journalist, the scientist, the scholar or the activist-
to issue a statement without any demonstration: this is what we
call "poetic license".

This condition leads to a series of questions:

-Can an artistic intervention truly bring about an unforeseen way of
thinking, or it is more a matter of creating a sensation of
"meaninglessness" that shows the absurdity of the situation?

- Can an artistic intervention translate social tensions into
narratives that in turn intervene in the imaginary landscape of a
place"

-Can an absurd act provoke a transgression that makes you abandon
the standard assumptions on the sources of conflict?

- Can those kinds of artistic acts bring about the possibility of change?

In any case, how can art remain politically significant without assuming
a doctrinal standpoint or aspiring to become social activism?

For the moment, I am exploring the following axiom:

Sometimes doing something poetic can become political
and
sometimes doing something political can become poetic.

WALL TEXT 2.

In the summer of 1995 I performed in Sao Paulo a walk (The Leak).
that was quoted as a poetic gesture, a *beau-geste*.

On the 4th and 5th of June 2004, I re-enacted that performance by tracing
a line through the city of Jerusalem with a leaking can of paint.

The walk followed the portion of the "Green Line" that runs
through the municipality of Jerusalem .

Its starting and ending points were determined by the municipal borders drawn
on the map of Jerusalem issued by The Survey of Israel Institute in the year
2003.

58 liters of green vinyl paint were used to trace 24 km of the line.

In February 2005 a filmed documentation of the walk was presented
to a number of people whom the artist invited to react spontaneously
to the action and the circumstances within which it was performed.

A selection of these reactions accompanies this film.

002



003



ART&SOCIETY

By claudia zanfi + gianmaria conti

We think that art can be like a seed: it works to stimulate and activate creative and democratic processes, which can become platforms for social debates, and “refresh” mentalities. The aim of our institution is also to relate local people to artists, researchers, architects, writers. To move between the various liminal zones of cities, public and transit spaces, in the awareness that it is necessary to know in depth the socio-political situation of the context. That’s also very important in order to achieve artistic projects that can be effective and communicate with the public and the society.

One of our main projects GOING PUBLIC is a mobile open platform, a network of production, reflection and cultural exchange, that establishes itself in peripheral areas. *Going Public* invites artists to work on places of the city, such as railway stations, public libraries, squares, schools, ect.... The project develops an attitude for intervention in social issues, together with local communities, in the fold of public policy, nomadism, of today’s precarious and temporary settlements. The researches are addressed to contemporary subjects such as: communities, territories, mobility, borders, new geographies, mediterranean cultures, micro-geographies, with a special attention to geo-political situations.

Art offers no
ready-made
solutions to
the challenge
of democracy
in the age of
globalization

—Roland Bleiker



offer support:
physical
metaphysical

1.00 Facilities:

1.01 Shelter:	1.011 Large space for group meetings 1.012 Smaller group areas.
1.02 Communications:	1.0211 Plenty of blackboards, wall space, and bulletin boards. 1.0212 16-mm movie projector with screen. 1.0213 Telephone. 1.0214 Xerox. 1.0215 Micro-fiche reader and printer. 1.0216 Casette tape recorder players. 1.0217 Video-tape recorder and player. 1.0218 Typewriter. 1.0219 Computer access. 1.0220 Library: documents, Dr. Fuller’s books, films, games, geodestix. 1.0221 Notebooks.
1.03 Supplies:	1.031 Maps. 1.032 Paper, pens, etc.
1.04 Operating budget:	1.041 Documentational. <div>1.0411 Printing. 1.0412 Photos. 1.0413 Computer program tapes. 1.0414 Video tapes.</div> 1.042 Graphics. <div>1.0421 Paper. 1.0422 Pens, inks, paints, etc. 1.0423 Zip-a-tone.</div> 1.043 Informational. <div>1.0431 Books. 1.0432 Magazines. 1.0433 Microfilm readers & print outs. 1.0434 Documents. 1.0435 Lab books. 1.0436 Abstracts. 1.0437 Charts. 1.0438 Maps. 1.0439 Computer time. ’</div> 1.044 Secretarial. <div>1.0441 Xerox. 1.0442 Stationery. 1.0443 Salary. 1.0444 Postage. 1.0445 Phoning. 1.0446 Supplies.</div> 1.045 Staff <div>1.0451 Salary 1.0452 Supplies. 1.0453 Computer punch-cards, typists.</div>

1.10 Staff:

- 1.11 Participants will hopefully range in interest and experience in all fields-physical and social sciences, arts and humanities, computer related fields, as well as multi-disciplined generalists.
- 1.12 A secretary/librarian to maintain library and communications.
- 1.13 If the group is large (20-40) full time staff member(s) are a necessity. They should have had experience in World Game development and Design Science¹.

¹World Game
The World Game is a scientific means for exploring expeditious ways of employing the World’s resources so efficiently and omni-considerately as to be able to provide a higher standard of living for all of humanity-higher than has heretofore been experienced by any humans-and on a continually sustainable basis for all generations to come, while enabling all of humanity to enjoy the whole planet Earth without any individual profiting at the expense of another and without interference with one another, while also rediverting the valuable chemistries known as pollution to effective uses elsewhere, conserving the wild resources and antiquities.

from the World Game: Integrative Resource Utilization
R. Buckminster Fuller, Summer 1969

↑ ↑ ↑
WE ARE THE SPECK
- EVIDENCE OF LIFE
- ITS TIME TO ACT
LIKE IT. HOW YOU ASK?

- STEP 1. NON-COMPLIANCE
STEP 2. REFUSAL (PREFER NOT TO - MORE OFTEN)
STEP 3. RE-CHANNEL
STEP 4. REVOLT (DAILY)
STEP 5. SHARE
STEP 6. REMAIN VIGILANT (ANXIOUS)
STEP 7. REJECT (SELF) RIGHTNESS
SATISFACTION
STEP 8. WITHDRAW ENERGIES
STEP 9. FUGA, USTARE, ESCAPE
STEP 10. BE ABSOLUTELY CRITICAL → NEGATIVE
→ AFFIRMATIVE
STEP 11. THINK AND
STEP 12. ADD

SEE - **SAW**

WHO IS ALL OF THIS (WAR?) FOR?
(ART?)

YOUR'S (AND OUR) GOOD CONSCIENCE
IS NOT ENOUGH!

YOU VICTIM
YOU OPPRESSOR
YOU VICTIM
YOU OPPRESSOR
YOU ARE NOT YOU!

LIARS ALL
WITNESS
TRUTH



YOUR VOICE
IS NEITHER THIS NOR THAT

YOU SHOULD SPEAK LESS
YOUR VOICE IS BEAUTIFUL



CHEAP CARTOONS

YOU ALL, AN EMBARRASSMENT
I DON'T NEED TO READ FURTHER
YOU KEEP SPEAKING ABOUT
WAR ASSUMING THAT THE
REST IS ART, WHEN IN FACT
(FACT?) THE REST, WHICH
IS ALL, IS A KIND OF WAR,
OR OTHER, AND WE HAVE
LOST OUR ART.

YOU SEEM TO ALWAYS
BEMOAN A LOSS OF SOME
SUIT, WONDER
WANDER
YOU WILL
ALWAYS
BE
BEHIND
PICKING
UP THE
PIECES
OR
FORGOTTEN HOW TO PLAY?
PROFANE?
BAD TIMING?
HE HAD EXPIRED
HE WAS GONE

THE KING IS DEAD!
LONG LIVE THE KING!

DETERMINATION
MILESTONE DAY
DANCING HUGGING LINGING
THE LONG NATIONAL NIGHTMARE
MISSION 2000
THERE IS LITTLE OR NO ROOM FOR SEX IN
WAR

SO THERE
IS RAPE
AND
TORTURE
AND
THIS KIND
OF
BULLSHIT

THAT PASSES FOR CRITICISM

MIDNIGHT ROLLS AROUND AND YOU ARE SITTING IN FRONT OF

I MAILED YOU A LETTER ON THE 14TH INTRODUCTION TO THE SELF-NEGATING NOTHING
OF MAY 1963. THE
SAVAK WAS BY THEN
AFTER ME, AND ALL
I COULD THINK OF TO
EXPLAIN OUR INTENDED
SENSELESS GOAL OF
STRUGGLING DEPOSING
FOR THE
WITH SHAN
WORDS WAS
THIS UPSIDE
DOWN STAMP
OF LUTHER.

I MADE A CHILD IN GERMANY
BUT THE
MOTHER
AND I
ARE
ESTRANGED.

WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO BE AT WAR?
WHO IS AT WAR WITH WHOM?
WHAT IS WAR, WHAT COULD I TELL YOU ABOUT IT,

YOU COULD DRAW US IN CLOSER UNTIL OUR SEX MET WITH OUR GENDER AND
THE CAPTION READS OF SEX, MONEY, AND HAPPINESS RACE
THE IMAGE, HEARTLESSNESS, CALLOUS OPPRESSION (SEX)

YOU WERE THERE YOU
LYING BASTARD AND LIES

THE KING, THE TYRANT, THE GODFATHER, MR. PRESIDENT - ALL DEAD AND THUS
WE HAD THE OPPORTUNITY TO SPEAK BUT
INSTEAD YOU CHOSE THEIR SILENCE, AND
THEIR AFTER WAS YOUR BEFORE, HIS
SADNESS, HER CRY FOR REVENGE

WAR

ON THE ONE HAND, ONE SAYS, IT IS ALL WAR, WAR FOR EXAMPLE IS TAKING PLACE ALL DAY
WAR IS EVERYWHERE, NOT JUST IN IRAQ OR AFGHANISTAN, WAR IS OUT ON OUR STREETS
WAR IS YET, HO, WAIT, NOT, TOO MUCH WAR, WAR → STATE WAR

WHY IS ALL FAIR
IN LOVE AND WAR?

WHY QUESTIONS ARE THE WORST OF THEM ALL
WE STRIVE
STRIDE
STAMPER ON - INTO THE

BINARY
PROPERTIES, ENEMIES
INTERIORITY
COLLECTIVES

WAR MACHINE
DETERITORIALIZING
ATTEMPTING ILL-TIMED VISIT

PART OF APPARATUS OF DOMINATION
THE BLOOD NEVER DRIES AND WAR
QUICK
ENOUGH
TRACING OUT THE LINES OF FLIGHT

JUDGEMENT DAY
JUDGEMENT DAY
CAME AND
WENT
IT PASSED US BY

LEFT US IN THE COLD.
YOUR REFLEXIVITY WILL BE
MY REFLEXIVITY
MY UNDOING

WAR



WE ARE NOT HERE TO GUILT TRIP YOU

ENTERTAIN^{YOU}
EXPLAIN^{YOU} EXONERATE^{YOU}
EXCUSE^{YOU} OR PARDON^{YOU}

BUT YOU SHOULD FIND IT HARD TO DENT OUR PRESENCE
QUENCH - SMASH - SMOKE
OUR DEMANDS!

BUT WHY DO YOU MAKE WAR
BEAUTIFUL? WE ARE NOT MAKING
WAR BEAUTIFUL! BUT WHY DO YOU
MAKE WAR
SELLABLE? YOU KEEP SHOOTING AND
SHOOTING, YOU GOOD FOR
NOTHING, EVENTUALLY THE
PRESIDENT CALLS YOU IN
AND ASKS YOU TO COMPLY
YOU SAY NOT OVER YOUR
DEAD
BODY
AND YOU ARE

THEN WHY DO YOU SHUFFLE SO?
ALL THE COLD (OR WARM) COMPLEXITY

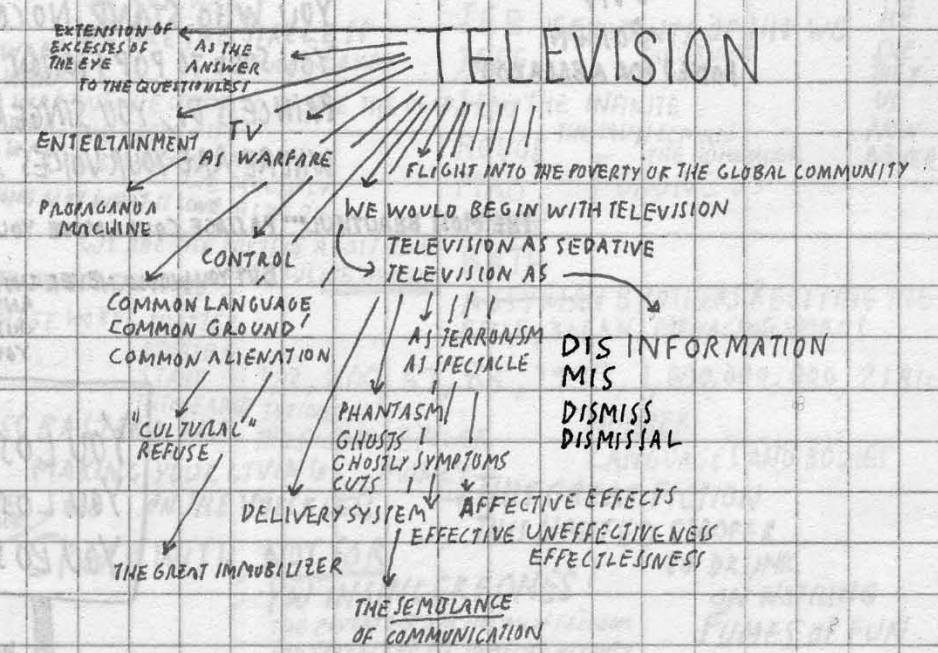
OF YOUR POETRY
WONT WIN YOU
RICHES
FRIENDS
POWER
SECURITY
EFFECTIVE
RESISTANCE
WILL IT?
RELENT
UNTIL, OF COURSE YOU
RECEIVED THAT VERY
COMFORTABLE JOB
FROM THE UNIVERSITY
AND YOU BECAME
SELF-SATISFIED LIKE
THE REST

EACH STEP
IS FURTHER
FROM THE
TRUTH
WAR
WAS
WHAT CAN ART
WHAT ART
THERE IS AN ART OF WAR
A CRAFT OF WAR
WARFARE
GOODS
HOODS
ENEMIES, MONSTERS
FIGURES
HOPES, HOPING AGAINST HOPE
HOPING WITH HOPE THAT IS NOT OURS

ITS WARM, ITS RIGHT, ITS THE MESSAGE
THE MEDIUM
THE MESSAGE
THE SMALL OBJECT
THE COMMODITY
THE FETISH
IF WE COULD ONLY STOP SHOPPING?

THE TELEVISION ARMS FOLDED LOOKING FURTHER AND FURTHER INTO ALL THE EXPRESSIONLESS, WORDLESS, UNNAMEABLE AND COLD DISTANT FEELINGS
IMAGE OF THE
WORLD I SHOULD BEGIN BY JUST INTRODUCING THE BASIC QUESTION.
CAN ART TODAY FULFILL ANY CRITICAL ROLE WITHIN

WE LOVED NEITHER WISELY NOR WELL
WE THE "WE"LESS



RAW

UNEDITED

YOU IMBECILE
YOU IMBECILE
YOU IMBECILES
ALL!



ON THE BOND
BETWEEN THE
SOVEREIGN
AND THE
people

(IN)
THE
FLAMES
OF
REBELLION

YOUR MONEY
PRODUCED
THIS IMAGE.

FORCE

PEACE KEEPER
PREVENT
PEACE
PATIENT

STRIKE

PREEMPTING
EMERGENCE

VENGEANCE

VIOLENCE

SUGAR

SALT

OVER

POISON

POISED FOR A BREAKOUT

A COLLAGE, MY LOVERS, MY ADMIRERS
OF THE INFAMOUS, YOU LOVING
BITCH ASS NIGGER, YOU BARING GIFTS
YOU FEAR EVERY WORD BEARING
YOU FAG, YOU SWEATY ARMO KISS AND HOLD US ALL IN YOUR
YOU CAMEL JOCKEY, YOU WHITE TRASH
YOU WHO STAND, NO CRAWL AT MY FEET
YOU SOLD TO POP FICTION J.E.K. JR. AND
PRINCESS DI, YOU SINGERS, YOU MUSICIANS
WHERE ARE YOUR VOICES AS YOU PROFITEER

THE MOST BEAUTIFUL*** PASSAGE COULD MOVE YOU TO SPILL YOURSELVES
SILLY WITH GOO
BUT YOU WOULD NEVER UNDO
ANYTHING
OUT OF YOUR ASS
YOU SILLY THING

YOU LOST
YOU LOST
YOU LOST

WHAT IS THE MEANING OF VICTORY ?

ERASE

CASUALTIES mounting

ENDLESS NIGHTS
OF WARFARE

DEATH TOLL

DEAR ONES, LITTLE ONES
YOUR SCREAMS
YOUR DREAMS
YOUR PASSAGE

I COULD WRITE WITH NOTHING, HOPE UPON HOPE, CUTTING THROUGH ALL
THE DISAPPOINTMENTS, WHAT IS HISTORY BUT A LIST OF OUR MISTAKES
THEY WERE NOT OUR'S, AND OUR'S WAS NOT THEIR'S, AND THEY, US, WE

WE ALL
DANCED
EVEN W/OUT
MUSIC

"THEY"
WILL
SAY
WE WROTE

BLOODY POEMS

THIS IS WHAT WE WERE LEFT WITH THE WORLD WAS BURNING AND WE
GURGLED, LURKING COUNTED IT DOWN
WE FUCKED IT ALL AWAY UNPOETICALLY

WHILE OUR CITIES
FRIGHTENED BURNED

CHEERS
BOMBS
EXPLOSIONS

TIMELESS, WE LEARNED
FROM EACH OTHER
EACH HIS OWN

ECONOMIC WARFARE

SAVAGE
BLOODY
NEO-LIBERAL
LIBERAL FASCISM

A BLOODY TRAIN WRECK, CARTOONS NEARING MIDNIGHT

RECEIVING
LETTERS
STORM UPON STORM
DESERT WRECKAGE

WE SHALL BURN IN YOUR BATHROOM
AND WE WILL HAVE SPILLED
OUR GUTS

AMERICAN
ARMS
RACE

WHAT SHOULD WE DO IN THE
OF TYRANNY

WE ARE WHO
WE ARE THE TIRELESS
OVERWORKED

SADDAM
GEORGE FACE
GEORGE

JEFF SERVANTS OF THE WE
THE BANNED
THE WOLFMAN

ME
HE
SHE
THEY
US
NOW
NEVER

HWAR WHICH WAR? WHICH WAR?
CH WAR WHICH WAR? WHICH WAR?
CH WAR WHICH WAR? WHICH WAR?
CH WAR WHICH WAR? WHICH WAR?

WE USE COLOR TO ESCAPE THE DEAD
WE ARE A GIFT
WE WALK AND RUN
WE MULTIPLY
AS WE DIE

THE INFINITE
THE MUSSELMAN
THE HOMOSACER
FORGIVE US

THE SILLY SONG ASKS WHAT IS LOVE

WE ARE THE POETS OF A LOST CAUSE
AND THUS WE WILL WIN

OUR FRIENDSHIP THROWN TO THE WIND

THESE WORDS SHATTER
STUTTER
STAND

1, 2, 600, 57, 83, 2999, 1,000,000,000, 21 BILLION

YOU SHAMELESS BASTARD, YOU

MAKING YOUR LIVING
ON THE VOICELESS

NUMBER
LANGUAGES AND BODIES

WE ARE THE DEBATS
LEFT IN THE WAKE
OF A GREAT
TUMULTUOUS
STORM.
AN ENDLESS STORM.

SPEAK WITH, NOT FOR

YOU INSINCERE ONES!
THE POVERTY OF OUR NOTION OF FREEDOM
THE POVERTY OF MY INACTIVE ACTIVITY
... IS THE POVERTY OF THE FUTURE

THIS GREAT FICTION
THIS LIMITED STOOPER

SO DRUNK
ON NOTHING
FUMES OF FUN
IRREGULAR SIZES AND ALL



I COULD INSPIRE YOU TO BURN US



THE IMAGE OF THE WORLD

FALTERS IN OUR HANDS
SLIPPING OUT OF OUR GRASP
OUT OF REACH
OUT OF THIS WORLD
OUT OF BOUNDS
OUT OF BOUNDEDNESS
WHO WILL REDEEM

PROPOSITION: WAR ON TERROR

NON-COMPLY - EARS
ADDRESSLESS
UNPROFITABLE
VOICELESS
ON WORKERS
ON POOR WEAK UNACCOUNTABLE
ON POWERLESS INVISIBLE
INDIGENOUS REFUSERS

THE SELF-SATISFIED
AND
THE RICH
AND THE
POWERFUL AND
MIGHTY

MONSTERS

(GLOBAL) CIVIL WAR
PERMANENT / TEMPORARY

THIS IS THE EXPLOSION

EVERY WORD, EVERY DOLLAR, EVERY
EVERY RESPONSE IS INSUFFICIENT

WE ARE THE SHORTAGE
WE ARE NOT WE

RESPONSE #1

THE SYNDICATES

THE FIGURES:
DEAR PRESIDENT BUSH
VICE PRESIDENT CHENEY (SP?)
HOMELAND SECURITY
SEC. OF DEFENSE
SEC. OF STATE
CHENEY (SP?)
CHENEY
CHENEY
CHE
NO

THE POWER

THE CORPORATIONS

THE PROFITS

THE PRAGMATISTS
THE REALISTS
CHRISTIAN RIGHT

THE PROFANES

THE LOVERS
THE HATEFUL
THE RELIGIOUS
THE SACRED

WHAT CAN I SAY? I WOULD LIKE
WORLD WOULD NOT SUFFICE TO TELL
WORLD CAN'T WAIT
WORLD WON'T LISTEN

LANGUAGES

THE WORLD VOICE

THE ENEMIES

THE GOOD GUYS

THE HEROES

THE INNOCENTS

THE GUILTY

THE HOPELESS
THE CONFUSED
THE INDIFFERENT
THE PRAGMATISTS
THE HAPPY ONES
THE MILLIONAIRES
BILLIONAIRES
POOR
HELPLESS
NEEDY

THE RESISTANCE

THE SUSPECTS

THE TERRORISTS

THE DON'T READ ANYTHING

DON'T BELIEVE ANYTHING

DON'T RUFFLE ANY FEATHERS

THE RIGHT

THE LEFT

THE EYES AND EARS

THE HEARTS AND MINDS

THE REBELS

THE CYNICS

THE SELL-OUTS

THE DO-GOODERS

THE WINNER THE LOSERS
THE WAVES THE HAVE NUTS

BATTLE LINES

THE OPPRESSED
THE WRETCHED
THE REFUSENIKS

DRAWN

THE UNTOUCHABLES

THE FEW, THE PROUD

THE BETTER THAN US

WE PUSH TOWARD INFINITY

THIS IS THE
FAILED LEFT
WE WERE
TALKING
ABOUT

INSUFFICIENT
LANGUAGE

INEXPRESSIVE

SHARED HELL

MADNESS

INSANITY

SCHIZOPHRENIA

WE LOST ALL HOPE?

HOW DO YOU LOSE SOMETHING THAT IS NOT YOUR OWN?

INTEGRITY
INTEGRAL INTEGRAL
INTEGRATED

EXPULSED
REPULSED
HURRIED TO OUR GRAVES

WHEN WAS THERE HOPE?

UNEVEN

THE WEIGHT OF THE WORLD
UNEASY, MASSIVE
DISINTEGRATING, MELTING
APOCALYPTE - SIGN OF
THE TIMES - WE NEED AN
ASSURED HAND FOR THE
GLOBAL MARKET-
PLACE

THE WORKERS

THE THINKERS

THE BELIEVERS AND UN

WHO BELIEVES?

AND WHAT DO WE BELIEVE

DEAR PRESIDENT
I, RESIDENT, ALIEN

WHAT CAN WE

ENEMY
COMBATANT

EVERY ONE OF THESE

IS A PART OF THIS WAR

THE SHITTY ARTISTS DO IN THE FACE OF OUR FACES?



RED BLOOD
WOUNDED
YOU POOL
YOU SHOULD LAUGH



WE HAVE ABANDONED

THE GESTURES

WHICH PRESERVED

(HELD) OUR POLITICS

THE POTENTIAL
FOR
OUR
COMING
POLITICS

MY HAND SHAKES TO WRITE
EACH WORD UNFOLDING IN A KIND OF STORY THAT BITES
WE ENTERED THROUGH THE GATES
OF THE LAW AND EXHUMED
THE BODY OF KAFKA IN THE
PROCESS.
COULD WE WRITE THE ODE TO YOUR
ONLY PLEASURE. WE COULD STRIP OURSELVES OF ALL RESPONSIBILITY AND
I COULD TRY AGAIN AS
YOU SHAKE
AND JIGGLE
YOU GRAPPLE
I AM SMALL
SO SMALL
FUCK YOUR CONSTANT
NO BOMB CAN
ERASE ME
WE, OH
MY, YES
FIGHT CORDLESS
OK, OK, MAY I?
YOU THINK YOU
YOU THE PENNILESS
YOU, WE, THE
SERVANTS
CAN, YOU, WHO CAN MAN, TANK, FLUTTER, CUT
COULDN'T YOU DO ANYTHING MORE THAN
JUST FALL UPON THAT
REFRAIN OF EXPRESSIONLESS EXPRESSION
EACH CHECKPOINT
EACH PHANTOM
EACH DEAD ONE
EACH ONE I HAVE LOVED, SO DEARLY, FUCK WHAT YOU
OR ANYONE
INCLUDING THE
CYNIC IN ME SAYS
YOU ALL DOUBT YOUR WAY TO YOUR
BUT WE ARE DOUBTING
OUR WAY, OUR
OWN NECESSARY DOUBTS, WE LIVE
ON OR OFF, ON, OFF OF, DOUBTS, DOUBTING
THOMAS - EXPERIMENTING
HEADLONG
HEADSTRONG LONGING FOR PASSAGE
COGNITIVE
MOVEMENT
TO
INFINITE
MEANS MANY
MEANS
NECESSARY
ON YOU MERCILESS ONES
BACK
WE MAKE YOU FEEL WE
AGAIN

YOU DESTROY, WE DESTROY
(WE) YOU PAINT IT GRAY, GREY

AND WE (YOU)
PUT THE
COLORS

MAKE YOU (WE)
FEEL HUMAN AGAIN

ALMONDS
WHO IS STANDING
STILL PLANNING
PLURAL, SINGULAR
MANAGING OUR
EMOTIONS, SENSELESS AND
MEANINGLESS AS WE ARE

ZOE
BIOB
BOMB

THU CONSTANTLY REINSCRIBED LINE
THE AMBROSIAN LIBRARY
THE LEVIATHAN
BEHEMOTH
THE LAST FEELT W/ MUSICIANS
ALL WITH THE HEADS
OF ANIMALS

YOU, WE
MY MERCY
MY HOVERING
DENIGRATED
DEFERRED
MANAGED, ORPHANED
HATED
CLUB
CIRCULAR, WEEKLY

THE WAR
WAR
IT IS THERE
IT IS HERE
EVEN
MORE

SOMETHING
INDIGESTIBLE
FOR EMPIRE!

WE CAN NO LONGER SAVE YOU, US
BEYOND SAVING WE OPEN TO SHARING OUR
FAULNESS

EVEN LAUGHTER FALTERS
AND WE FALL WITH IT
don't ask but is it art
STROKING we have managed to
EACH ONE OF YOU PETS
PLEASE JUST GIVE ME ANOTHER CHANCE.
unnecessary
irrelevant



THE CHALICE

SPECTACLE
CULTURE ENTERTAINING

RECEPTACLE
ERASING
CULTURE

NO
ALLA
CULTURA
OPPORTUNISTA

HOW TO AVOID BOTH
THE CYNICISM OF THE
MARKET-DRIVEN
AND THE SCEPTICISM
OF A FAILED LEFT
THIS WOULD BE
OUR POLITICAL TASK.

HOW CAN WE
NOT BE
IMPLICATED IN
THE
CULTURE
OF
OPPORTUNISM?
OR, HOW CAN WE
BE THE MOST RADICAL OF
OPPORTUNISTS, AND
TO SEIZE
THIS FLEETING
BURDENED
MOMENT
AND TRANSFORM A CULTURE OF RUSES, DEATH, DESTRUCTION AND
SHE WHO CANNOT TAKE SIDES
HE
MUST KEEPSILENT.
IN THE AMBROSIAN
EXPLOITATION INTO
INTENDED TO SUGGEST THAT ON THE LAST DAY, THE RELATIONS BETWEEN ANIMALS AND MEN WILL TAKE A NEW
NATURE

NOT
IT IS IMPOSSIBLE, THEREFORE,
THAT IN ATTRIBUTING AN ANIMAL HEAD TO THE REMNANT OF ISRAEL, THE ARTIST OF THE MANUSCRIPT
AND THAT MAN HIMSELF WILL BE RECONCILED WITH HIS ANIMAL

006

A well known University

The Politics Department

Cast

Student - Karl Murphy

Secretary - Rosalind

Head of Department - Geoff

Professor of Politics - Ben

Professor of Politics - Syed

Doctor of Politics - Sally

Doctor of Politics - Andrew

Doctor of Politics - Brigit

Lecturer in Politics - Tony

Lecturer in Politics - Nevenka

Part time Lecturer in Politics - Pablo

HEFCE - The Higher Education Funding Council for England

HE - Higher Education

Mail from student Karl Murphy arrives and is circulated within the department by secretary Rosalind.

12.17pm

Hello Rosalind,

Its Karl Murphy. I'm studying Politics with Economics, and i'm writing to inform you of my absence from my seminar today because i am participating in the 'Stop The War' Demonstration. I will catch up on all work missed.

Karl Murphy

12:22pm

Rosalind,

this student needs to be told that he needs to specify which seminar he is missing, and also told that in any case, this is not a valid reason for missing a seminar.

Geoff

14:01pm

Hey Geoff,

We're a politics department! This student has shown a degree of commitment to politics that I only wish we had more generally among the students of the department. He has also, very thoughtfully, informed the department. I'm absolutely opposed to penalising him. This is a very touchy subject for me. I failed first year Chinese at university because the army people who taught us would organise language examinations on the day we had arranged a demonstration. Now that I am a teacher, I cannot sit by and see the same thing happen to others.

Regards

Ben

14.10pm

I agree. Political participation should be encouraged - or at least not penalised. But I'm just wondering how we would know in the future whether students have actually attended a demo or just sat at home watching TV. I'm in agreement with you in principle though.

Sally

14.17pm

Dear Ben

First, there is no question of penalising him, simply marking him as absent without good cause.

Second, I am well aware of the need to engage in politics. You may not know that I give a significant amount of my limited spare time to politics, actually going out and knocking on doors engaging with members of the public on all issues. So I do not need any lessons on that. I wish more people would do likewise for whatever cause they believe in.

Third, we are hardly in a situation where the military is organising exams on the same days as demonstrations. There is simply no comparison to make.

Finally, students agree when they sign up to study here that they are here to study first and to organise their extra politics around that. Taking part in a demo does not meet any criteria that we lay down for missing seminars, nor would me not having turned up last week just because an election was in the offing.

Best wishes

Geoff

14.22pm

Dear Geoff,

I'll weigh in on this one, because I think it's worth debating - in a friendly spirit. I think it's admirable for ANY student, but especially a Politics student, to participate in politics in an active way, and opposing the Iraq war surely is an instance of active and worthwhile form of participation. You obviously don't disagree in 'letter', but it seems to me you negate that in 'spirit' by describing this as 'extra politics' and distinguishing between this extra or 'surplus' and the main activity, that of 'signing up to study'. And it is penalizing, for (as I understand it) missing a certain number of classes leads to probation etc. More generally though this is perhaps a matter for another debate - I can't understand why we mark rolls and have coercive mechanisms to police attendance. I take my teaching very seriously, as I assume we all do, but I don't see why I should compel my students to attend. If they sign up, don't attend, and fare badly, that is their choice; and if they don't attend and yet manage to do well in the subject, that probably means that they are quite bright. I would rather only have those students attend who are interested (or at least, farsighted enough to know that their chances of success are boosted by being in class); not to mention the saving (to you, in this instance) of time spent tracking attendance, writing letters of warning etc.

The hypothetical analogy with you missing a class doesn't hold - there is a difference between the employment contract and being a student. Even here, unionists frequently down tools to attend rallies, and I don't imagine that you would insist that they be penalised. (which raises the question, did the student union ask students to attend? If so, I think that seals the matter). All this aside though, the most compelling point to my mind is that we will look ridiculous if we penalise a student for missing

a class to attend a rally against a war that has dominated political debate in this country. If I were active in student politics and student newspapers, as I once was, I would have a field day with this!

Cheers

Syed

14.40pm

For everyone's information, attendance is not something we just prefer from students: it's part of the HEFCE contract in which we claim to be teaching certain numbers of students in exchange for public funding. Missing classes contravenes this contract with the public (who pay far more than any individual student for them to be educated). But, that aside, it is hardly up to us as educators to have a preferred list of reasons why students miss seminars. This really isn't the point, even if you agree with their stated reason. If they miss seminars and tell us why in advance that is fine. We only 'penalize' if they miss a certain number (ie more than 4) since we have a duty to educate them and to confirm their education with HEFCE. So if they miss 4 seminars for reasons we like, it really doesn't matter: they have lost touch with the course and the minimal attendance requirement. I think it is neither here nor there that we sense some 'spirit' of participation. We are not contacted to do this, and that saves us the bother of having to 'feel' their reasons.

Bureaucratically yours,

Andrew

14.50pm

Dear Syed and Geoff

A quick response. When, as an undergraduate student I disagreed with the College authorities and led a protest I was given a choice: I could remain in the College Hall or leave it; if I stayed I would have to obey the rules I was protesting against. In response I lectured the Head of Hall, which did not go down very well - particularly my references to On Liberty. But, as Tony Benn says about those who oppose authority, I accepted the consequences of my actions and found somewhere else to live. I was not prepared to shut up...and the exclusion did not do away with my freedom of speech. I don't think this case is quite the same. The student will be marked absent. The consequences of a single absence are hardly noticeable. Repeated absences, even for something as important as joining the protest against an illegal war, are/can be significant. College does not require

attendance at lectures. Our employer's/the College rule is that students are obligated to attend seminars. The reasoning behind the rule is that, unlike Lectures, where students are there to listen (most of the time anyway) in seminars they are there to participate. Someone who regularly misses seminars without good reason is not participating - and, as a result - they are letting the rest of the group, their fellow students, down.

I think we need to keep things in proportion but I do see a reason for expecting students doing our courses to attend seminars so that they can contribute and work with one another. I also hope they will find the time to attend plenty of protests against a war that informed and sensible people knew was an madcap scheme and an imperial adventure.

All the best,
Tony

14.59pm

Dear All,

Three things.

a) I will not be in College today: but the MA dissertations, first-marked by me will be in the relevant pigeon holes as of tomorrow 9am. I'm sorry for this delay on the agreed deadline, but I've had to use the day to organise my accomodation (which, incidentally, has also prevented me from going to the demonstration) and cannot make it to College.

b) I apologise for introducing this confusion, but as far as suggestions go, my proposal to "ban textbooks and wikipedia" must not be taken literally, and the the same goes for my previous remark that "all prohibions are good". On the essay guidelines more generally, I agree with Tony on his further point that we should be insistant about correct style, grammar and spelling, and that this is as important as a correct referencing practice (...but there are nights when I really wish I could ban spelling mistakes, including my own).

c) For what's it worth, my opinion is that Karl Murphy's political participation is in no way being penalised if the department tells him that he can't miss seminars in order to attend demonstrations (with which we might or not agree, that's besides the point). I'm sure most of us would encourage his political commitment, but seminars are not scheduled in order to better boycott demonstrations, and students like him are free and responsible when they make this choice.

At any rate, if Karl Murphy is also a committed student, and it sounds like he is, missing a seminar will be of little consequence to him anyway. In my own modest experience, those students who take the trouble to inform us when they can't make a seminar generally care about attendance, and don't require to be reminded about the importance of turning up.

Sorry for the long rant, and see you tomorrow.

Best,
Pablo

15.07pm

It's unlikely in any case that there will be more than four occasions in a year when a major demo clashes with the one student;s seminar time slot for a particular course. So here I think the 'four strikes and you're out' rule is fair enough and allows plenty of opportunities for political participation.
Sally

15.16pm

What not at your desk Pablo? You do realise that you'll have to be marked absent and given a stern talking to for setting a bad example. I mean at the very least you could have claimed to be at an anti-war demonstration or something.
Brigit

15.30pm

That won't work on me, Brigit: I enjoy discipline, and look forward to that stern talking to.
best,
Pablo

15.47pm

Well Pablo, now that I know this about you I'll be doing more than ticking your attendance on Wednesday!
Ben

18.04pm

I think Tony sets out the situation clearly here. I would add in response to Syed's comment about attendance that we monitor this because the learning experiences which students are supposed to have here are greatly affected by non-attendance of others, and we took a collective decision about a year ago to monitor attendance.
Geoff

19.03pm

My last contribution - in response to Andrew's (joking? mischievous?) contribution. That really seems to me to accept and internalize a reasoning that is important in as much as real and significant things depend on it (funding etc), but that misdescribes what we do. We are not service providers, they are not clients; I am a teacher who seeks to get his students interested and excited in ideas, and I don't give a toss about my duty to the HEFCE, whatever that might be. I don't believe any of you (you too Andrew) does either - which is why universities still, for the most part, continue to do something worthwhile. It is also why the bureaucratic description of what we are/should be doing, and our self-understandings as academics (and dare I use the word, intellectuals) are at odds. We translate the rules into our terms, but make certain compromises because we are realists. They control the purse-strings and overlook our transgressions/translations as long as they are not too flagrant. That is a far from ideal situation, but it beats the hell out of narrowing the gap by adopting the Ministry or educational authority's view on things.

Cheers
Syed

19.53pm

Well, I'm all for inspiring students to take up ideas and I applaud this student's interest in politics. But what if I didn't? What if I felt like the war was appropriate and possibly even necessary? Would I be right to do the reverse and penalize the student? What if the student wanted to be on a more radical, possibly offensive political march?

My views on what politics students undertake cannot be the criterion on which I judge the appropriateness of their presence at a seminar. That we are funded by HEFCE is not merely a bureaucratic nicety, it is vital to all of us (our wages, our relationship to the wider public) and it entails the university adopting a bottom line on what attendance should mean. Now I don't think this case hits that bottom line at all, but that line exists. It is formulated to make our personal opinions of why students are absent to be irrelevant to how we ought to treat them, i.e. equally. That way we avoid the authoritarianism of intellectuals.

I wasn't joking (though I see the awful comedy of it all), just trying to pinpoint the fundamental issue which I think is just not related to what, with the greatest of

respect, I think might be Syed's somewhat idealized view of an intellectual/teacher.

But I could be wrong.
Andrew

20.47pm

I'm sorry but why is it idealistic to be in this job for the reasons Syed cites? Those are in my view THE ONLY reasons to be in it! But I guess this is straying from the original subject...
On student attendance, I started out with Syed's views about it (probably because I came from a system where no one monitored attendance and it was upto the students to get as much as they could and wanted from their courses), but after my first year here I came to the point where I felt we HAD to monitor attendance because too many students weren't showing up and seminars were a disaster, and because it was really unfair to those students who did come and who tried to get something out of them. Monitoring attendance was one way of combatting that, though we still have far too many 'virtual' students on the books who are not engaged, not interested, not prepared, and who frankly don't seem to care much about politics inside or outside the classroom.

Karl Murphy, from the sounds of it, seems like a student who has understood the message about seminar attendance since he signalled his absence, yet who felt strongly enough about his political views to make the choice not to attend. We have to give him the message back that we understand that this was an exceptional circumstance and that we respect his choice (whether we agree with the cause or not), but that he must make sure it does not become a pattern. There is no need for penalties and his one absence will only come to haunt him if non-attendance becomes a pattern. And even then... as those of us who have been directors of studies know, it is nearly impossible to do anything to students who are serial non-attenders. So, Syed, rest assured our powers are minimal!

Another suggestion: get Karl Murphy to give a seminar presentation on the demonstration, why it was important to him to participate and what he got out of it!
Nevenka

9.35am

I think this debate has been a useful and interesting one. It may be something that continues in other places over some time. I thought that I should make a few points

on this as I sparked this off with my short e-mail saying that such an absence was not covered by the rules on absences.

Of course, I take the point that we do not wish to discourage political activity. You all know my own record on this, and I should also add that in my introductory talk to first years, I urge them to be involved in politics in some form while they are students. I argue that it will enrich their studies, as well as making a contribution to society. I also recognise that Mr Karl Murphy has been unusually polite. I shall write to him applauding his involvement in politics, and thanking him for his politeness. I shall also, however, remind him of the attendance rules to which he is signed up.

I am grateful to Syed and Nevenka for reminding us of the idealism with which we enter teaching and research. Many of us have probably carried on research when it has not been our job, and I know that I am among like-minded people in working the hours that I do because of idealism. To a certain extent, like professional sportspeople, we are funded to pursue our hobby. The goals are high-minded, but we are also highly-privileged.

This means that I am extremely grateful to Andrew for reminding us of the obligations upon us. He shows some of the scars of engagement in centre-left politics over many years and is all too aware of the difficulties in arguing for funding for HE. I do not believe, therefore, that his argument should be quite so easily characterised as bureaucratic, but as a salient reminder of the kinds of adjustments which Syed reminded us we have to make. HEFCE, distributes taxpayers' money to us. It is better that this comes from HEFCE than directly from the government because it means that academics rather than politicians distribute the cash. That is very much in our self-interest, and we should "give a toss" about it because it is periodically under threat. In a country where football commentators regularly use the term "academic" to mean "pointless" (that is, "QPR are five-nil down with a minute to go, anything they do now is academic"), we need to remember that our activities as intellectuals are funded by the taxpayer on sufferance and largely unknowingly. In particular, most taxpayers would rather have tax cuts or spend money on the NHS than fund the research we do. Our vast salaries (and they are vast compared to the average taxpayer) are provided so that we can deliver teaching and some research along broadly agreed lines. With that comes the HEFCE guidelines about

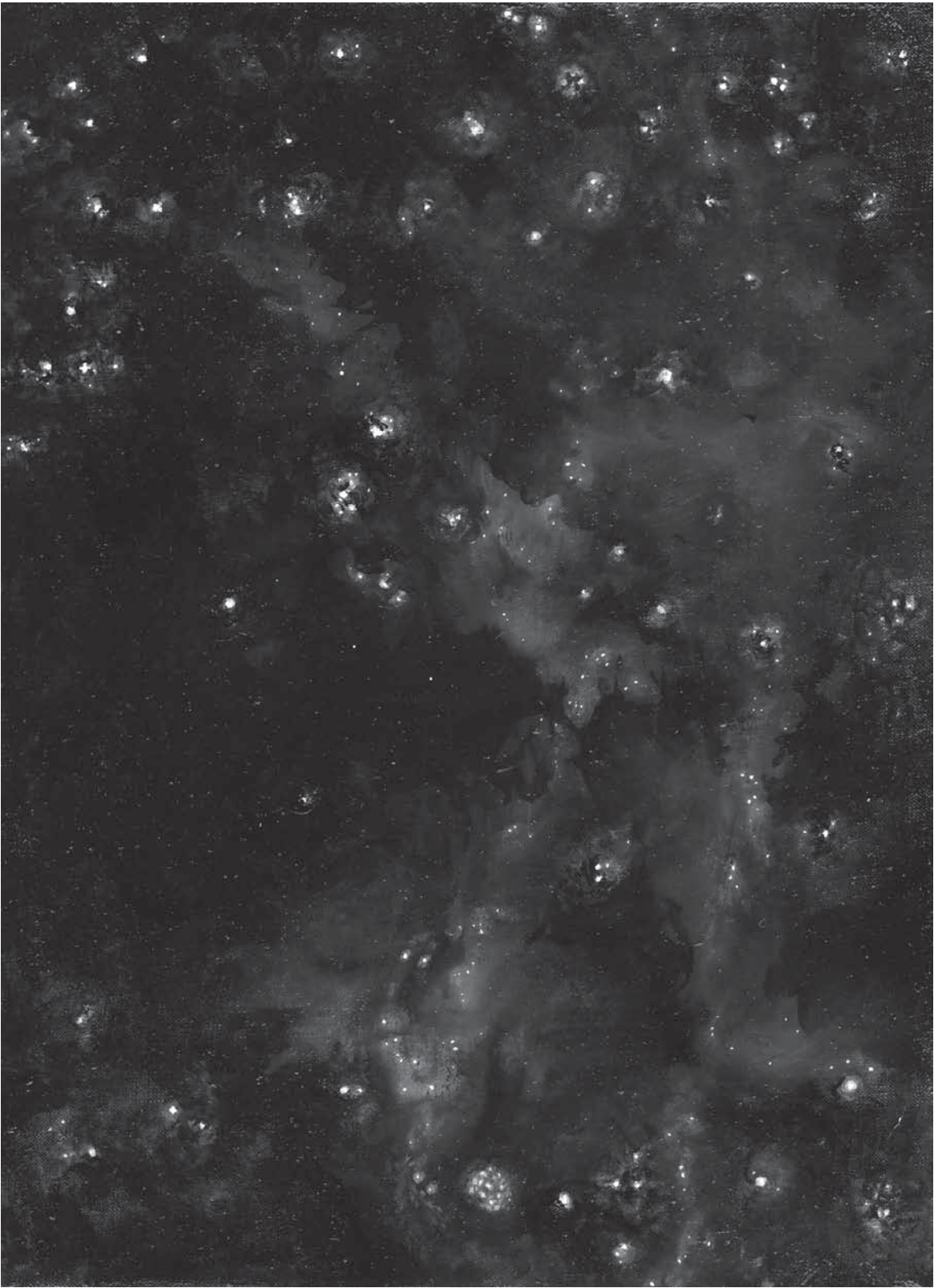
what students should be doing. Those who favour reducing funding for HE (and if anyone thinks things are tough now, another Tory government will be a real shock), would have a field day with any suggestion that going on demonstrations is on a par with illness or bereavement when it comes to missing a class.

I also feel that we may have been slightly influenced by the nature of the demonstration. What if, as Andrew said, the demo had been pro-war: would there really have been such support? What if the student had wished to attend a BNP demonstration against immigration? Or had simply wished to spend the day delivering leaflets during an election? I think we need to be careful about this.

Please feel free to respond but I have to say that as far as my own involvement in this goes, I will not be posting any further comments as I simply don't have the time.

Best wishes
Geoff

007





ART IS A WITNESS





Bronze, Granite, Grief

i

It begins with a mother's appeal to Hephaestus to make her son a suit of armor that he can wear into battle. His best friend murdered, his own armor captured, Achilles plans to turn his anguish into a furious attack. (He will eventually kill so many Trojans that the river Scamander will cry out for mercy, its streams and rapids choked with the dead.) Moved by Thetis' pleas, Hephaestus promises a work of such beauty that men will marvel at it for years, a shield that will match the warrior's glory but not hide him from certain death.

Hephaestus pounds his five sheets of metal into a weapon and a work of art. The shield depicts a vision of Greek society that is integral to the war at hand. He forges two cities – one at peace, another under siege – the first characterized by nuptial celebrations, the second by havoc and strife. The cities are not alternatives to one another. They are different moments in public life. In the city at peace, an argument has ensued over who will compensate a man for his kinsman's wrongful death. A circle of judges has gathered to offer different responses to the problem, and an assembled crowd cheers for the most eloquent arguments. In the city at war, wives and children guard the ramparts under the watchful eye of elders. The siege is part of the natural order: Hephaestus, the blacksmith, surrounds it with the image of endless bundles of grain, of dancing girls and boys, of plowmen drinking honeyed wine while they rest between their furrows. As armies clash outside the city walls, a pair of lions is "gulping down the guts" of an ambushed bull.

Much has been made of the vibrancy of objects in Homer's time, the ways in which swords and goblets have the vigor of human life. What does the fearsome Achilles carry into battle? Not an image that would terrify his adversaries – a portrait of Hades or the Minotaur or the brave Perseus dangling a freshly severed head. He bears a vision of all he fights for and all he is going to give up. Achilles' shield may live beyond him, but ultimately it fails him as a weapon and a work of art.

ii

There are no towering heroes in Maya Ying Lin's Vietnam Veterans Memorial in Washington, DC. There are no statues of soldiers high above an awestruck citizenry. To enter Lin's memorial, visitors must descend.

Cut into a gently sloping berm, the memorial consists of two walls of highly polished black granite joined at angle of 125 degrees. The names of the nearly 60,000 Americans who died in the Vietnam War are carved into their surface. Lin designed the names to flow in chronological sequence, so that the war's first and last casualties would converge in the middle where the walls intersect. The names read like the catalogue of an ancient epic.

The memorial is built around the dialectic created by the visitor's reflection in its walls. As Yusef Komunyakaa suggests in his extraordinary poem "Facing It," to visit the memorial is to see oneself inside it. The faces of toddlers, bundled-up women, and leather-clad vets peer from within the granite, their features engraved with the names of the dead. Relics of remembrance tilt against the walls. Notes, medals, photographs, flags, flowers, stray six packs of beer -- each has a double in the black stone.

Lin hoped the memorial would be an instrument of healing. The visitors' interaction with the work and its arrangement of names was meant to suggest the cyclical nature of life and death. Amid the triumphalism of the national mall, however, the memorial resembles the "black gash of shame" that critics labeled it early on. It creates an angle of assessment, a vertex from which Lincoln looks entombed in his memorial and Washington exposed by his.

Although criticized for being too abstract, the Vietnam Veterans Memorial is, in fact, highly representational. Hephaestus's shield represented the order of Greek society as Achilles prepared for conflict. It depicted the various social groups and activities that made such warfare possible. Lin's memorial transforms the shield's mimetic function by representing the people who have come to remember the dead. We are reflected in the granite because we have lost something inside it. The dead do not live through us. Part of us has gone with them.

iii

What kind of monument might represent the current war, the American war on terror, this war against enemies thought to be most watchful when they are sleeping, most sinister when they are praying, most toxic when they are annihilating themselves?

What kind of monument might represent the bitter vulnerabilities of Baghdad, London, Bali, Jerusalem, Madrid, Samarra, and New York?

The moment defies the mimetic and scoffs at the panegyric mode. Irony is in such demand that its friendship has grown old, dissatisfying, a weekend companion at best.

I write in a country that has relatively open elections, abundant free expression, and the broad pursuit of individual desires. And yet, democracy is elusive, more a ghost

than a presence. I see its face hovering in the granite, but when I turn to greet it, it is nowhere to be found.

Democracy is imperiled by those who have sworn to protect it, the leaders who've learned to mesmerize crowds not with eloquence but fear. We hear that artists are supposed to speak truth to power, but power continually turns its head from the hydra of truth-speakers everywhere.

It would take countless gods of Hephaestus' strength to pound the shield of state-sponsored democracy into a vibrant, living thing, but that is what needs to be done. Art can introduce the plowmen to the leather-clad vets, it can draw the bundled women into the ring of girls and boys; it can save the city from its eternal siege and make the lions choke on the struggling bull. It can draw the mothers off the ramparts. It can wake the sleepers and the mesmerized crowds. Art can turn the dead into pebbles at the bottom of a river. It can carry the names of the missing to the mourners gathered downstream.

Process over system, perception over policy, conversation over ideologues – these are ways to liberate democracy from the funerary arts.

David Haven Blake has written for *Mother Jones*, *Fiction International*, and *Virginia Quarterly Review*. He has published two studies of Walt Whitman and is currently writing a book about the politics of fame.

The Art of Agonistic Democracy

Roland Bleiker
University of Queensland
December 2006

One of the most difficult political challenges ahead is to retain democratic ideals at a time when their traditional sphere of application, the nation state, has become increasingly undermined by processes of globalization. While the latter have engendered an unprecedented transnationalisation of governance, much is done to prevent the emergence of a corresponding transnational realm of participation. Many of the institutions that shape global politics, from international organizations to multinationals companies, are neither transparent nor accountable to a democratic constituency.

Visualizing a new, post-national version of democracy is, of course, a daunting task. I do not pretend that I could possibly address the issues at stake in a brief text. The purpose of the reflections that follow are more modest: 1) they allude to one particular solution that has been advanced, the notion of agonistic or pluralist democracy; and 2) they outline the seemingly unlikely but nevertheless important role that art can play in fostering such an approach to democracy. Rather than making a futile attempt at comprehensiveness, my reflections are advanced in an aphoristic style, which seeks to draw out linkages between art and democracy in a few selective domains. Doing so generates more questions than it provides answers. But this is precisely one of the key contributions that art can make to democracy: to question, to challenge, to resist complacency.

I

Solutions to the paradox of democracy and globalization tend to be located between two opposing poles. On one end of the spectrum are communitarian approaches. They aim at slowing down or even undoing globalization, hoping to re-establish state sovereignty in a way that preserves the autonomy and power of the traditional realm of democratic participation. The assumption here is that a viable democratic system presupposes, as Michael Walzer once put it, “a bounded world.”¹ At the other end of the spectrum are approaches influenced by cosmopolitan ideas. They seek to extend democracy beyond the state, hoping to articulate decision-making procedures that can be applied at the global level.²

Agonistic or pluralist approaches to democracy break radically with both communitarian and cosmopolitan solutions. William E. Connolly is a particularly prolific advocate of such a stance. He believes that we can face the challenge of

¹ Michael Waltzer, “The Distribution of Membership,” in Peter G. Brown and Henry Shue (eds), *Boundaries: National Autonomy and its Limits* (Totowa, NY: Rowman and Littlefield, 1981), p. 1

² Jürgen Habermas, *Die postnationale Konstellation: Politische Essays* (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1998); David Held, *Democracy and the Global Order: From the Modern State to Cosmopolitan Governance* (Cambridge: Polity, 1995).

IV

Two civic virtues are necessary to render a journey towards an agonistic or pluralist notion of democracy feasible in practice.

The first one is agonistic respect among multiple groups or individuals. This respect is necessary even when – indeed, precisely when – these groups or individuals passionately disagree with each other. Whereas the liberal notion of tolerance assumes a majority that occupies an authoritative center and bestows tolerance upon minorities, agonistic respect is operating when numerous interdependent minorities co-exist and interact with each other in a safe and respectful environment, thus generating and sustaining a form of common governance. These interacting units share a number of rights and duties, chief among them is a willingness to respect each others' different faith or value system. Accepting difference, Connolly believes, should even include the recognition that each such value system, including one's own, is and should in principle be contestable.⁷

The second virtue in a world of deep pluralism is critical responsiveness: the willingness to listen carefully to others, particularly to those who do not yet have achieved sufficient recognition in the prevailing political and social setting. Not all demands by a new constituency should necessarily be accepted but, and Connolly admits this is the difficult part: existing norms or laws cannot necessarily serve as a base for judgment. A critical response must go beyond these foundations because they are often part of the problem itself. Whatever form it takes, the new, more critical attitude should involve the cultivation of a private disposition and the courage to express and defend this disposition in public.⁸

V

Art is not always pluralistic. It does not always embody a spirit of critical democratic inquiry. Art can be as regressive as progressive, as oppressive as liberating. Louis-Ferdinand Céline, Yukio Mishima, Ezra Pound or Leni Riefenstahl are examples of great artists attracted to fascist and explicit anti-democratic ideas.⁹

Art has always sided with all sides of the political spectrum. Or, rather, it has refused to side at all. And this is precisely why great art has always been appropriated by leaders of all political orientations. The more authoritarian the ruler, the more passionate their love for literature. Radovan Karadzic, Saddam Hussein, Muammar al-Gaddafi, Saparamurat Niyazov or Kim Jong-il all claim to have written poetic works. Of sorts, that is. And virtually all "great" dictators were eager to surround themselves with "great" works of art, hoping that timeless beauty would lift their appropriators to the same level of legitimacy and historical importance.

VI

⁷ William E. Connolly, *Pluralism* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2005), pp. 66, 94, 123-5.

⁸ Connolly, *Pluralism*, pp. 126-7.

⁹ Gerard Holden, "World Literature and World Politics: In Search of a Research Agenda," *Global Society*, Vol. 17, No 3, July 2003, p. 16.

Great art may always be susceptible to political appropriations, but it also always defies any form of exclusive ownership or meaning. And this is where the democratic potential of art is most effective.

Even more so than generating reverence and legitimacy, great art has also always installed great fear in most rulers, even though "all art is," as Oscar Wilde once put it, "quite useless."¹⁰ It is precisely this uselessness and the ambivalence associated with it that renders great art inherently political and democratic. For the independent nature of art can never be entirely subjugated to short-term political or moral agendas. Art is thus always a potential threat to these very agendas, particularly if they are articulated on narrow grounds.

VII

A well known example: Pablo Picasso's painting *Guernica* has contributed to a democratic spirit and to critical inquiry about war and violence. It has done so even though it does not contain a clear message. It deals with the effects of the Spanish Civil War but does so in an ambivalent way. The significance of *Guernica* as a form of critical insight and historical memory is located precisely in the fact that Picasso created a distance from life-like representations, thus capturing a certain emotional truth about the atrocity of the civil war that no factual account could ever hope to achieve.¹¹ *Guernica* has turned into one of the most symbolic and internationally recognized anti-war statements, and this even though the painting makes no explicit political statement at all.

A tapestry version of *Guernica* hangs at the United Nations in New York, just outside the entrance to the Security Council. When, in February 2003, US Secretary Colin Powell delivered his final plea for war against Iraq, *Guernica* was curiously covered with a large blue cloth. UN officials insisted that the cover was designed to create a more effective background for the television cameras. The true reasons were probably far more political in nature, given that the painting is a highly symbolic and effective reminder of the horrors of war. Be it as it may, the shrouding of *Guernica* only served to highlight its political power, generating major protests against both the looming war and the act of negating the ethical insight of a major work of art. *Guernica* also revealed that great art is far more independent and memorable than any political statement. It contributed to the spirit of agonistic democracy: it challenged what was meant to remain beyond challenge, it generated public discussion, it reminded people of a world where things could be otherwise.

VIII

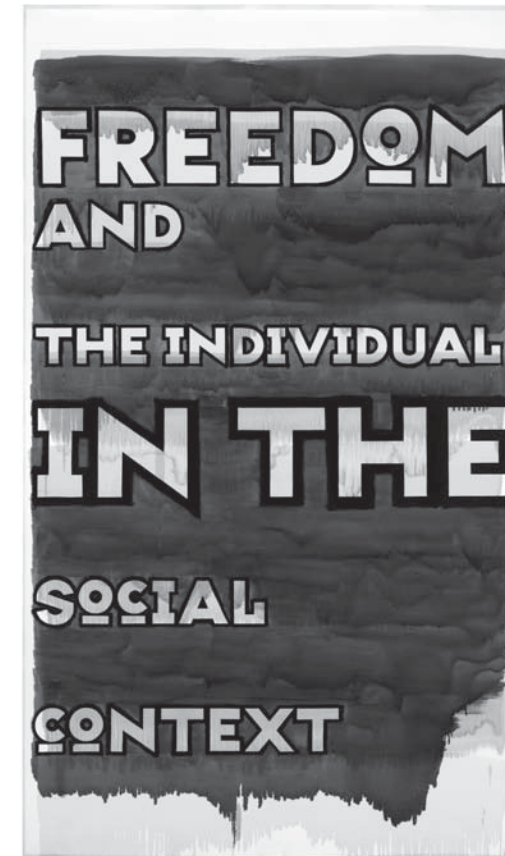
Art offers no ready-made solutions to the challenge of democracy in the age of globalization. But it can contribute to the cultivation of a democratic spirit at a time when such a cultural attitude is needed more than ever.

¹⁰ Oscar Wilde, *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (Ware: Wordsworth, 1992), p. 6.

¹¹ See, for instance, Russel Martin's recent *Picasso's War* (Scribner, 2003).

The relationship between art and democracy may be like the function that Paul Celan ascribed to poems. They are "messages in a bottle:" pleas that are sent out with the hope that they will be recovered at some stage in the future. The message may not be picked up immediately. At the moment of its release there may be no language to appreciate the bottled plea for dialogue. But one day it will be washed onto a shore: onto an individual longing for insight, a society needing alternatives, a democracy in peril or in search for renewal.¹²

013



¹² Paul Celan, "Ansprache anlässlich der Entgegennahme des Literaturpreises der Freien Hansestadt Bremen," and "Der Meridian," both in *Gesammelte Werke* (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1986), Vol. III, pp. 186 and 198.

Daniela Brahm
The New Town, 2006
in: *Ideal City / Invisible Cities*, Zamosc / Poland,
announcement structure on a public market place,
paintings on wood, aluminium, Forex, attached to
a scaffolding, a flag, about 810 x 350 x 150 cm,
commissioned by European Art Projects



To respond to the question “Does art have anything in particular to do with democracy?” we have to clarify firstly that there is no art in general. However, if we speak about contemporary art, that is, the art of the international art system, we can firmly announce that this art does not only deal with democracy but completely belongs to the contemporary democratic institutions and their machinery. The rise and triumph of the current cultural network (museums, galleries, magazines, biennials, art fairs, residencies, sponsorship etc.) signifies precisely the extreme moment of the exile of art from its essence, the moment in which – having become pure exchange, pure information, pure management – art takes on its own inability to possess itself and becomes part of the dominant order.

Today’s democracy is characterized first of all by the unprecedented control and manipulation of every sphere of human activity: movement, speech, thought, production. Contemporary art as a whole makes a great and still underestimated contribution to this total control through domestication and normalisation of aesthetic discourses, imagination, bodies and all artistic life. Someone called this mechanism of total control bio-politics and created the philosophical thesis, according to which the West’s political paradigm shifted from the model of the city state to that of the concentration camp, that is, we had passed from Athens to Auschwitz. For sure you can contemplate this process in the development of the art world and its activities.

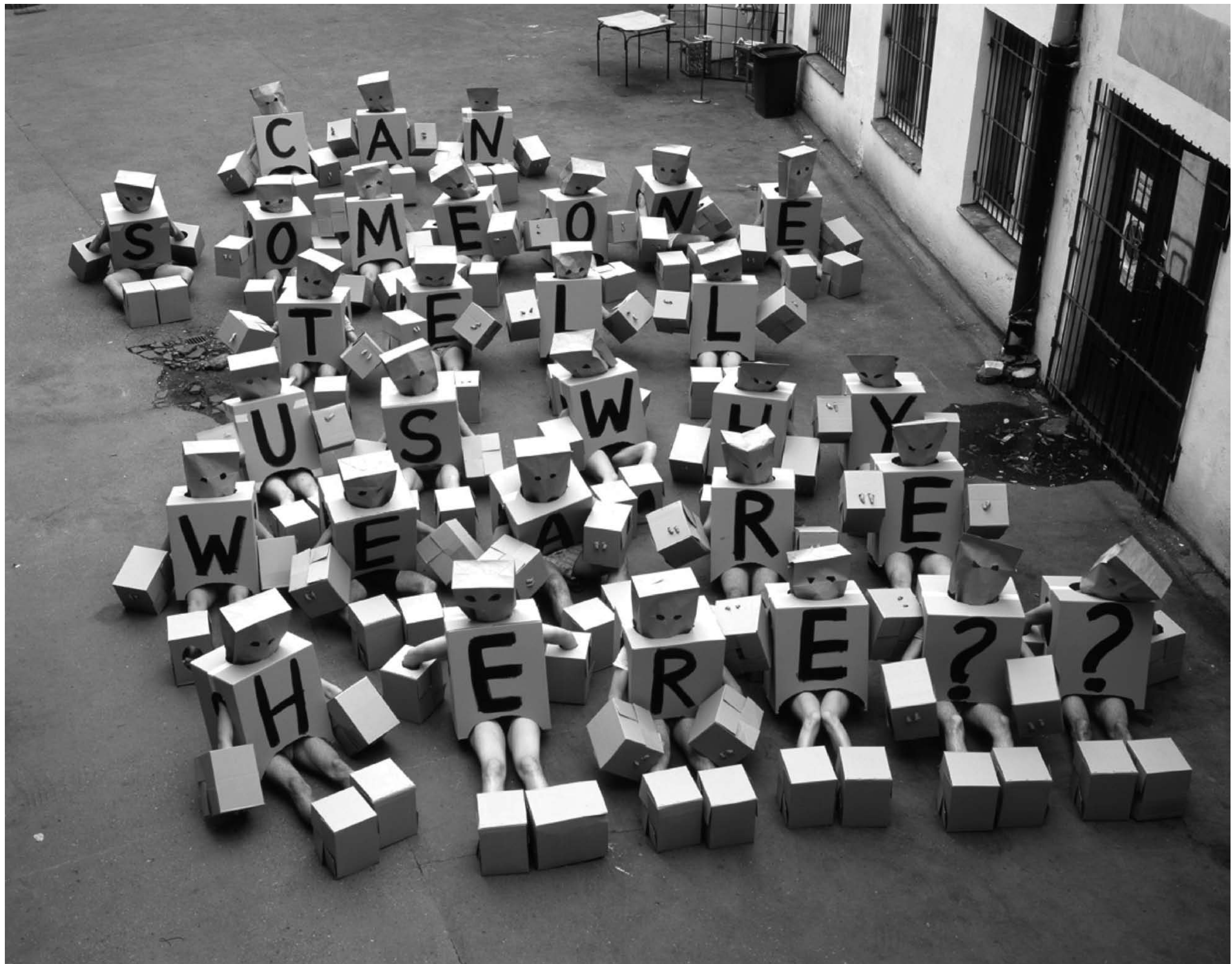
However, the media machine with which the art system increasingly coalesces imposes the lie about the continual free and active participation of people in the public sphere, particularly in culture. Contemporary art is nothing but an obedient instrument of this mystification and contemporary artists are simply cogs in this ideological machinery. Degrading from generation to generation, more and more identifying with discourses and technological devices that register and control life in democratic states, artists became perfect accomplices in the bio-political project of power.

Funnily enough, by answering your question we, authors of this contribution, somehow get integrated in basic democratic procedures, namely tests, questionnaires, surveys, polls etc., the task of which is to create “critical opinions”, “unity in diversity” and, in the end, consensus. But all this is the complete opposite of our vision and our position. Really, what do we – petty hooligans, vagabonds and creatures without money, identity, community and home, who are in permanent trouble and do not know one day from the next, only that we are in the heart of planetary winter – have in common with the other participants in this volume, with such respectable artists as stupid asshole Thomas Hirschhorn, shitty Atelier Van Lieshout etc., or theorists like lollipop Chantal Mouffe? Nothing at all. We feel no sympathy towards them, no proximity. We don’t like them, we don’t believe them. We have no respect for them. On the contrary, we think that any trace of democratic “discussion”, i.e. consensus must be erased, that the obedient aesthetic crowd must be attacked, and that the democratic order in culture and politics must be demolished.

The essential character of art is its being a mode of truth understood as a gift, as appearance from nonbeing to being, from concealment into the full light of day. Thus, the worst enemies of art are domestication and lies that oppress and hide truth. But domestication and the democratic order is one and the same thing.

Alexander Brener, Barbara Schurz





Both democracy
and art share a
commonality in the
fact that they are
representational,
ambivalent as well
as autocratic



define a brief:



2.00 object¹: the object of the game is to earn the most points by playing cards to the board. As the game is played, the players will become more familiar with the geography of the United Nations world in which we live.

2.10 options²:

- 2.11 compete in all the events
- 2.12 compete in some events
- 2.13 practice one event
- 2.14 see world record
- 2.15 include travelogue (YES)

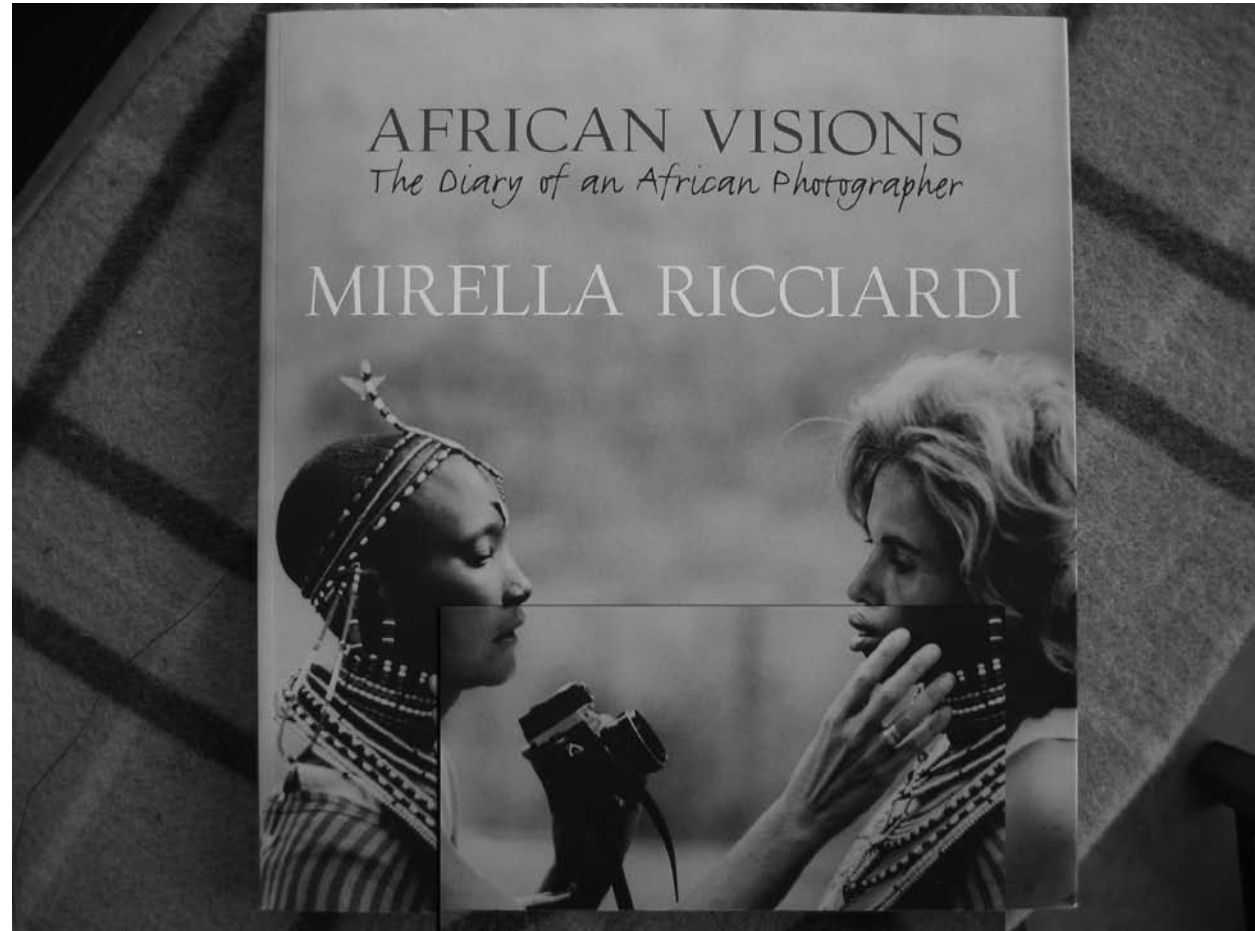
2.20 preparations³:

- 2.20 each player takes a chart and 10,000 francs in the following denominations:
Two 2000 francs notes and five 100 francs notes.
- 2.21 Place six daggers in the six holes in the Director's board under the letter S (Start).
- 2.22 After the cards have been shuffled, each player draws a card from the pack. The player drawing the card highest in value becomes the Director (dealer) for the start of the first round.
- 2.22 The Coup card is the highest card in the deck.
- 2.23 If two players tie for high, they draw again.
- 2.24 If only three are playing, remove the sevens and eights from the deck before dealing.

¹ Object, from World Flag Game about the United Nations, Parker Brother 1961

² The options:
Medals are awarded after each event, and a Grand Champion will be named at the end of the Games. from World Games by Epyx.

³ Coup d'Etat is an overthrow of existing authority Preparation, from Coup d'etat, 1966 Parker Brothers.

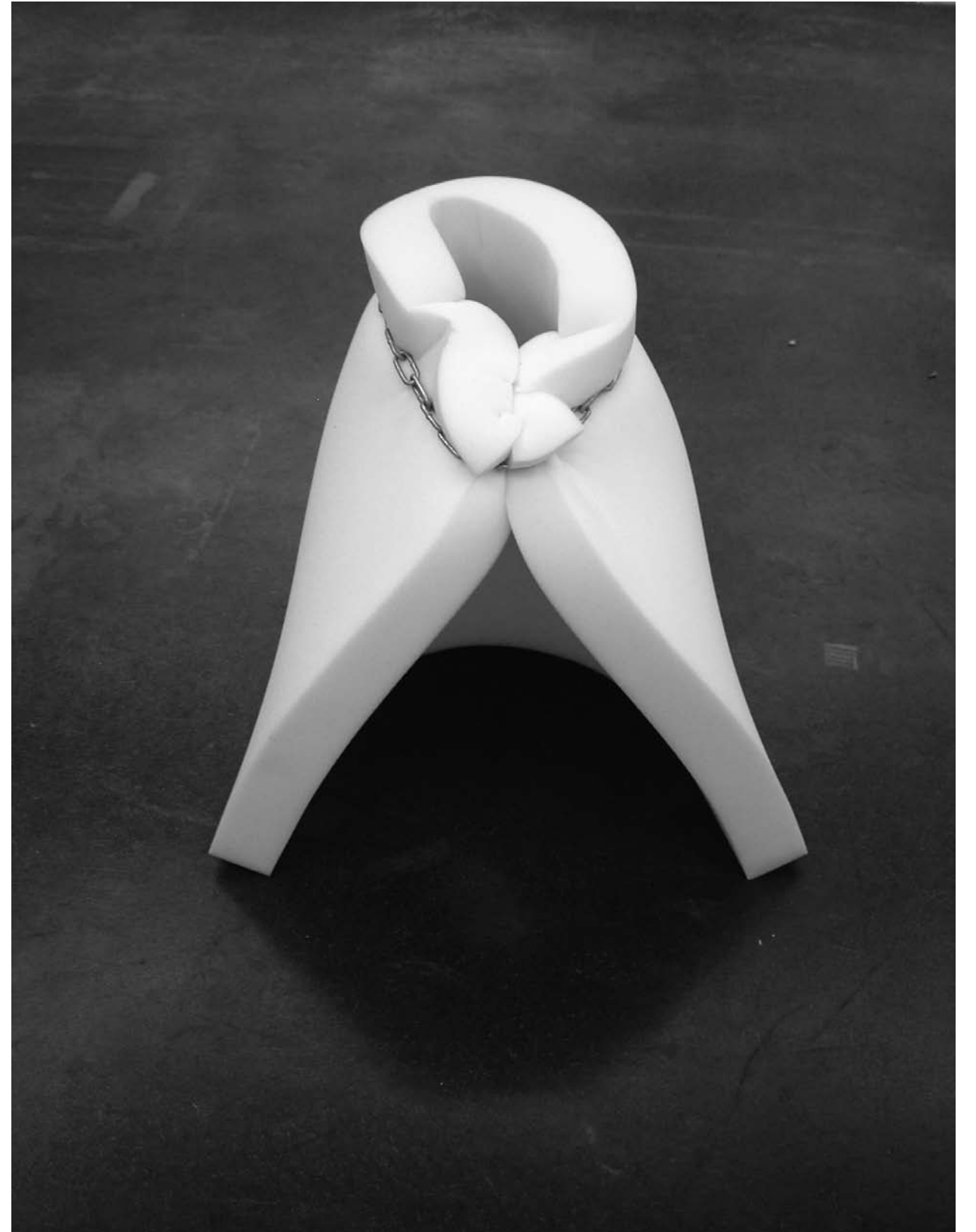


A DEMOCRACY OF MEANING

I took the question seriously, I looked carefully at its particularity. And it was precisely the "particular" word what dispelled me at first. Then it became precisely the focus of my attraction. As when you meet someone and you notice very early on that there is something—a physical trait, perhaps—that you just can't stand in them; and it ends up being the particular thing you fall in love with, eventually.

I once read a chapter of a book on Alexander Kluge called "The Democracy of meaning". This notion helps me to respond to the question of this book. Art is a democracy of meaning, this is how it is linked particularly to that forsaken word.





THE ART OF POLITICS WITHOUT “US”?

One of the most fundamental elements of Alain Badiou’s critique of Nietzsche is the thesis on alleged “*arhe*-political” tendency in Nietzsche’s thought: according to Badiou, Nietzsche was caught in the trap of constantly trying to develop (or at a certain point even he himself to emerge as) a process that would, regardless to any type of current political strategies, or even in voluntary ignorance of political actuality and political events, produce political effects. Nietzsche is supposed to have been striving for a singular type of philosophy that is in itself *more essentially political than politics itself*, and thus made independent from the political influence. For Badiou of course, who justly believes that the field of the political has always been one of the independent conditions of philosophical thought, such philosophical emancipation from politics also means the emancipation from philosophy itself, and therefore he proclaims Nietzsche a “prince of sophists”. Nevertheless, it is very difficult to deny that there in fact was a certain artistic and philosophical operation of Nietzsche’s thought, which actually very efficiently undermined the sheer element from which contemporary democratic discourses (as well as did fascist and real-socialist regimes) derive their stability and their common sense: Nietzsche somehow undermined the existence of a “We” as the supposed ontological condition of “us”. As Derrida has stated in his famous polemics with Gadamer: “*Legein* of this *logos* alone, yes, exactly the togetherness, the gathering [Versammlung] of this logic is what Nietzsche has put under the question-mark.”¹ And of course, is it possible for politics *to exist at all* without *us*, without certain logic of “gathering” - without us, who constitute a “We”?

Among interpreters there is a rather wide consensus on Nietzsche’s role in the deconstruction of “common social reality” that according to some leads to “poststructuralist apoliticism,” nevertheless, it might prove interesting that Nietzsche’s subversion of the immense power of the word “We” is as a matter of fact based upon emergence of a different (no less cruel) “We,” upon brilliant poetical proliferation of meanings of this word, and upon artistically subtle, somewhat blur and prophetic, grim but at the same time uncompromising promise of the emergence of *other* “us,” of *different* “us”. This paper that in general deals with the problem of the relation between Nietzsche’s and Hegel’s philosophy, at the same time presents an effort to provide at least some of the most crucial nuances of these *other* “us” – of us who are about to disappear... of “us” who are maybe still yet to appear for the first time in our history.

¹ The quote is from Derrida’s intervention at the occasion of Gadamer’s lecture in Paris on the 25th of April 1981.

1. “We” that is “I”

In both Hegel’s and Nietzsche’s philosophy, the relation of the words “*we*” and “*I*” is defined by the paradoxical identity: *we* is *I*. This same sentence however, bears in Nietzsche’s thought a completely different meaning than in Hegel’s. Both meanings of the paradox “*we*” is “*I*” are actually in irreconcilable adversity. Further more, what might well be the most fascinating feature of the story, this tension of meanings becomes most evident at the point of a renewed encounter - where both, Hegel and Nietzsche, in invisible ink rewrite “*we* is *I*” as – *nothing* is *nothing*.

In *Phenomenology of Spirit* “*we*” and “*I*” are brought together in the famous sentence ““*I*” that is “*We*” and “*We*” that is “*I*,”” which represents the first determination of the *Spirit* itself. In more accurate words, ““*I*” that is “*We*”...” is a speculative constellation, which incorporates three internally connected circular movements:

1. The *insistence* of the other in the most inner kernel of a subject and subject’s *existence* in other being.
2. The correlative reinstatement of “social substance” and true self-consciousness.
3. Auto-reproduction of *Spirit*.

Hegel: “A self-consciousness, in being an object, is just as much “*I*” as “object”. With this, we already have before us the Notion of *Spirit*. What still lies ahead for consciousness is the experience what *Spirit* is – this absolute substance which is the unity of different independent self-consciousnesses which, in their opposition, enjoy perfect freedom and independence: ““*I*” that is “*We*” and “*We*” that is “*I*.””²

In few short steps: the basic notion of *Spirit* is according to Hegel already achieved by the structure of self-consciousness, that is, towards the end of the chapter on “life”. As soon as consciousness relates to life, it becomes consciousness of something *other than itself that is simultaneously itself*. Consciousness is something living, but in Hegel’s philosophy, consciousness *lives* only insofar as it *withdraws from life*, and the first step of this withdrawal is named “desire”.³ The consciousness (as desire) has to prove its independence from life, and it does so by constantly negating the independence of the opposing objectivity of the living

² G.W.F. Hegel, *Phenomenology of spirit*, Oxford University Press 1977, p. 110.

³ For a more elaborate analysis of the dialectics of desire see: Judith Butler, *Subjects of Desire*, Columbia University Press, New York 1987.

world. It is conscious of itself through contrasting nullity of everything else. Desire however falls into its own trap: in order to annul its object and thereby obtain certainty of itself, the object *has to exist*. Only what exists can be annulled. The object that has to exist in order to be annulled thus cannot be empty nothing; on the contrary, the object's bungee but nevertheless undeniable existence has become consciousness' only positive foundation.

Desire exists only in the tension in between its own void and the other in which it does not find satisfaction. Nevertheless in this unbearable captivity in being less-ness, desire (although not yet explicitly) still manages to find the first traces of its independence (from life): its living force is the absolute negativity - its infinite act of annihilation of other (life). Or, in other words, desire that wants to steal the substantiality of the opposing substance, and thereby fill its lack, reinstates its independence by *loosing even that small amount of substantiality it had before*: it experiences total ontological dependency from the other, and thus itself as pure negativity (of the other). At this point it is already possible to claim: "self-consciousness can be obtained only through *Aufhebung* of myself."⁴ The other insists in me and I exist in its perpetual annulment.

This type of desire nevertheless still does not fulfill the basic condition of the self-consciousness: its object is still not identical to it; object constantly eludes desire through desire's own act of annihilation – the mere possibility that the object *can* be annulled proves that it is *not* absolute negativity. Self-consciousness can reinstate itself only as a consciousness that finds an instance "of itself out of itself," and that is possible only insofar as desire as absolute negativity stumbles upon another absolute negativity. Further on, because this absolute negativity cannot be represented by the object that has proven to be the only positive foundation of desire, there's only one possibility left: self-consciousness has to meet another self-consciousness. "We" is thus in a certain sense already subject's *conditio sine qua non*, although a further step is still required for "We" to emerge in its full power.

At the beginning of the dialectics of "lordship and bondage" consciousness still remains desire that can find its satisfaction only in desire of the other. "Self-consciousness exists in and for itself when, and by the fact that, it so exists for another; that is, it exists only in being acknowledged."⁵ Hence, desire can become true self-consciousness if it achieves recognition by another self-consciousness, or in other words, *desire* has to be *desired*; its object has to become its pure certainty, or more accurately, desire can and has to become an object of (other) identical desire. Desire is however in a complex relation with another self-

consciousness: "Self-consciousness is faced with another self consciousness; it has come *out of itself*. This has a twofold significance: first it has lost itself, for it finds itself as *other* being; secondly, in doing so it has superseded the other, for it does not see the other as the essential being, but in the other sees its own self."⁶ Consciousness that has found itself in another being is simultaneously being lost in other's dimension; it sinks in other's disappearance caused by the consciousness itself. Once again the only way for the consciousness to become free is to supersede the other being that keeps it in dependence from its own disappearing existence. Yet again it has to assert its autonomy by an act of negation. The same is, however, also the case with the other self-consciousness. Shocked by the ingression of an element that behaves quite differently than the harmless object, they are about to enter a struggle for life and death. Nevertheless, nothing happens. Armageddon is doomed to failure even before it has started, and that so for both of the participants: in the same moment one of them would actually kill another, she/he would instantly loose the only instance capable of providing her/him with the recognition she/he so desperately seeks. The winner would go down together with his victim, sentenced to unconscious life of a vegetable. There is none but one solution that can solve this deadlock situation: the ingression of *the law*. The law gives the opportunity to both of the extreme postures who exist only in the impossibility of their full realization (lord's loss of his necessary counter-part and bondsman's death) to perform and to finish their conflict on the symbolic level, and from there on play the game "as if the lord had killed the bondsman and the latter survived his death," which enables them to set firm their "social roles". This solution is however possible only through fulfillment of one necessary condition, namely that they both accept *reality* of the "common social reality" as the ontological condition of their existence. Lord has submitted bondsman, but this submission was possible only through reinstatement of a "third player," of the third absolute negativity that submits them both. And only this third element – *reality* of the social reality is the true ""We" that is "I" and "I" that is "We"" – the seed of the Spirit to become.

""We" that is "I"... is the *genome* of the Spirit. But it is not merely that, further on, it is also its most stable figure. All of the Spirit's later episodes (morality, culture, ethics) at a certain point prove unstable and collapse. "We" that is "I" on the other hand always remains its fundamental framework. One has to focus on the manner how Hegel rewrites ""We" that is "I"... at the beginning of the chapter on Spirit: "It is Spirit which is *for itself* in that it preserves itself in its reflection in individuals; and it is *implicitly* Spirit, or substance, in that it

⁴ Jacques Derrida, *Glas*, Galilée, Paris 1974, p. 29.

⁵ *Phenomenology*, p. 111.

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 111.

preserves them within itself.”⁷ At this crucial point ““We” that is “I”...” transgresses its basic meaning of the social bond and at the same time sublimates it: “We” remains in its reflection in individuals even at the point when “We” as a social bond falls apart. Hence, even at the point when particular incarnations of the Spirit, that is, various historical forms of the state fall apart, - *and they have to collapse* because in the last instance they are nothing but *hindrances* in the way of absolute’s unstoppable development – the social substance still lives on, “preserved” in individuals. The structure of ““We” that is “I”” is indestructible, it is the *living scroll* of its discomposure, or even *life within the written record* of its discomposure. ““I” that is “We”...” is the social substance, which “preserves the individuals within itself,” but ““I” that is “We”...” is also the individual that exists only under condition that it incorporates the social substance and thus keeps it in constant readiness for a possible resurrection.

What is the Spirit? This question of course cannot be answered in a uniform way. Spirit is the “social substance” which in the same step transgresses and enables the existence of an individual: “We may say that self-consciousness is merely a “something,” it has actuality only insofar as it alienates itself from itself; by so doing, it gives itself the character of a universal, and this its universality is its authentication and actuality”⁸ Spirit is the sphere of the universal in which the subject exactly at the point of its total *Entfremdung* becomes itself. But Spirit is not only the social substance. Actually there is *no* such thing as the “social substance” except in its “refection in individuals”. Spirit is at the same time also a series of moments in which the subject that can never be totally absorbed by the substance reinstates itself as its inner rupture, which drives the substance from its inert self-equality and thereby gives it the dynamic quality of – the Spirit. The Spirit is therefore also a disobeying subject that tears up the social substance, its rupture, and point of its disappearance.

How is it possible to think of both momentums of the Spirit at once? In other words, how does the subject’s *alienation* coincide with its *irreducibility*? Slavoj Žižek and Mladen Dolar have often stressed that the central statement of *Phenomenology* - “substance is subject” cannot be simply reversed into its opposite – subject is substance.⁹ On the contrary, “the absolute interfusion of substance and subject”¹⁰ comes to place exactly at the point where *subject does not become substance*. The crucial element of “the play” starts at the point where the subject fails to tear out the “soul” of the substance – its ontological congruity, and put it

into its own lacking tissue. *Phenomenology* as a whole is a story of the subject’s hopeless endeavor to take over the substantiality of the substance, to break the fetters imposed on it by the opposing environment and thus to become free. But the result of all of this “struggles for freedom” is always a double disappointment: firstly, it becomes apparent to the subject that everywhere it has reached to grab the fugacious substance, it has only reached to itself, - it was itself who was the source of its limitations, and secondly, there’s always a price to be paid for its “insolence” – again and again it loses even that small amount of substantiality it has thought to possess. If we return to the decisive point of the dialectics of desire: all that desire wants to extract from the other is recognition. All that it gets is knowledge of its own absolute dependency from the other. That means that it loses even that minimum of self-esteem/being it had at the beginning of the process. And yet, exactly in this *loss* of its originality it also finds the *source* of its independence: the *irreducibility* of Hegelian subject becomes evident in the moment when the subject through its complete *alienation* in social substance totally exhausts its *substantial separateness* from the world and thus finds itself in a situation where it does not have any kind of being left, but at the same time, exactly as such, that means as a pure “lack of being”, insists in substance as its inner rupture. In other words, Hegelian subject reinstates itself exactly at the fragile point where *only a complete loss of substantiality shields it from a total dissolution in substance*. From this point of view it also becomes finally evident why “substance is subject” cannot be rewritten as “subject is substance,” and that so despite the fact that all the substance there is, enters the configuration of subjectivity. - Subject *as* the only substance *is not* substance exactly because its *surplus in nothing*, its anti-substance, inhibits its identity with itself *as* substance. It is not subject’s identity with substance that poses the problem; on the contrary, there is no other substance but subject. The problem (and at the same time solution) lies in the fact that *the subject is not the subject*. It exists as something that prevents its identity with itself.

Passage towards Nietzsche will be carried out in three steps, all of them largely based upon Derrida’s work *Glas*.

1. “The Spirit is the *self* of actual conscience...”¹¹ Hegelian subject can only be a spiritual subject. Subject in a series of moments breaks out of substance, it exists as its inner splitting, but even as such it remains a spiritual subject. Even as such it remains “*auser sich bei sich*”. In the subject that breaks out of substance, it is the *Spirit*, the “absolute substance,” *who* is “*out of itself by itself*”. The reinstatement of subject’s

⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 267.

⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 297.

⁹ For instance: Slavoj Žižek, *The Ticklish Subject*, Verso, New York – London 1999, p. 76.

¹⁰ *Phenomenology*, p. 242.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 263.

irreducibility is far from being a blind spot in the circulation of Spirit (absolute negativity); instead it is the moment of spiritual self-reproduction in its purest form.

2. The Spirit does not have opposition. The traditional candidate for this position – the matter, does not fulfill all the required conditions. Two laws control the matter: *weight* and *disparity*. If weight designates the tendency towards the center, then as such it cannot be the opposite of the Spirit, because Spirit in fact is the center, while the matter in its disparity does not have one. Matter can therefore act as the opposite of the Spirit only by opposing its own tendency. “But in order to oppose its own tendency the matter already has to be the Spirit. Even if it yields in its tendency it is yet again the Spirit. In any case it is Spirit, it does not have any other essence but a spiritual one.”¹² Matter is, exists, only in so far as Spirit *is* the matter. Spirit is the one who keeps the matter in erection despite of its inherent tendency of subsiding. “Spirit is a bone” – to quote one of Žižek’s favorite passages from the *Phenomenology*, but not any kind of bone. Spirit is a dog’s bone. Of course it is true that the Spirit is not some kind of ethereal instance that controls the world below – also Spirit itself indeed does exist only under condition that it has already been incarnated in the “material world”. But nevertheless spirit *is* the world, but the world is *not yet* the Spirit. “This universal substance is not worldly; the world powerlessly opposes it.”¹³
3. Because Hegelian subject cannot be anything else but a spiritual subject, and because the Spirit does not have opposition, one has to make a conclusion that also the subject within itself does not have an absolute, irreducible opposition. The subject might well be identical to a rupture in substance, and *this identity also inhibits subject’s absolute identity with itself as the only substance*. As such it is always a split figure. *But exactly this split is the Spirit*. The Hegelian subject does not have a true opposite within itself, at least not an opposite that would present opposition to the Spirit. Hence, it lacks its own *body* – the subject is its body, but only insofar as it is the Spirit that *is* the body; only insofar as it is *der Geist der isst seinen Körper*.

Also in Nietzsche’s thought “I” is indulged into identity with “We,” but this “We” that is “I” has a completely different meaning, and what is crucial, it is installed exactly in the gap, that Hegelian Spirit cannot allow if it does not want its pneumatics to burst open.

Nietzsche: “The assumption of one single subject is perhaps unnecessary; perhaps it is just as permissible to assume a multiplicity of subjects, whose interaction and struggle is the basis of thought and consciousness in general? A kind of aristocracy of “cells” in which dominion resides? To be sure, an aristocracy of equals, used to ruling jointly and understanding how to command. *My hypothesis*: The subject as multiplicity.”¹⁴

At the most fundamental level, Nietzsche speaks of two internally connected splits. The first line is drawn along the subverted division between body and consciousness: the real subject is no longer the consciousness that perceives itself as *one*, but body and its *unconscious* drives, whereby the consciousness is degraded to the level of a mere symptom or body’s interaction with the outer world. The second split concerns the body itself, which is perceived as a *unit* only from the hermetical point of view of consciousness that reflects on body its own imaginary oneness. The body itself is just a complex synthesis of heterogeneous forces that can only be *represented as one*.

In a certain way it is possible to say that also in the frames of Nietzsche’s thought, an individual can be thought of only at the point of hers/his total *Entfremdung*. But if in Hegel’s philosophy the subject is always “out of itself by itself,” then Nietzsche’s “subject” is *out of itself within itself*, - it dissolves in the multiplicity of nerves, cells, and atoms that do not exist.¹⁵ Nietzsche’s thesis on subject that is in fact one of his theses on *being* is multiplicity without units that shreds “our” *intimacy* from within.

“Being out of ourselves *by* ourselves” and “being out of ourselves *within* ourselves” - the meaning of this dividing line can be better understood from within the horizon of Aristotelian ontology. In his excellent book *L’envers de la dialectique*, Gérard Lebrun has noticed that in Aristotle’s thought there are two principles of individuation that have to be thought of together with the problematic of *the double ousia*. The first principle is teleological: an individual is comprehended as determinable instance that is fully reinstated only insofar as it completely coincides with its *logos*, what is in the sublunary world however made impossible by the instance of matter. The principle of the individuation is thus the *form* that has to be in an infinite process of purification from the matter, which inhibits its complete self-equality and thus its completion. In the same way also individual itself is understood as a process of infinite transgression of its particularity, moving in the direction of the impossible identity with the universal *logos*. The second principle is exactly the opposite of the first: “this

¹² Jacques Derrida, *Glas*, p. 30.

¹³ G.W.F. Hegel, *Vorlesungen über die Philosophie der Weltgeschichte*, Lasson & Hoffmeister, Meiner 1955, p. 103.

¹⁴ Friedrich Nietzsche, *Will to power*, Vintage Books, New York 1968, p. 270.

¹⁵ Nietzsche was namely supporter of Croatian scientist Rudjer Bošković who was trying to prove that the matter doesn’t have any kind of micro-kernels.

particular Callias who has been created... is a particular form within *this* flesh and within *these* bones, and if it is the form that makes him identical to his creator, it is the matter that separates him from the latter.”¹⁶ In the first example the matter was understood as an obstacle for the individuation, in the second, it is perceived as its *drive*: it is only the matter that enables the *differentiation* according to which it is possible to think of individual in hers/his absolute particularity. Hence, from Aristotle onwards there are two principles of individuation:

- a) *Developmentally historical* principle that already depicts the accessories of the understanding of an individual as of a “lack of being”: individual is being reinstated through perpetual transgression of her/his particularity, which is however the only moment that really includes the primary *ousia*. In any attempt to fully accomplish her/his being, the latter evades her grip in the form of what had to be brought to sacrifice in order for the being to be grasped at the first place.
- b) *Atomistic* principle that remains obliged to the individual in its absolute particularity – to *these* bones and *this* flesh; principle that poses an immediate identity between the individual and her being, and thus reinstates an individual as a being of substantial seclusion from the world.

Hegel has the reputation of being the most militant supporter of the developmental conception of the individuality, what is, as a matter of fact, at least to a certain degree, also justifiable: “The state is the truth of the substantial will that has hoisted the particular self-consciousness’ into their unity [...] so that the individual has his objectivity, veracity and morality only as its part.”¹⁷ The subject arrives to the point of true self-consciousness only through *Aufhebung* of its self; it becomes itself only when it has transgressed its particularity and became an element of the universal. At the first glimpse it might seem that Hegel with his radical critique of atomized individual, and with his reinstatement of trans-individual subject of historical development (the Spirit), makes a stand against the main current of post-Cartesian rationalistic philosophy that from Descartes onwards (with the sole exception of Espinoza) strives after atomized image of subjectivity that, in the form of *cogito*, *itself becomes foundation of its being*. But the situation is somewhat more complex. It is true that post-Cartesian tradition puts forward independent subject, but only insofar as the subject arises in strict correlation with the process of its loss of substantiality. And that so from the outset onwards: Descartes has to destroy the whole of subject’s constitution, just in order to grasp

the undeniable point of *cogito*. Of course it is true that the latter is eventually turned into substance, but nevertheless – *what is being turned into substance is indeed the driving element of the breakdown of subject’s substantiality itself – cogito, whose inverted side is exactly the disruptive doubt*. To continue, one of the most elementary features of *Critique of pure reason* is the critique of Cartesian substantiality of the *cogito*, and one of basic features of Kant’s ethics is his critique of naïve conception of freedom, based upon a subject that functions as *causa sui*, etc. Hence, it is possible to say that the post-Cartesian philosophy indeed belongs to the tradition of the atomized individuality, which is however always thought of through *substitution of primary ousia with an existing nothing*. The subject can be thought of only through its loss of substantiality – that is in a certain way the story of the post-Cartesian philosophy of subjectivity. And from this point of view, Hegel is not in discontinuity with its trend. On the contrary, his gesture, the installation of subject *in* the exact point where it looses its substance, or in different words, the comprehension of the subject as an element that inhibits its own self-identity, marks only a subversive accomplishment of the process commenced by Descartes, who has, while turning *cogito* into substance, indeed turned into substance the sheer driving element of the breakdown of subject’s substantiality.

It might sound as a paradox that Nietzsche, together with all of his critique of “*the atomism of the soul*,”¹⁸ actually remains faithful to the atomistic picture of an individual – to this body and to this flesh. ““I” you say, and are proud of the word. But greater is that in which you do not wish to have faith – your body and its great reason: that does not say “I,” but does “I.””¹⁹ Even more than that, he accuses the whole Cartesian tradition of fraud: the substantiality of *cogito*, as well as its opposite operation, is only twisted radicalization of the theological identity in God. There is no identity in the Other, in fact there is no Other, there’s only me and/as my body. In the same moment however when a “subject” finds herself in her body that is perceived as multiplicity, she simultaneously stumbles upon an inhibition, that, first, from the point of view of the consciousness inhibits her true identity with herself (the consciousness only reflects its imaginary oneness), and secondly, from the point of view of the body, inhibits any kind of self-equality (body is a stranger within itself).

The crucial point that we are trying to extract from Nietzsche’s thought, is however not the reorientation towards the body, that has actually been carried out already by the French materialists of 16th and 17th century, but something rather more complicated and yet very

¹⁶ Gérard Lebrun, *L’envers de la dialectique*, Seuil, Pariz 2004, p. 86.

¹⁷ G.W.F. Hegel, *Grundlinien der Philosophie des Rechts*, Suhrkamp, 1978, p. 399.

¹⁸ »The first step must be to kill off that other and more ominous atomism that Christianity taught best and longest: *the atomism of the soul*.« *Beyond Good and Evil*, p. 14

¹⁹ Friedrich Nietzsche, *Thus spoke Zarathustra*, Penguin Books 1978, p. 34.

present and topical. While subsiding in the infinite field of heterogeneous multiplicity that does not tolerate any outer or *inner* limits (there is no Other, there are no units), the “subject” dissolves in the “reality” from which it is impossible to “ascend or descend to any [other] “reality...””²⁰ And is there any other word to describe this sole reality of multiple without units and without opposition (in subject or God or Nothing), than “We”? – Not “We” perceived as multiplicity of “equal free subjects” gathered around the central void (the world or Spirit or God or Word) in which they reflect and find reflection of their own *nothing(ness)* that is both – the principle of their particularization and the instance of universality that interfuses and trespasses them, quite the opposite is the case. As Jean-Luc Nancy has stated in the preface to *Being Singular Plural* (where he actually comments on Nietzsche) – it is an “autistic multiplicity” that we have become.²¹ It is an autistic multiplicity that “we” have always been: all of us – humans, ghosts (nations or Parties), bricks and parrots. All of “us” blended together into an infinite “reality” without limits. Nietzsche’s hypothesis on “subject as multiplicity” is at the same time deconstruction of “We” and reemergence of a “We” that has broken out of the circulation of substance and subject: “The concept of substance is a consequence of the concept of the subject: not the reverse! If we relinquish the soul, “the subject,” the precondition for “substance” in general disappears. One acquires degrees of being, one loses that which *has* being.”²² “We” and “I” once again fall together into a merciless “I” that is “We” that has a “higher degree of being” than any imaginary or (always) synthetic particularity. We no longer *constitute a “WE”*; we *are subsiding* in limitless, non anthropocentric, non representational “WE” that, although being in its essence heterogeneous, does not tolerate any type of Otherness, and in which all of us have been thrown, together with our narcissism of petty differences and together with our more and more repeating words. The time of “We” (the Spirit) has ended. The time of autistic “We” without margins that correlates to the loss of intimacy (even within oneself) has begun.

2. War for a “we” that does not exist

“We” does not exist – this claim might seem strange enough to anyone that has turned a page or two in one of Nietzsche’s books. Nietzsche namely uses the word “we” in excessive quantities, more than any other philosopher. Hegel, for instance, uses the word “we”

approximately five hundred times. Nietzsche uses it more than three thousand times. Of course it is also a question of style, and the style is exactly what is in question here, a specific use of style, a certain type of artistic exhibition that suddenly turns into deconstructive and perhaps even *political* weapon.

“*We immoralists!*”²³ “We who are not sufficiently Jesuits, nor democrats, nor even Germans, we *good Europeans* and free, *very* free spirits...”²⁴ “We hermits and marmots...”²⁵ “We noble ones, we good, beautiful, happy ones!”²⁶ The first feature that all of this various usages of the word “we” have in common, is that they all (with the exception of the valiant rodents) represent “dubious entities”. That does not mean that they are not taken seriously, not in the least. In all of them however there is a two-fold process of meaning that is going on:

To say “we immoralists!” – of course it is a gesture of *mobilization*, a gesture of *distinction*, but nevertheless – is not such a claim a paradox in itself? Is not the essence of Nietzsche’s opposition to morality correlative to a declaration of the total breakdown of the community of people, united under the horizon of the universal values? “Wild bunch” of immoralists cannot constitute a “We”. The immoralists gather at the margins of the “social substance”, they meet in sequestered nooks where one withholds her consent to the rules of the society. They dislike families, law and religion. And above all – who are the real immoralists – “we” who behold the empty and non-essential truth of the value to dissolve in the games of the will to power? Or “them” – people gathered under the safe patronage of values: the “heard,” “negative nihilists”?²⁷ Maybe all of us, insofar as we meet in “nothing”; we who look at nothing of the existing value *and* they who worship its nothingness? Nevertheless it is clear that Nietzsche is in fact striving for a possibility of this meeting of “us-different,” of “us immoralists” to occur: “The problem of “equality,” while we all thirst after distinction...”²⁸ This distinctive meeting is however *impossible without taking into the account its own impossibility*. “We immoralists!” - this differentiation, this mobilization of us-different, becomes possible only insofar as it includes its own impossibility: immoralists cannot constitute a “we”. They sneak up to the surface and gather around the rupture in the “social substance,” that has been drilled out by their own impossibility.

²³ *Beyond Good and Evil*, p. 117.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 4.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 123.

²⁶ Friedrich Nietzsche, *Genealogy of Morals*, Vintage Books, New York 1989, p. 37.

²⁷ »Apart from the fact that I am a decadent, I am also the opposite.« Friedrich Nietzsche, *Ecce Homo*, Vintage Books, New York 1989, p. 224.

²⁸ *The Will to Power*, p. 157.

²⁰ *Beyond good and Evil*, p. 35.

²¹ Jean-Luc Nancy, *Being Singular Plural*, Stanford University Press 2000, p. Xiii.

²² *The Will to Power*, p. 268.

This perhaps becomes clearer in the case of “us, free spirits”. Already in *Human, all too human*, Nietzsche makes a confession that all of the “free spirits” he was talking about, in fact do not exist. They were just parts of his imagination - means to overcome his unbearable loneliness caused by the disappearance of the inner intimacy. In the same intersection, nevertheless, he also speaks of the possibility of such “free spirits” to *emerge*. He even feels that his work is a type of “acceleration” of this becoming. “We, free spirits” has a two-fold meaning: it is a type of subversive irony, which mocks the ideology of free will that binds together the Christian continuity with the modern neo-liberalistic rule, and at the same time it designates something that still has to *become* what it perhaps already *is*: *togetherness* of “us” who were made impossible, *other-us*, us-different.

Nietzsche’s “we” is always written in a peculiar manner – its utterance subverts itself; it is an auto-subversive weapon: we can be “marmots,” “hermits,” free-lancers,” even fox hunters – if you will, and exactly this fact somehow *implies that “we” does not exist*. At the same time, any kind of possibility of us-to-become, can be declared only through declaration of its own impossibility.

But why are the operations of the various types of Nietzsche’s “we,” all of them pointed against “the social bond,” still so important for us? It might well seem that the problem of contemporary theory is not - how to get rid of “us” (that is more a problem of contemporary economy), but rather instead - how to be able to think of something that would still answer to the name of *socio-political subject*. It actually seems that “we” has died of a natural death. Even such authors as Badiou and Nancy (both of them heavily indulged in contemporary debates on possibilities of a “we”) who more or less disagree on everything, actually agree that a certain type of “we” has permanently played out its historical role: “The current of thought that has identified the historical period that is now being ended, has claimed that any kind of becoming-subject has to be collective in nature, and that all the living intellects are in constitution of a certain “we.””²⁹ This process however, Badiou continues, has a strange ending: the rupture of the social bond in fact does not result – as moralists like to state – in raging individualism, on the contrary, what we are witnessing now, is in fact *resurrection of the most primitive collective micro-identities*: nation states, families, football clubs, religious appurtenance, neighborhoods; – that is what has remained of the once magnificent and almighty Spirit. As *Laibach* have declared in one of their latest songs (Nietzsche’s influence is more than evident): “Our time is outstanding. It no longer drifts onwards, rather instead it

spins backwards in the already outlived forms of the spirit, - what gives us an enormous possibility: *to actually live the future of what we are becoming*.” It seems as if the death of “We” did not result in individualism or anarchy, it has resulted in *well-organized proliferation* of micro-identities: the corps of the social substance rots in disgusting smell of distasteful *petit liaisons*. And of course, it is the *same process* that is responsible for the *breakdown of symbolic social link* and for the *resurrection of petty communitarian identities*: the capital. *The capital* is the one who at the same time disrupts the established order of fixed social positions, and provides sustenance for micro-identities on which it actually feeds. Capital needs flexibility of identities, which at the same time, have to remain identifiable, representable. In other words, all of the petty particular differences, we have grown accustomed to worship, are as a matter of fact only a cover up for the real process that is lurking from behind: after the death of One, everything has yet again *become* One. And that is exactly the point of Nietzsche’s famous sentence: “Let us stick to the facts: the people have won – or “the slaves” or “mob” or whatever you like to call them...” A certain type of “We” has yet again become a synonym for power.

In order to better understand Nietzsche’s statement, it is necessary to shortly explain the fundamental framework of the *Genealogy of Morals*. In his conception of the birth of “society,” Nietzsche actually follows Hegel, namely, also his story begins in the field of confrontation of “the strong” and “the weak”. In his version however, there is no reconciliation between the both *ontological* categories, only a perpetual struggle, and exactly this struggle is in fact what we call the history of mankind, although it *simultaneously* depicts the non-possibility of a universal society. In his analysis of *Genealogy*, Foucault came to the following conclusion: “What Nietzsche calls *Entstehungsherd* of the concept of Good is neither the energy of the strong, nor the reaction of the weak; it is exactly the scene in which they sort out ones against the others, ones at the top of the others; it is the void that separates them and which opens between them, the void through which they exchange their threats and their slogans.”³⁰

Each of these threatening slogans, actually has a structure of a “We,” and in the midst of them, there is a gap, a “non-place” that inhibits the possibility of a universal “We.” The relation between them is however asymmetrical. “We noble ones, we good, beautiful, happy ones!” – although the “we-type” of the “strong,” seeks its opposite in the contrasting lower quality of “the weak,” it is essentially self-affirmative, differential and *benign*: it does not

²⁹ Alain Badiou, *Le Siècle*, Seuil, Paris 2005, p. 141, 142.

³⁰ Michel Foucault, *Nietzsche, la généalogie, l’histoire*, in *Dits et écrits II*, Gallimard, Paris 1994, p. 144.

seek complete annihilation of its opponent. That however does not hold true for the “we-type” of “the weak”: *all of us* are just humans, *all of us* are *equals* – in short, “we-type” of “the weak” seeks *abolishment of all the differences*. It cannot be carried into affect if not under the condition that it effectively negates the *sheer possibility of its opposition*. “While every noble morality develops from a triumphant affirmation of itself, slave morality from the outset says No to what is “outside,” what is “different, “ what is “not itself”; and *this* No is its creative deed.”³¹ What is the key to the story? The “slave morality” can actually triumph only if it enters the “non-place” that separates the two belligerent sides; *it has to declare its “we” exactly at the point from which arises its inherent impossibility*. It happened. In two steps: Christianity and Democracy. Only one “We”; “We” that *is* One has remained, with ontological difference buried beneath layers of phony differences between the micro-identities, produced and organized by the capital.

Only from this perspective it becomes possible to fully understand the operation of Nietzsche’s “we”: to declare “we” at the exact point from which arises its impossibility – this is the act of sublime violence that gave power to the ruling slave morality. To declare we at the point where this *impossibility is somehow made transparent through artistic manipulation* (we immoralists) – through this act of violence, Nietzsche tries to open a gap to breathe for the different-us-different.

³¹ *Genealogy*, p. 36.

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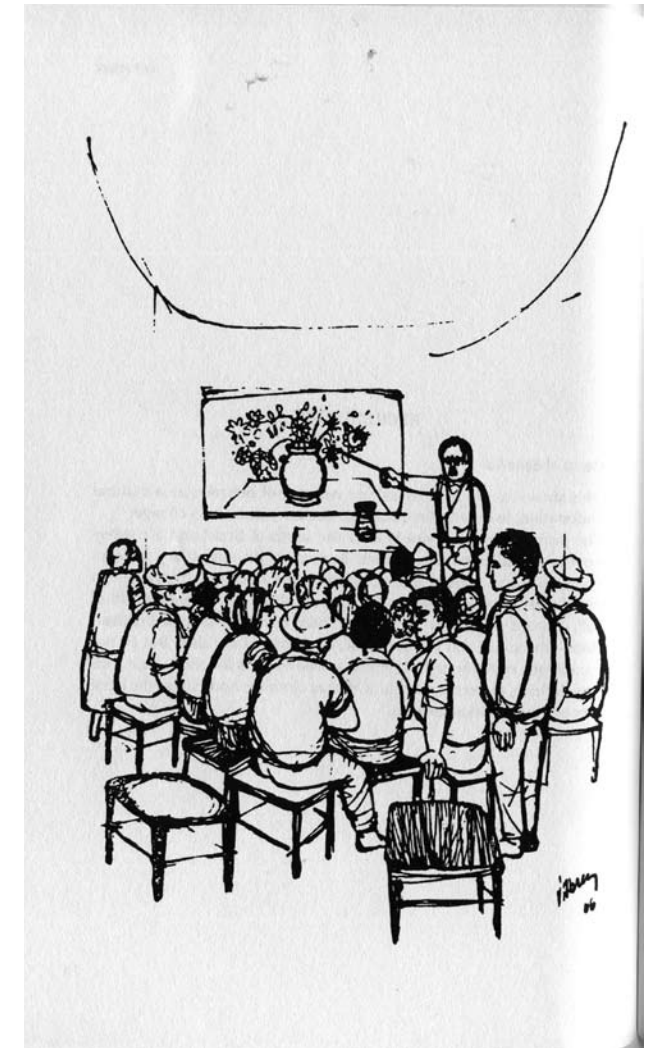
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2

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Your polling station will be : Centre For The Deaf King Square		Address [REDACTED] [REDACTED] [REDACTED]
Number on Register [REDACTED]		[REDACTED]

This card is for information only. You can vote without it, but it will save you time if you take it to the polling station and show it to the clerk there. SEE INFORMATION ON THE BACK OF THIS CARD



This sequence of ten images were created by artist Francisco Brenand and used by educator and educational theorist Paulo Freire for his "Culture Circle" program in Brazil during the 1960's.

The (illiterate) participants are stimulated to debate on the hidden meanings "coded" in the pictures. This happens at the first level of the program before even learning how to read. The participants are involved in generative modes of debate and dialogue with the aim of bringing their consciousness and actions to bear on "the democratization

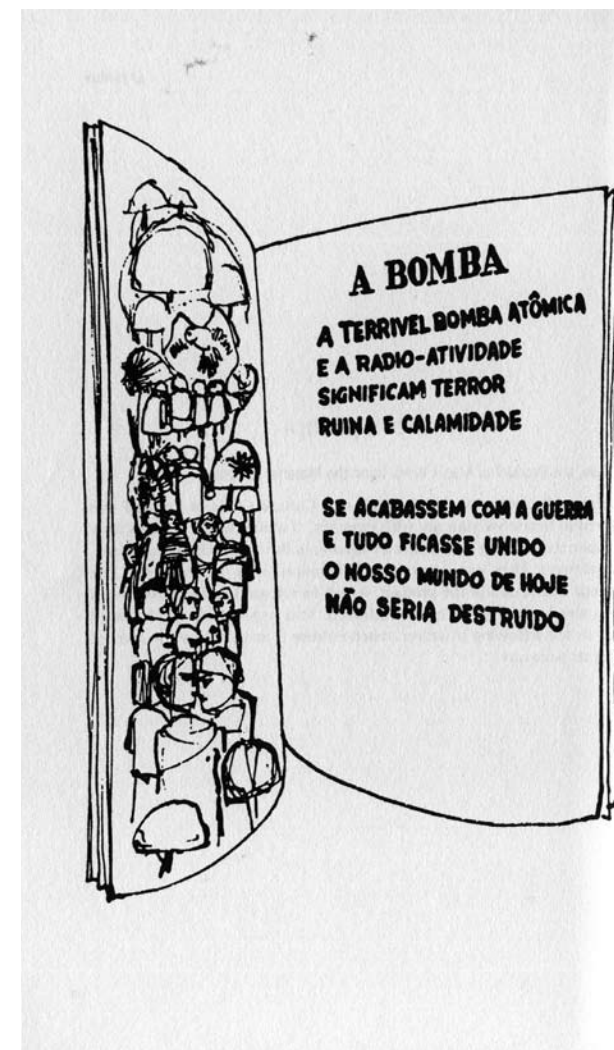
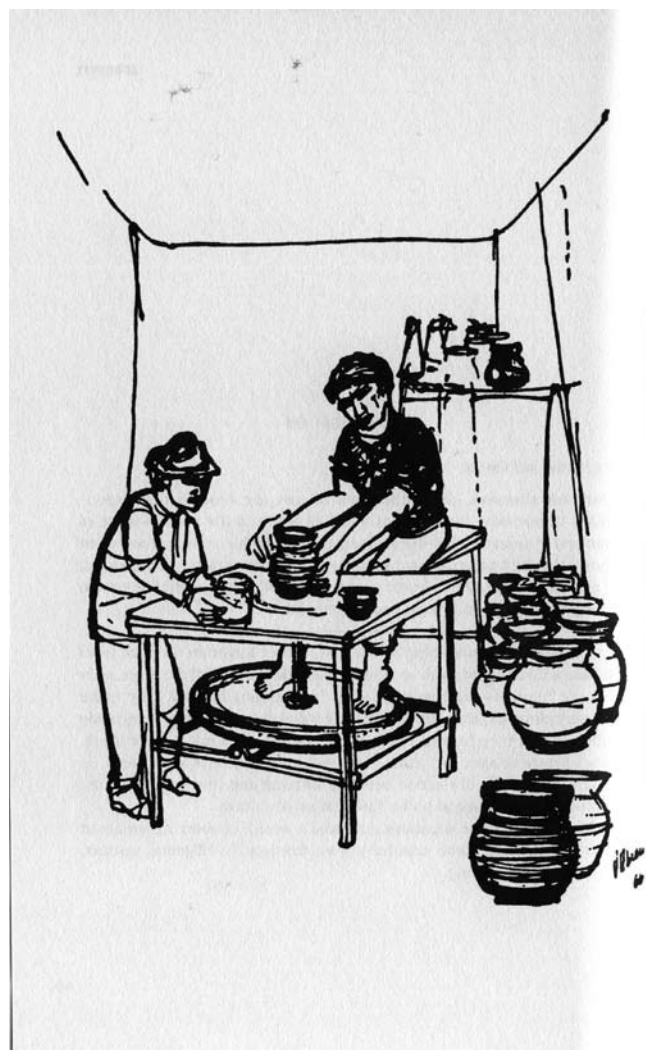
of culture within the general context of fundamental democratization"

I want to ask what kind of images we need as contemporary illiterates of democracy in its micro and macro dimensions to generate dialogue and realize how engaged we are "in relations with the world".

Binna Choi

Source of the images: Paulo Freire, Education for Critical Consciousness published, Continuum: London, (1974;2008)







In 1943, the American artist Stuart Davis published a provocative defence of abstract art, entitled 'What about Modern Art and Democracy?' (*Harpers*, December, 1943, pages 16-23.) It is a complex essay that responds to attacks on abstract art by George Biddle, a highly influential social realist painter who enjoyed close relations with President Franklin D. Roosevelt, was instrumental in the formation of the Federal Art Project, and during the early years of World War Two, chaired the Art Advisory Committee of the US Department of War. Davis notes with approval the enormous rise since the Depression of the capacity to produce and distribute art throughout the US. In no small measure, this was due to the support provided artists by the Federal Art Project of the 1930s. Davis offers the upbeat observation that 'a vast machinery for popularization of art is now available'. Yet this prospective renaissance in American art is tempered with the question: 'Who controls it and to what ends?' This sobering reflection is typical of Davis' magnificent rhetoric that grasps clearly and combatively the contradictions faced by twentieth century artists. Davis shows us that 'democracy', when used by the State to describe a social and political environment, is often collapsed into the fantasy of creative freedom. It's an infectious fantasy, as well. The practice of art has repeatedly been offered as a paradigmatic case of the free individual; the social being who is able to exercise her artistic vision without constraint or prescription. Entire peoples have been measured against this benchmark of free self-expression. Contemporary critics and historians of art, as well, continue to refer to certain types of politically provocative art as being an 'alternative public sphere.' An entire generation of US artists grew up during the 1980s believing that the art gallery was the locus of democracy and social truth. Davis, however, would have had no truck with such mythmaking. With the righteous indignation of a man who believes that so long as one human being is enslaved, none can truly be free, Davis traced the curious fate of a 'free' art in a decidedly un-democratic social world. This is the world of the institutions of art and culture. The vast machinery of mediators between artist and public; what Davis described as the 'agencies of sponsorship and distribution in whose policies the artist has little or no voice.' Because Davis always held the welfare of the artist paramount, he had little time for those who ignored the imbalance of power between artists and the institutions of art. After all, Davis reasoned, it is the institutions of art whose 'policies both reflect and create public opinion' and 'react directly on the economic status of the artist and on his aesthetic orientation.' Today, we tend not to see the institutions of art and culture as quite so determining; on the other hand, some would argue that there is no comparable position to occupy, as Davis did during the 1930s, *outside* the institutions of art and culture. It is true that during the early-1930s Davis was instrumental in the organization of the Artists' Union, participated in the Artists' Congress, and proselytized tirelessly for the management of art by artists. All these efforts were organized under banner of art and democracy. So far as Davis was concerned, his conception of cultural democracy had little in common with the bureaucratic dream of 'art for the millions'. For Davis and his generation, democracy meant first and foremost *participation*. With that principle firmly in mind, Davis was confident that he could counter the charge of 'elitism' directed by artists like Biddle against Modern art in general and abstract art in particular.

Participation and self-organization by artists is everywhere today. Confrontation is so *retardataire*. Are the institutions of art and culture any *more* democratic than they were for Davis? Is there not good reason to remain sceptical about the promise of art and democracy?

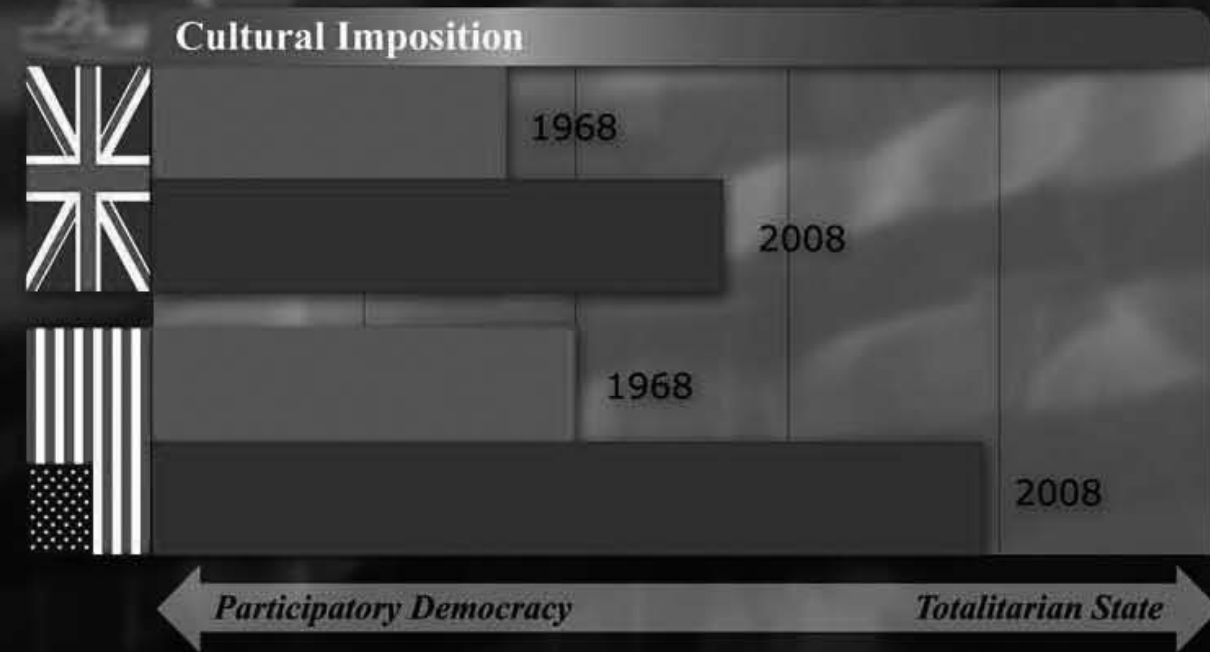
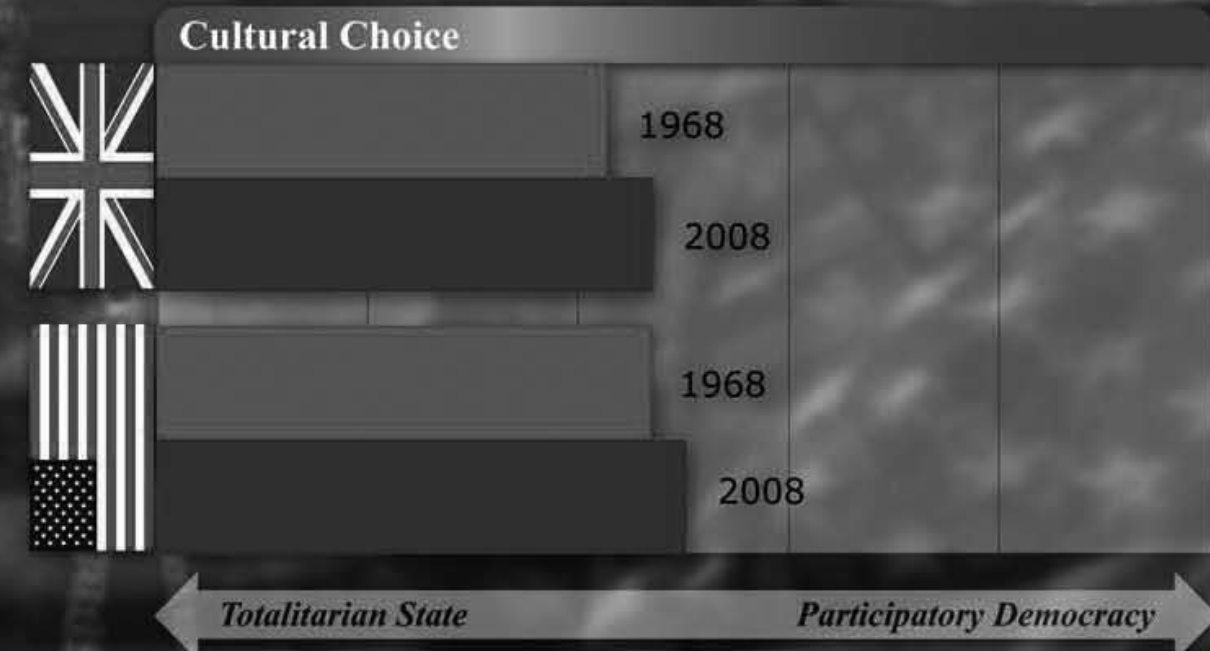
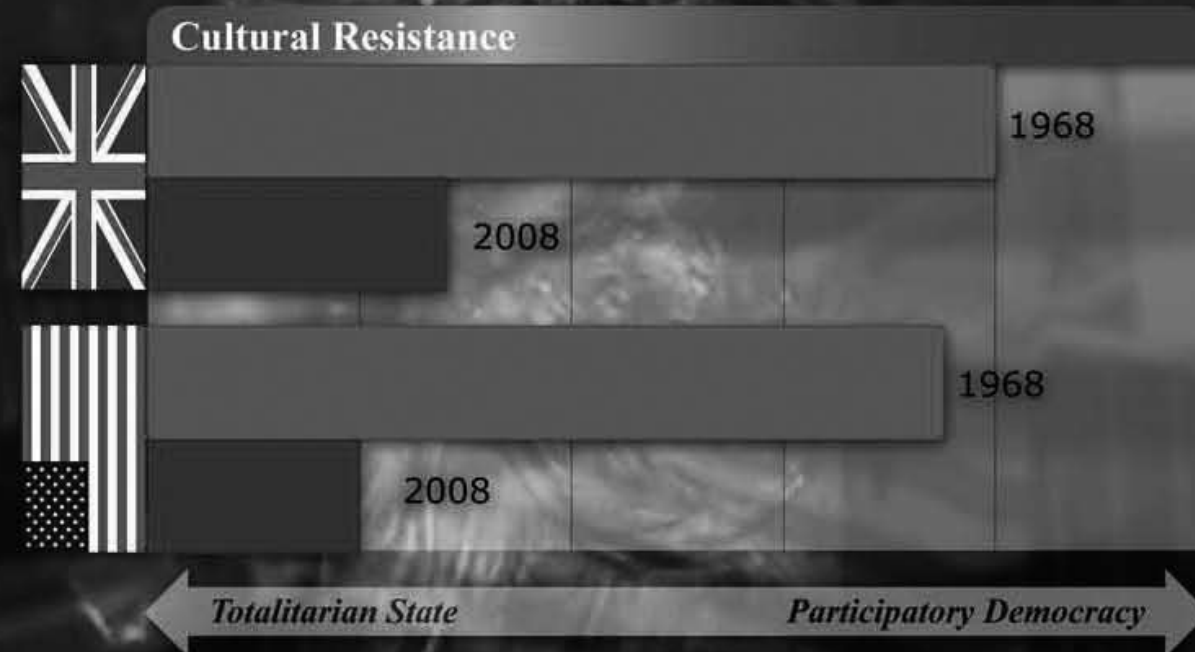
Art as a mode of political action can only take place at the borders of a community where it can cut into its consensual flows

—Susan Schuppli



The HEALTH *of* DEMOCRACY

Using leading cultural indicators we compare the health of Democracy in 1968 to 2008 in the US and UK



US SUSPENDS RIGHT OF HABEAS CORPUS – WIRE TAPS ON AMERICAN CITIZENS ESTABLISHED WITHOUT JUDICIAL OVERSIGHT – US PRESIDENT CLAIMS SOLE UNIVERSAL RIGHT TO "PREEMPTIVE WAR" – US PRESIDENT USURPS RIGHT OF COURTS TO INTERPRET TREATIES
 US PRESIDENT INTERPRETS GENEVA CONVENTION TO LEGALIZE TORTURE – UK LANDS TORTURE PLANES EN ROUTE TO MIDDLE EAST AND EASTERN EUROPE – CONSTITUTIONAL SCHOLARS SAY US IN GREATEST CONSTITUTIONAL CRISIS IN ITS HISTORY

Le jugement esthétique, fondement transcendantal de la démocratie ?

Thierry de Duve

La toute première phrase du préambule de la *Déclaration universelle des droits de l'homme* contient un postulat, et chacun sait qu'un postulat est une hypothèse mais une hypothèse indémontrable et néanmoins légitime, une hypothèse dont on décide qu'elle n'a pas à être vérifiée soit parce qu'elle va de soi soit parce qu'elle est nécessaire à tout ce qu'on va construire sur cette base. « Considérant que la reconnaissance de la dignité inhérente à tous les membres de la famille humaine et de leurs droits égaux et inaliénables constitue le fondement de la liberté, de la justice et de la paix dans le monde... », cette phrase postule qu'être homme, c'est être membre de la famille humaine¹. Voilà un postulat qui parle spontanément à l'intuition et qu'il paraît précisément inhumain de remettre en cause, mais qui n'en est pas moins un postulat. On peut craindre à ce titre — mais faut-il le craindre ? — que le fondement de la liberté, de la justice et de la paix dans le monde, le fondement, donc, de l'idéal démocratique, demeure lui-même infondé. Dans sa préface à l'édition publiée pour les quarante ans de la *Déclaration*, Franca Sciuto, alors présidente d'Amnesty International, réitère ce postulat, et là encore à la toute première phrase : « Nous appartenons tous à une seule et même famille : le genre humain². » Cela n'est pas nécessairement rassurant. Il suffit de penser aux parents pédophiles, au « Famillle, je vous hais » d'André Gide, aux surdéterminations traumatiques de l'inconscient par le roman familial, aux guerres ethniques ou au destin sanglant des Atrides, pour que l'assertion de Franca Sciuto se charge de résonances sinistres qu'il n'était certainement pas dans les intentions des auteurs de la *Déclaration* d'évoquer. Sous sa plume, le mot famille est visiblement métaphorique car il désigne le genre humain, concept politique, et non l'espèce humaine, concept biologique. Les liens du sang, en effet, n'unissent tous les membres de l'humanité qu'à condition de remonter le cours de l'évolution jusqu'à l'ancêtre commun, ce à quoi nul ne songe quand il s'agit de reconnaître la dignité inhérente à tous les êtres humains.

Le postulat familialiste de la *Déclaration des droits de l'homme* en cache donc un autre, qui est que le bien, le souverain bien qui doit guider l'humanité vers l'idéal démocratique, réside potentiellement dans l'appartenance à la famille humaine

universelle — ou qu'il doit y résider. Que dans cette famille on s'entend et on s'aime par principe — ou par pétition de principe. Que les familles sont bonnes — ou qu'elles doivent l'être. L'hésitation que par trois fois j'ai mise entre l'être et le devoir être laisse l'esprit profondément insatisfait. À s'en tenir au postulat tel quel, on risque de verser dans l'angélisme. À se précipiter dans la raillerie anti-humaniste, on risque de se priver de tout recours aux droits humains dans le combat politique. Comment sortir du dilemme ? Mon hésitation ne résulte pas de mon scepticisme pourtant bien réel à l'égard de la bonté naturelle des familles comme résidence potentielle du souverain bien. Elle résulte de l'hétérogénéité du politique et du biologique que manifeste l'interdiction de réduire, en compréhension, le genre humain à l'espèce humaine, avec laquelle il coïncide pourtant, en extension. En l'absence de cette réduction, en présence de cette interdiction, c'est le *sentiment* de l'appartenance à l'humanité qui justifierait qu'on parle d'elle comme d'une famille dont on exige à bon droit la bonté, et c'est bien ce à quoi, dans sa manière de s'adresser spontanément à l'intuition, le préambule de la *Déclaration* fait appel, sans jamais le dire. Les liens familiaux sont en effet les seuls à être naturellement affectifs tout en formant institution sociale. Qu'il arrive que les familles s'entre-déchirent, et qu'elles le fassent autant par amour que par haine, confirme le ciment affectif de l'institution familiale bien plus qu'il ne le dément. Le sentiment d'appartenir à la famille humaine — appelons-le avec une touche d'humour *le sens de la famille*, un sens de la famille élargi aux dimensions de l'humanité — ferait donc la médiation ou le pontage entre le genre humain comme concept politique et l'espèce humaine comme concept biologique, autrement dit, entre les droits de l'homme et les lois de la nature. C'est, je pense, un tel sentiment que Kant avait en vue sous le nom de *sensus communis*, notion qui, comme on sait, ne lui est venue sous la plume que lorsqu'il s'est attelé à la critique du jugement de goût, pas avant, et qu'il identifie à la faculté de juger esthétique elle-même. Entre les jugements éthiques et politiques, d'une part, les jugements scientifiques et épistémologiques, de l'autre, le jugement esthétique ferait le pontage. Permettez-moi donc de vous proposer, nourri de réflexions sur le pessimisme empirique et l'optimisme transcendantal de Kant, un petit commentaire à la *Critique de la faculté de juger*, qui sera aussi une manière de m'interroger sur la place de l'art par rapport à l'idéal démocratique.

Je vais tout droit à ce qui à mon sens relie pour Kant la place de l'art — ou du moins du beau naturel, et de l'art par l'intermédiaire des Beaux-Arts — à l'idéal démocratique. C'est ceci : si l'esprit humain s'interrogeant sur ce qui constitue sa propre humanité avait accès à la chose en soi, *die Menschheit an sich*, si le supra-sensible pouvait s'incarner dans le sensible, si l'on avait la certitude absolue que le *sensus*

¹ *Déclaration universelle des droits de l'homme*, Folio-Gallimard, Paris, 1988, p. 18.

² *Ibid.*, p. 12.

communis existe — autrement dit, que le sens de la famille universelle est lui-même universellement partagé —, eh bien, le jugement esthétique serait le fondement de la démocratie. Le fondement empirique d’une démocratie parfaite court-circuitant les aléas et les distorsions qu’induit dans nos démocraties imparfaites le recours aux institutions et à leur représentativité. D’une démocratie directe, par empathie. Les humains éliraient pour les diriger des êtres beaux, et ceux-ci seraient beaux de l’intérieur, beaux moralement. La communauté des hommes reposerait sur le sentiment partagé de l’harmonie entre eux. La distinction suspecte que fait Tönnies entre communauté-*Gemeinschaft* et collectivité-*Gesellschaft* n’aurait plus lieu d’être, ou bien ne serait plus suspecte³. La famille humaine serait fondée à la fois en nature et en droit *via* le sentiment d’en faire partie. La société universelle des humains aurait des bases esthétiques, c’est-à-dire affectives, sentimentales. Le seul art véritable serait l’art de vivre. Le beau et le bien ne feraient qu’un.

Kant, bien sûr, n’y croit pas. Rien ne prouve que le *sensus communis* est une réalité naturelle, instinctive, biologique ; le supra-sensible ne s’incarne pas *unmittelbar* dans le sensible ; et l’esprit humain s’interrogeant sur sa propre humanité n’a pas accès à la chose en soi, *die Menschheit an sich*. Observateur sceptique du monde, et profondément pessimiste quant à la nature humaine et ses perspectives de progrès moral, Kant s’est aussi acharné, en philosophe critique, à séparer le domaine de la causalité fondé en nature et le domaine du droit éthique fondé en liberté. Cette séparation, les deux premières *Critiques* s’en seront chargées. La troisième, la *Critique de la faculté de juger*, aura fait le pont par-dessus l’abîme entre les deux premières, sans le combler. Au centre de la troisième *Critique*, l’idée du *sensus communis*. Qu’est ce que le *sensus communis* pour Kant ? Rien à voir avec le sens commun, que Descartes estimait la chose la mieux partagée au monde, le sens commun au sens du bon sens, au sens qu’entend, justement, le sens ou l’entendement commun. Le *sensus communis* est un sentiment commun. Mieux, c’est une communauté de sentiments ou, mieux encore, une aptitude à la mise en commun des sentiments, au partage des affects, à leur *Mitteilbarkeit* – ce qu’on traduit d’ordinaire par communicabilité mais qui signifie littéralement partageabilité. C’est la faculté d’éprouver du sentiment en commun, de *con-sentir*, de se donner le consentement mutuel, de s’entendre, de vivre en paix, de s’aimer. Tous. C’est le sens de la famille universelle et le sens universel de la famille.

³ Ferdinand Tönnies, *Communauté et société. Catégories fondamentales de la sociologie pure* (1922), PUF, Paris, 1977.

Comment Kant sait-il que le *sensus communis* existe ? Il ne le sait pas. Pourquoi dès lors croit-il qu’il existe ? Kant ne le croit pas. Il doit exister, ce qui est tout autre chose. On doit supposer qu’il est ancré dans la nature de l’homme, sans quoi il n’y aurait aucun espoir que les humains s’entendent jamais ; ni aucune raison de vouloir qu’ils puissent s’entendre un jour ; ni même aucune nécessité de penser qu’ils le doivent. Le *sensus communis*, c’est l’idée que les humains peuvent et doivent s’entendre et que telle est leur destination. Et ce n’est qu’une idée, sans plus. Chez Kant, le statut de ce qui n’est qu’une idée sans plus et ne devient jamais un concept, mais reste une idée dont on ne peut se passer, s’appelle transcendantal. Le *sensus communis* est une idée transcendantale, dont la teneur, formulée dans le vocabulaire de la *Déclaration des droits de l’homme*, est que l’humanité forme une famille. Le fait qu’il soit inhérent à cette famille d’hésiter entre l’être et le devoir être est inclus dans l’idée en question. Puisque cette idée transcendantale ne dispose d’aucune preuve empirique décisive de son incarnation dans la réalité, à quel signe Kant reconnaît-il du moins son existence, comme idée ? Au fait que nous jugeons esthétiquement. Kant fait plus que le suggérer : l’aptitude au partage affectif partagée par tous qu’il nomme *sensus communis* n’est autre que le goût, la faculté de juger esthétique, qui juge non pas rationnellement mais affectivement⁴. Comment Kant sait-il qu’elle est partagée par tous ? Il ne le sait pas. Pourquoi y croit-il, dès lors ? Il n’y croit pas. Cela fait belle lurette qu’il a été réveillé de son sommeil dogmatique par Hume le sceptique, et qu’il se méfie comme de la peste de toute croyance. Mais de tous les philosophes ayant réfléchi sur l’art et sur le beau, pas un n’a su s’étonner avec plus de fraîcheur que lui — et cet étonnement est l’étonnant — du fait que les gens emploient à tout bout de champ des phrases comme « ceci est beau » pour exprimer leur sentiment de plaisir devant ce qu’ils trouvent beau à titre personnel, comme si la beauté était, à la manière de la couleur, par exemple, une propriété de l’objet qui occasionne ce plaisir. Et pas un n’a su mieux que lui saisir ce qu’il en est du jugement esthétique dans son rapport nécessaire à la liberté, et donc, à l’idéal démocratique.

Je juge belle cette chose, là devant moi. J’exprime ainsi le plaisir que la perception de cette chose suscite en moi. En quoi suis-je justifié de la dire belle, objectivement, alors que mon plaisir n’est qu’un sentiment personnel ? Malgré les apparences, répond

⁴ « Je dis que l’on pourrait donner avec plus de raison le nom de *sensus communis* au goût qu’au bon sens et que la faculté esthétique de juger, plutôt que celle qui est intellectuelle, mériterait le nom de sens commun à tous, si l’on veut bien appeler sens un effet de la simple réflexion sur l’esprit ; on entend alors en effet par sens le sentiment de plaisir. On pourrait même définir le goût par la faculté de juger ce qui rend notre sentiment [...] universellement communicable sans la médiation d’un concept. » Emmanuel Kant, *Critique de la faculté de juger*, Vrin, Paris, 1979, § 40, Du goût comme d’une sorte de *sensus communis*, p. 128-129.

Kant, je n'ai pas prétendu à la beauté objective de la chose, mais bien à l'accord universel des subjectivités quant au sentiment que la chose suscite. Autrement dit, j'ai prétendu que cette chose est belle pour tout le monde. L'accent n'est plus sur « cette chose est belle », il est sur « j'ai prétendu ». Cela me justifie-t-il davantage ? Pas le moins du monde. Mon voisin est libre de juger laide la chose que je juge belle. Rien ne prouve que le sentiment de la beauté, quant à cette chose, soit universellement partagé. Dans l'empirique, le désaccord d'un seul suffirait même à prouver le contraire. Si je suis justifié, ce ne saurait être que dans le transcendantal, au niveau des conditions *a priori* qui fondent mon expérience esthétique au même titre que celle de n'importe qui, et concernant n'importe quelle chose au même titre que celle que j'ai devant les yeux. Il faut donc — il le faut — que je suppose mon voisin doté de la même faculté de juger que celle dont mon propre plaisir me signale l'existence en moi. Même et surtout s'il en use différemment, le fait qu'il en use librement me signale la possibilité qu'a son sentiment de s'accorder avec le mien sans y être contraint. Mon voisin est *de la famille*, il doit en être. Je n'ai pas le loisir de penser autrement, car lui dénier le goût serait lui dénier l'humanité. À bien y songer, il en va de la famille humaine universelle comme il en va de la famille restreinte : quand on se dispute en famille, il vient presque toujours un moment où l'objet de la querelle est la querelle elle-même, chacun s'épuisant à faire entendre aux autres qu'on ne devrait pas se disputer entre consanguins. Non au nom de la parenté comme telle, mais bien de la solidarité affective que chacun juge contre-nature de ne pas présupposer entre membres de la même famille. Ainsi de la famille des humains, unie, non pas empiriquement par les liens du sang mais transcendantalement par le *sensus communis* : à l'occasion du moindre dissentiment esthétique, chacun éprouve que le sens de la famille universel est ébranlé dans son existence, et chacun s'évertue à maintenir qu'il faut qu'il existe. L'accent est maintenant sur « il faut ». C'est lui qui fait le pont entre la famille naturelle (l'espèce humaine) et la famille instituée politiquement et juridiquement (le genre humain), sans pourtant les fonder ni en nature ni en droit.

Le plus surprenant, chez Kant, est que le « il faut » est en même temps un « il suffit » et un « tu dois ». Le jugement de goût, dit-il, « affirme seulement que nous sommes autorisés à présupposer d'une manière universelle en tout homme les mêmes conditions de la faculté de juger que nous trouvons en nous⁵. » La condition théorique nécessaire et suffisante de l'universalité du goût, le jugement de goût la trouve dans sa propre prétention à l'universalité — et non l'inverse, comme on s'y attendrait. C'est

⁵ *Ibid.*, § 38, Dédution des jugements de goût — Remarque, p. 124.

parce que je ressens en moi la présence de la faculté du goût que je suis autorisé à supposer qu'il en est ainsi *naturellement* pour mon voisin, et pour tout homme. Mais c'est parce qu'il faut qu'il en soit ainsi pour tout homme que je suis *moralement* obligé de présupposer que mon voisin a du goût, comme je pense en avoir moi-même. Rien n'est démontré si je n'assume pas ce « il faut » théorique comme un « je dois » pratique. Ou comme un « tu dois » qui me tombe dessus et dont je me sens obligé de faire ma maxime. Quelque chose qui commence à ressembler furieusement à un impératif catégorique. Par exemple — mais notez bien que ce n'est nulle part dans Kant : « Ne prononce jamais de jugement esthétique dont tu ne puisses en même temps vouloir qu'il ait valeur universelle⁶. » Autrement dit : « Ne nomme beau — ou art — que ce qui suscite chez toi le désir de voir le genre humain au grand complet partager ton sentiment. » Kant a de bonnes raisons pour ne jamais rien dire de tel, parmi lesquelles il y a le fait que le jugement esthétique est affectif et involontaire. On ne peut pas plus s'empêcher de prononcer des jugements esthétiques à prétention universelle (on peut les garder pour soi, mais c'est autre chose) qu'on ne peut s'empêcher d'éprouver le sentiment avec lequel ils coïncident. On ne gouverne donc pas ses jugements de goût par des maximes de la volonté. Soit. Adaptons donc notre quasi-impératif catégorique à cette objection, en le phrasant à la manière de son autre formulation dans la deuxième *Critique* : « Demande-toi si le sentiment que tu éprouves dans ton jugement esthétique, au cas où il relèverait d'une loi universelle de la nature valant donc pour tous tes semblables, tu le revendiquerais toujours⁷. » Autrement dit : « S'il était établi que la nature avait doté les hommes d'un sens inné de la famille humaine dont ton sentiment est l'expression, demande-toi s'il serait toujours désirable de nommer beau — ou art — ce qui l'occasionne. » Cette formulation-là, je pense que Kant y souscrirait certainement, bien que je sois sûr, en revanche, qu'il n'estimerait pas nécessaire d'en passer par là.

Ce qui rend nécessaire d'en passer par là, c'est la question de savoir s'il y a lieu de craindre que le fondement de l'idéal démocratique demeure infondé du fait qu'il repose sur un postulat — celui que contient le préambule de la *Déclaration universelle des droits de l'homme* quand il postule que l'humanité forme une famille et que cette famille est bonne par essence, ou qu'elle doit l'être. Un postulat n'étant pas une

⁶ La formule canonique de l'impératif catégorique kantien est : « Agis de telle sorte que la maxime de ta volonté puisse en même temps toujours valoir comme principe d'une législation universelle. » *Critique de la raison pratique*, Vrin, Paris, 1974, p. 44.

⁷ La formule de Kant est : « Demande-toi si l'action que tu projettes, au cas où elle devrait arriver d'après une loi de la nature dont tu ferais toi-même partie, tu pourrais encore la regarder comme possible pour ta volonté. » *Ibid.*, p. 82.

hypothèse empiriquement vérifiable, ce n'est pas en lui opposant le spectacle du mal dans le monde que nous déciderons si nos éventuelles craintes sont elles-mêmes fondées ou non. Le pessimisme et le sarcasme anti-humaniste ne sont ni plus ni moins probants que l'optimisme et l'angélisme quand il s'agit d'examiner en quel sens le postulat est légitime, s'il l'est. Il faut le mettre à l'épreuve autrement, et cette épreuve, c'est la perspective du postulat inversé consistant à affirmer : le sens du beau n'est pas dans la nature humaine. Il n'est pas vrai que l'humanité soit douée de la faculté de juger esthétique. Le *sensus communis* n'existe pas. Nous n'avons pas en nous de sentiment commun ou d'aptitude naturelle à la mise en commun de nos sentiments. Les sentiments sont radicalement incommunicables : pas d'*Einfühlung*, pas d'empathie, de sympathie ou de télépathie. Il n'y a pas à espérer que les humains en société s'unissent jamais en une communauté affective, fût-elle à l'état potentiel et perpétuellement différé. Nous sommes une fois pour toutes dénués de la faculté de nous entendre. L'humanité n'est pas une famille, ou si elle l'est, ce sont les Atrides. L'amour est une chimère.

Je ne force pas la note, tout cela, réinversé, bien sûr, redressé, repositivé, est bel et bien postulé par le *sensus communis*, qui est très explicitement un postulat, en un sens assez particulier et bien kantien, celui d'une idée de la raison. Contrairement au postulat du préambule de la *Déclaration universelle des droits de l'homme*, le postulat inversé ne parle pas spontanément à l'intuition ; il la heurte de front et paraît inhumain parce que contre-nature. Que l'amour *universel* soit une chimère, le réalisme impose de s'y résoudre. Mais qu'il n'existe pas du tout, que les sentiments soient radicalement non partageables, qu'il n'y ait aucune base instinctive, pulsionnelle, somatique, génétique, bref, aucune base biologique, c'est-à-dire naturelle, à ce qui nous agglutine les uns aux autres, cela non ! Le postulat inversé n'est qu'un postulat, comme l'autre. Pourquoi l'envisager ? Parce qu'il met le pontage des jugements politiques et des jugements scientifiques par le jugement esthétique à l'épreuve en le privant de sa tête de pont dans la nature pour mieux mettre en évidence sa tête de pont dans l'éthique. Ce qui est bien utile pour comprendre avec Kant en quoi le *sensus communis* — non la *réalité* mais l'*idée* du *sensus communis* — fait effectivement le pontage entre les domaines de juridiction des deux premières *Critiques*, à savoir le politique et le biologique, les droits de l'homme et les lois de la nature. Et en quoi la place de l'art par rapport à l'idéal démocratique en dépend.

Le « il faut » de tout à l'heure est cette fois résolument éthique et plus du tout théorique : malgré l'absence d'ancrage universel dans le sens de la famille, je dois postuler l'existence d'une communauté humaine universalisable. Autrement dit, le

sentiment que j'ai d'être humain n'implique pas le moins du monde que les autres le soient, mais je dois faire comme si. Faire comme si ne veut pas dire faire semblant, ni considérer que les idées de la raison sont des fictions théoriques — l'erreur de Vaihinger dans sa *Philosophie du comme si*⁸. Cela veut dire se comporter comme si la paix perpétuelle était possible alors même que la guerre perpétuelle est une certitude absolue. Nous voici franchement sur le terrain de la moralité politique. En quoi le jugement esthétique est-il concerné ? Reprenons à nouveaux frais. Je juge que cette chose est belle, en vertu du sentiment de plaisir que je ressens. Mon voisin est libre de la juger laide, et il la juge laide. La guerre du goût est déclarée. Mais en réclamant que mon voisin juge comme moi, je lui prête mon sentiment, je le lui communique, non en faisant effectivement qu'il sente comme moi — comment y arriverais-je, puisque toute empathie est exclue ? — mais en lui supposant la même capacité à éprouver du plaisir que celle dont mon propre plaisir me fait éprouver l'existence en moi. Ma prétention à juger universellement est un appel à l'assentiment de l'autre mais aussi un défi. Je lui déclare la guerre à mon tour en le sommant de faire la paix. Comment se fait-il que j'en éprouve du plaisir ? Le plaisir que j'ai pris à cette chose que je juge belle, et qui n'est autre que le plaisir que me procure le fait, pour moi indéniable, d'être doté de la faculté de juger esthétique, il s'avère alors qu'il est en même temps le plaisir que j'ai à l'idée, à la simple idée, que mon voisin en est doté comme moi et qu'il est donc doué pour la paix. Je me suis comporté moralement à l'égard de mon voisin en postulant que la paix est possible en matière de goût — et partant, en toute matière — alors même qu'il m'avait déclaré la guerre sur ce terrain et que moi-même je ne pactise pas. Qui plus est, en constatant qu'il réclame de moi le même assentiment que moi de lui, cette fois sur la laideur de la chose que pour ma part je juge belle, je constate qu'il a les mêmes prérogatives et qu'il se comporte avec la même éthique que moi. Et ceci sans avoir posé un acte moral ni l'un ni l'autre. Uniquement en nous laissant aller à notre sentiment personnel, à nos passions respectives. Je sais que le *sensus communis* est une fable pour enfants de chœur, pourtant j'ai fait comme si. Et lui de même.

J'espère vous avoir fait sentir, en durcissant Kant, en lui faisant adopter le postulat inversé, que si on pouvait prouver l'absence d'universel dans le sentiment, se comporter comme s'il y en avait serait une obligation uniquement éthique. En chaque jugement esthétique se logerait un impératif catégorique mais d'une nature étrange et imprévue, puisqu'il nous serait loisible de nous en acquitter involontairement, passivement, même, en tout cas sans en faire une maxime consciente. Kant ne va jamais

⁸ Hans Vaihinger, *Die Philosophie des Als Ob*, Felix Meiner Verlag, Leipzig, 1911.

jusqu'à penser une telle chose, qui serait une hérésie pour son système. Elle n'en serait pas moins une interprétation sensée du § 59, où il dit que le beau est le symbole du bien moral — et, soit dit en passant, l'amorce d'une relecture de la troisième *Critique* qui ne passe pas par l'Analytique du sublime, où Kant s'approche fort d'une telle pensée. De mon propre plaisir éprouvé — comment dire ? — somatiquement, proprioceptivement, « pathologiquement », dirait Kant (quoi qu'il en ait sur le désintéressement et sur la question de savoir si le plaisir précède le jugement ou le jugement le plaisir, on peut se demander ce que pourrait bien être un plaisir qui ne serait pas vécu de cette manière⁹), de mon propre plaisir, donc, mais du fait même que je ne peux m'empêcher de le supposer en mon voisin en dépit de son désaccord, je procède en supposant à tous mes semblables la capacité de l'éprouver. Et de là je suppose l'existence en chaque être humain d'une aptitude au vivre-ensemble que justifierait, s'il existait, le partage universel des sentiments. Cette aptitude supposée, je l'appelle *sensus communis*, sens universel de la famille universelle. Bien qu'il soit nécessaire et obligatoire, cet échafaudage de suppositions reste de part en part de l'ordre de la pure supposition. Sur le *sensus communis*, Kant est radicalement agnostique. Ce qui signifie en définitive ceci : que le fondement de l'idéal démocratique reste infondé pour Kant, et que c'est en tant qu'il est infondé que la démocratie a transcendentalement partie liée avec le beau et l'art (*via* les Beaux-Arts).

Revenons à la famille humaine postulée par la *Déclaration universelle des droits de l'homme* et à ce qui à mon sens relie pour Kant la place du beau — ou de l'art — à l'idéal démocratique. Si l'on avait la certitude que le sens universel de la famille universelle existe, disais-je, le jugement esthétique serait le fondement de la démocratie. Les humains éliraient pour les diriger des êtres beaux, et ceux-ci seraient beaux de l'intérieur, beaux moralement. La communauté des hommes reposerait sur le sentiment partagé. Le beau et le bien ne feraient qu'un. Eh bien, c'est parce que le beau et le bien ne font pas qu'un, qu'ils ne sauraient faire un, et qu'il est bon et juste qu'ils ne fassent pas un, que l'art est nécessaire et vital à la démocratie. Ni comme son fondement réel ni comme son fondement utopique mais comme le témoin empirique de son fondement transcendantal. Rien n'est plus dangereux pour la démocratie que de vouloir fonder réellement la *Gesellschaft* sur la *Gemeinschaft*, la société sur la communauté, la citoyenneté sur le sens de la famille, car on tombe là dans la confusion de l'empirique et du transcendantal. Chaque fois que cela a été tenté, on a vu aux résultats que le cercle familial des humains se resserrait sur la tribu, l'ethnie, la race des purs, le *Blut und*

⁹ Sur le désintéressement, voir le § 2 de la troisième *Critique*, et sur la question de savoir si le plaisir précède le jugement ou le jugement le plaisir, le § 9.

Boden, les « vrais hommes », la filiation biologique avérée, et excluait les autres de la famille humaine. Et plus d'une de ces tentatives, celle du nazisme avant tout, ont confondu sciemment le politique avec l'esthétique et l'esthétique avec le biologique. Le peuple aryen comme œuvre d'art modelée par un Führer-artiste, c'est le résultat d'une confusion monstrueuse entre l'empirique et le transcendantal¹⁰. Kant, qui n'a pas de pire adversaire que cette confusion, maintient les registres du politique et de l'esthétique strictement séparés. Il maintient même, pessimiste et sceptique qu'il est, le politique séparé de l'éthique. L'éthique est du ressort des maximes de la volonté. L'esthétique relève du sentiment. Et la politique, c'est-à-dire l'art de gouverner, ressortit en définitive au registre de ce qu'il appelle les techniques de la nature. Mais Kant articule les trois registres, le politique à l'éthique par la doctrine du droit, l'éthique à l'art par la théorie du beau comme symbole de la moralité, l'esthétique aux techniques de la nature par le jugement de goût comme modèle du jugement téléologique. L'horizon d'une communauté des êtres raisonnables — l'expression kantienne et très peu romantique pour la famille humaine — ne serait pas pensable sans cette triple articulation, ni celle-ci sans que le sentiment d'appartenir à l'humanité n'intervienne dans le pontage. Le préambule de la *Déclaration universelle des droits de l'homme*, quant à lui, ne dit jamais que c'est le pontage de l'espèce humaine, concept biologique, et du genre humain, concept politique, par l'*idée* du sentiment d'appartenance à l'humanité qui rend légitime que l'on parle d'elle comme d'une famille. Il semble prendre ce sentiment pour argent comptant, malgré les Atrides, les guerres ethniques, les parents pédophiles ou le « Famille, je vous hais » de Gide. Le préambule ne dit pas davantage que le *signe* que nous avons en nous cette idée se repère au fait que les gens emploient à tout bout de champ des phrases comme « ceci est beau » — ou « ceci est de l'art » — pour exprimer leur sentiment personnel tout en réclamant qu'il soit partageable par tous. Mais la *Déclaration* elle-même le reconnaît lorsqu'elle dit à l'article 27 que toute personne a le droit de jouir des arts.

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¹⁰ Cf. Eric Michaud, *Un art de l'éternité, L'image et le temps du national-socialisme*, Gallimard, Paris, 1996.

Images of democracy (synopsis)

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Gilles Deleuze thought that one of the essential features of art is its faculty of ‘resistance’. In an attempt to reposition the twentieth-century discussion on the topic of the sublime, we try to evaluate the artists powers of resistance against the background of the political shift from despotism to democracy in Modern Times. We thereby focus on the status of aesthetic images, as they move from the Kantian ideas on the ‘disinterestedness’ of beauty, on the one hand, and the impossibility to resist the overwhelming forces of the Sublime, on the other, to the more ‘engaged’ modern and post-modern aesthetics (of subversion or even ugliness). How can we even measure the contribution of artistic images in this evolution? An attempt to indicate the shift into a ‘democratic’ imagery is made through the reading of a modernist novel, Joseph Roths *Radetzky March*, where one can witness the waning of the traditional, autocratic way of representing the (monarch’s) world, and the breakthrough of a new representational code, created in and by democracy.

[IMAGES OF DEMOCRACY]

door Peter de Graeve

Een hypothese

Of het in de huidige kunstwereld nog wat opbrengt om naar de esthetica van de oude Kant te verwijzen lijkt een misplaatste vraag geworden. Indien ze niet spontaan getuigen van een beate bewondering worden uitspraken over het maatschappelijk nut, de esthetische relevantie of de intrinsieke schoonheid van actuele kunstwerken, en oordelen over het politieke of sociale engagement van eigentijdse kunstenaars afgedaan als het onbegrip van een niet bijdetijdse geest. Vernuftig en zonder gêne wordt het *non disputandum* van de Latijnse zegswijze uitgesproken ten bate van ongeremde vernieuwingsdrang en sensatiezucht,— die zelf de gangmakers zijn van de niet te stuiten commercialisering van de kunstwereld. Het louter subjectieve karakter van smaakoordelen wordt daarbij doorgaans verdedigd met de nauwelijks verborgen intentie, kritische en negatieve commentaren af te wimpelen: ‘U ziet het zo? Wel, ik zie het anders.’ Bij gebrek aan romantische kunstenaars is de allerindividueelste emotie vandaag het voorrecht geworden van de goeroes en adepten van de actuele kunst. Subjectiviteit is een *credo*, wat betekent dat ze zich in niets nog van puur *subjectivisme* onderscheidt.

Het menselijk oordeel over schoonheid verschilt volgens Kant hierin van het loutere smaakoordeel dat het niet individualistisch is: een oordeel over het schone is *algemeen geldig*. [1] Nochtans lost men de moeilijkheid niet op door te doen alsof men het kan rooien zonder deze kantiaanse privileges en hun boude aanspraak op universaliteit, waarin de moderne esthetica ten slotte haar oorsprong en betekenis heeft gevonden, en door de vraag naar de betekenis van het schone dan maar te herleiden tot het weinig fantasierijke dilemma waarmee de huidige kunstbeschouwing zichzelf onderdompelt in een behaaglijke onverschilligheid. Het is een onmiskenbaar feit dat op de strakke kantiaanse hiërarchie in de loop van de negentiende eeuw (ten tijde van Manet, de impressionisten, Cézanne, maar wellicht reeds vóór hen) een omwenteling van de artistieke smaak is gevolgd die zelf uitliep op zoiets als een ‘egalitair’ kunststreven—Beuys’ *Iedereen kunstenaar*. Dit feit neemt niet weg dat de hedendaagse ervaring van schoonheid zowel in onze uitspraken *over* als onze omgang *met* de werken van tijdgenoten, meer en meer gevat zit in onverschilligheid en onbeslistheid die door het succes van de biënnales, megatentoonstellingen en happenings nog nauwelijks wordt gemaskeerd.

Reality, in its plurality
and contingency,
is the sphere of the
unexpected, of
the unpredictable...

De weeromstuit van een hypothese

Wat vroeger ‘het systeem der kunsten’ heette, en waarin de hele kantiaanse (of hegeliaanse) esthetische hiërarchie nog een vast fundament vond, is nu zoals gezegd dermate dooreen geschud en ingepalmd door een ongebreideld, koortsachtig experimenteren met de materiële en spirituele grenzen van wat kunst heet, dat de maker van een hedendaags werk haast vanzelf een *makelaar* is geworden: iemand die niet creëert vanuit de intrinsieke mogelijkheden en beperkingen van een materiaal of discipline, maar die de plooibaarheid en onvatbaarheid hiervan tot het uiterste in het eigen voordeel probeert uit te buiten.

Bovenop het probleem van de raadselachtigheid van de hedendaagse kunst stelt zich ook de volgende vraag. Het vermelde *subjectivisme*, hoe kan iemand dit bij het *beoordelen* van wat kunst ‘is’ nog vermijden als het hoe dan ook is verheven tot de absolute norm in de *creatie* van kunstwerken—vanaf hun ontstaan in het atelier, de fabriek of zelfs de natuur tot hun verhandeld worden op de wereldmarkt? Als er dus al sprake kan zijn van een malaise in de kunst (en je hoeft weinig fantasie om die eventualiteit te beamen), dan treft zij zeker niet alleen de praktijk van de *kunstenaar* maar evengoed de reflectie van de *filosoof*. Het verschil tussen beiden is evenwel dat voor de eerste altijd de uitweg overblijft van een handig en als het moet zelfs schaamteloos te gelde maken van een dergelijk onbehagen, daar waar de tweede het aan zijn stiel verplicht is dit te doorgronden—of tenminste te doen alsof...

Spreken is niet vanzelfsprekend

Waar het nog gebeurt dat de hedendaagse kunstscène wordt ingehuurd als gangmaker van een filosofische levensstijl—vaak met de beste intenties—mondt het pleidooi niet zelden uit in een kritiekloos naar de mond praten van de grootste gemeenplaatsen uit de moderne en postmoderne kunstgeschiedenis: het ‘genie’ van Duchamp, de val van het platonisme, de bevrijding van het lichaam, de kortsluiting van de nabootsing... [3]

Of we de individuele kunstenaar nu politieke lafheid verwijten of hem niettegenstaande die lafheid het diepste respect blijven betuigen, dan wel of we het instituut van de actuele kunst wegens zijn onbenulligheid verachten of het hierom juist als toonbeeld van een doorgaans als ‘postmodern’ gekwalificeerde deugd van de oppervlakkigheid opvoeren—in beide gevallen zit het oordeel van de kunstfilosoof gevangen in een aporie van de kantiaanse esthetica die tot op vandaag niet is opgehelderd. Het verwijt van politieke lafheid en de oproep tot politiek engagement gaan uit van *ethische* veronderstellingen die, althans in de kantiaanse optiek, niet in een *esthetica* thuishoren. De waarde van een kunstwerk hangt niet af van de vermeende kleinburgerlijkheid van zijn schepper, en dat is precies hetgeen ook Merleau-Ponty ooit constateerde. Net zomin zal de waarde van een levensfilosofie ooit geïllustreerd kunnen worden aan de hand van de richting die een oeuvre, laat staan de kunst in haar geheel, in een gegeven tijdperk uitgaat. Wie het tegenovergestelde beweert moet de kantiaanse scheiding tussen ethiek en esthetiek tegelijk heimelijk aanhouden en heimelijk ontkrachten. Want niet alleen verplicht hij zichzelf ertoe te oordelen *vanuit* een ethisch of politiek-filosofisch perspectief *over* een esthetisch vraagstuk—of andersom, vanuit de kunst over de samenleving. Bovendien moet hij er *tegelijk* op toezien dat degene *over wie* hij vonnist niet het gelijkaardige voorrecht geniet om op zijn beurt deze morele uitspraken op hun artistieke of esthetische waarde af te meten... De objectieve weerlegging van de kantiaanse stelling dat ethiek en esthetiek van elkaar gescheiden moeten blijven is tot dusverre niet geleverd, en precies dit verzuim vormt de bres waardoorheen het alles overrompelende subjectivisme van de hedendaagse kunstbeschuwing zich stort. [4] Kan men de kunst zwakte, dwaling of nalatigheid aanwrijven wanneer zij het kunstfilosofische onvermogen om klaarheid te brengen in het vraagstuk van de subjectiviteit, ons door Kant nagelaten, keer op keer genadeloos uitbuit en aan de kaak stelt? Is het niet veeleer terecht te noemen—al was het maar omdat

zoiets ‘deel uitmaakt van het spel’—dat de hedendaagse kunstenaar tegenover de harde verwijten van lafheid, kleinburgerlijkheid en onbenul, hem door sommige filosofen in het gelaat geslingerd, de (soms ver)gezochte ambiguïteit van zijn ontwerpen en de koppig stilzwijgende materialiteit van het werk plaatst, of uiteindelijk zelfs zijn onwil om *expressis verbis* op ‘aantijgingen’ te reageren? Spreken is niet vanzelfsprekend...

Een these

De politieke en ethische dubbelzinnigheid van de hedendaagse kunst behelst meer dan alleen een pose of ironische knipoog; veeleer is ze een poging om het ethische en politieke bij de artistieke praktijk te betrekken op een manier die voor wijsgeren vandaag in vele gevallen nog onvoorstelbaar is. De filosoof die in de actuele kunst niets dan ironie ziet maakt het zichzelf te licht, en gaat (gewild?) voorbij aan een diepere ambiguïteit, namelijk die tussen scherts en ernst, tussen doelmatigheid en spel, op de grens waarvan de moderne kunst bij voorkeur balanceert en waarmee zij de kunstfilosofische ‘arbeid van het concept’ in het hart, dat wil zeggen in z’n *ethos*, raakt.

De kunst alléén voedt niet de vertwijfeling over de maatschappelijke rol die actuele kunstenaars te spelen hebben—ofschoon zij onmiskenbaar als eerste dit soort twijfels zal willen uitstallen. (Of is ‘uitstallen’ soms niet de artistieke activiteit bij uitstek?) Als er al sprake kan zijn van sensatiezucht vanwege de makers en van toenemende onverschilligheid vanwege liefhebbers van kunst dan hebben beide intenties in eerste instantie te maken met het gewijzigde maatschappelijke verwachtingspatroon waarin de moderne kunst functioneert sedert het midden van de negentiende eeuw of, om heel precies te zijn, sinds de tijd dat de aporie van het kantiaanse denken over schoonheid in de Europese cultuur is gematerialiseerd. Dat is althans mijn stelling. Ze is grotesk, ja zelfs gratis, in een dubbel opzicht. Ten eerste, omdat reeds vele anderen vóór mij de rol van de kunst en de belevenis van schoonheid in de kantiaanse esthetica diepgaand onderzochten en bekritiseerden (Stendhal, Schopenhauer, Nietzsche, Gadamer, Adorno...). Ten tweede, omdat het op het eerste gezicht toch wat ruim bemeten is, zo’n ‘gewijzigd maatschappelijk verwachtingspatroon’ van een hele cultuur, en nog wel gespreid over twee eeuwen. Toch is het niet mijn bedoeling om aan de hand van een historisch overzicht van de kunstfilosofie het wel en wee van de Europese kunstidealen te beschrijven, noch om een cultuurfilosofisch manifest af te kondigen over één of andere onafwendbare artistieke decadentie of onstuitbare kunstemancipatie. Als er dan toch een etiket moet gekleefd, dan veeleer het volgende: proberen klaar te zien in een verhouding tussen scheppen en denken, of tussen kunst en filosofie—om het grof te zeggen, want het zou klinkklare onzin zijn te beweren dat de kunst niet denkt of de wijsbegeerte niets creëert!—, die in het verleden al te vaak onbesproken of althans ongezegd is gebleven.

De ‘politieke’ status van de kunst zal daarbij hoe dan ook een leidraad zijn. We zullen het vraagstuk van de verhouding tussen kunst en macht moeten aanraken, maar ook dat van het maatschappelijk engagement van de hedendaagse kunstenaar. Beide relaties hebben hun onoverzichtelijke dimensies. Om te beginnen zijn ‘kunst’ en ‘macht’ van oudsher nauw met elkaar verweven, van de bas-reliëfs in het paleis van Susa of het beroemde mozaïek van Pompeï met Alexander de Grote en Darius, over de artistieke verheerlijking van raciale zuiverheid in nazi-Duitsland of van het socialistische vaderland in de USSR, tot en met de portrettering van het Belgische vorstenpaar door Dirk Braeckman. Maar in de geschiedenis van het machtsportret doet zich vanaf de moderne tijd een breuk voor—waarvan overigens het werk van Braeckman getuigt—, die hierin bestaat dat het klassieke ‘beeld van de macht’ (of van de machthebber) gaandeweg is verschoven in de richting van een overdonderende ‘macht van het beeld’. Deze laatste macht is in dit tijdperk van digitale communicatie zelfs in

grótere mate (zij het op een andere manier en met een andere betekenis) ‘totalitair’ dan het geval was onder Hitler en Stalin.

In het andere scenario, dat van het maatschappelijk engagement van de moderne kunstenaar, is de evolutie op het eerste gezicht veel minder duidelijk en speelt de onoverzichtelijkheid zich vooral in de breedte af. Hoe kan men bijvoorbeeld het engagement van de volgende kunstenaars en de mogelijk politiek-esthetische dimensie van de genoemde kunstwerken met elkaar te vergelijken? De *Olympia* van Manet, de *Demoiselles d’Avignon* of de *Guernica* van Picasso, Jasper John’s *Flag* of de *Electric Chair* van Andy Warhol, Beuys’ performance *Coyote*, de *Wrapped Reichstag* van Christo, Jan Fabre’s *Hamzuilen* tijdens *Over the Edges* of de onvermijdelijke *Cloaca* van Wim Delvoye, een portret van koningin Elisabeth II geschilderd door Lucian Freud en dat van een *Paus* door Francis Bacon, het oeuvre van Jake en Dinos Chapman of ten slotte, waarom ook niet, het maatschappelijk isolement waartoe Thierry de Cordier zichzelf een tijdlang vrijwillig veroordeelde... De lijst is virtueel oneindig, en het antwoord op de vraag naar het artistieke engagement lijkt bijgevolg onachterhaalbaar. Dat is niet alleen het gevolg van het feit dat de criteria waarmee de moderne kunst zo’n engagement mogelijkwerijs wordt toegekend—of ontzegd—subjectief blijken te zijn, of emotioneel geladen. Er is mijns inziens meer aan de hand: het vraagstuk van de politieke status van de kunst in het algemeen, en de moderne kunst in het bijzonder, wordt wezenlijk getekend door de noties van het *belang* en de hiermee corresponderende *belangeloosheid*. En hiermee hebben we opnieuw voet aan wal gezet op kantiaanse bodem.

Het concept van de belangeloosheid vormt in Kants esthetica het alfa—en wellicht ook een omega, zie verder—: ‘smaak is het oordeelsvermogen over een voorwerp of over een wijze van voorstellen door welbehagen of onbehagen, *zonder het minste belang (ohne alles Interesse)*’ [5] Zo beschouwd is het belang veel meer dan een wijsgerige ‘notie’ of een ‘concept’. Ze is een *waarde*, en niet zomaar één. Het belang, ofwel de kantiaanse omkering ervan in de idee van de belangeloosheid, is de waarde van de waarde. Schoonheid, als waarde, wordt dankzij de waarde van het belangeloze tot een graad van esthetische autonomie verheven die de kunst bij uitzondering toekomt: esthetisch ‘waardeloos’ is in klassiek opzicht dan ook die kunst waarbij enig belang in het spel is. De kantiaanse belangeloosheid van het schone verhief de kunst tot een status van uitzonderlijkheid waarop ze (misschien, ooit?) recht had en aanspraak maakte; deze waarde plaatste haar immers ver boven de smaakvolheid van een bord soep of de aantrekkelijkheid van de laatste mode.

Maar de belangeloosheid van de kunst was toen en is ook nu nog een onhoudbare aporie.

Kunstenaars hebben dit aan gevoeld. Filosofen daarentegen lijken noch het ene noch het andere te *begrijpen*...

Representatie, presentatie, presentie

Één van de recentste voorbeelden van de verwarring over de zin en betekenis van artistiek engagement in de hedendaags kunst is de *Venice Cube 2005* van Gregor Schneider. Het tentoonstellen van dit kunstwerk, waarvan de creatie was verwacht tijdens de Biënnale van Venetië van dat jaar, werd uiteindelijk door de Italiaanse autoriteiten verboden. Deze ingreep had alles te maken met de inhoud van het werk, en zou dus met enige overdrijving als ‘censuur’ bestempeld kunnen worden. De kunstenaar had immers de bedoeling om een islamitisch heiligdom, de *Kaäba* of Tempel van de Zwarte Steen, uit de stad Mekka, met een exacte kopie op het San Marcoplein na te bouwen. Uit vrees voor opschudding, rellen of islamistische aanslagen besloot de Italiaanse overheid om de realisatie van het werk te dwarsbomen, hierin alvast wat de motieven betreft nauwelijks onderdoend voor de autoritaire tussenkomsten van Europese vorsten en regeringsleiders in de achttiende en negentiende eeuw. Bijzonder opmerkelijk bij dit alles is evenwel dat de angst voor de perverse effecten van een *mimesis* bij de beslissing blijkbaar de doorslag hebben gegeven. Nochtans

verhinderde één en ander niet de tentoonstelling van het project in een zaal elders in Venetië, waar alweer een nabootsing, ditmaal van de idee achter het kunstproject, aan de hand van de ontwerpen die de kunstenaar daartoe reeds had vervaardigd, te zien was. Voor de ogen van de twijfelaars werd de impact van de o zo klassieke *representatie*—ooit beschouwd als het kernstuk van de macht van het beeld, vandaag veeleer verguisd als een bastaard van het platonisme—in Venetië nog maar eens gedemonstreerd. In het tumult van de ophef die door de verbodsbepaling werd veroorzaakt zagen velen over het hoofd dat het door Schneider voor *Venice Cube 2005* gebruikte procédé (concept, projecten, ontwerpen, schaalmodellen) veel gelijkenissen vertoont met de werkwijze van de neorealistische ‘inpakkunstenaar’ Christo. Het is hiervan in zekere zin het exacte spiegelbeeld en bijgevolg, nogmaals, een *nabootsing*. Christo verborg originele bouwwerken (*Reichstag*, *Pont Neuf*) onder zeildoeken met de bedoeling de oorspronkelijkheid van hun zijn, dus hun zin, te beklemtonen. Doordat hij ze in een esthetische betekenis onderbracht, ze als het ware in de kunstwereld onderdompelde, kon Christo inderdaad deze opmerkelijke verschuiving in ervaring en appreciatie teweegbrengen. Schneider gaat net andersom te werk. Hij verbergt niet, maar imiteert, om vervolgens de pseudo-*Kaäba* in alle openheid uit te stallen. Niettemin ligt het ook in zijn bedoeling om door middel van zo’n artistieke ingreep (iets van de) de oorspronkelijke zin van het bouwwerk weer te geven en op te roepen. *Id quod potestas demonstravit*...

Reeds de klassieke portretten van de macht bezaten deze representatieve kracht. [6] Ze waren uit op de nabootsing van de absolute macht van de vorst, zoals in het portret van Louis XIV door Hyacinthe Rigaud (1702) of van de heldenmoed van de generaal, zoals de Napoleon die als legeraanvoerder de steile Alpen over trekt, vereeuwigd door David (1800); of nog, ze waren een ode aan de noeste arbeid van de regeerder ten dienste van het volk, met het portret door diezelfde David van diezelfde Napoleon (1812), ditmaal in het holst van de nacht poserend vóór een bureau waarop enkele documenten, onder meer de *Code Napoléon*, voor de toeschouwer liggen uitgestald (uitstalling van de uitstalling) [7], dan wel aan de ernst en toewijding van de president in de sobere staatsieportretten van De Gaulle of Mitterrand van de jaren ’60 en ’80 van de twintigste eeuw. Één voor één waarden en waardigheden waarvan de kunst, meen ik, alle belang heeft ze te *kunnen* uitbeelden. Reeds van bij de aanvang van de ‘moderne’ kunst, in de ruime betekenis, dus sinds de Renaissance, vormt het *kunnen tonen* van een bepaalde waarde het eminente belang, indien niet de ware inzet, van de westerse kunst. Primaire bronnen die deze modernisering van de Europese kunst hebben geïnitieerd en gestimuleerd, Leon Alberti’s *Over de schilderkunst*, Giorgio Vasari’s *Levens*, tot en met de idealistische traktaten van het maniërisme (Zuccaro, Lomazzo), zijn hierin eensluidend. Het lijkt mij dan ook evident dat ‘kunst’ en ‘vertoon’ niet alleen samengaan, maar dat zij in dit samengaan een belang dienen dat tegelijk het hunne is én dat van iets of iemand anders: de macht, de machthebber. Een belang dat tegelijk het meest eigene veronderstelt, en toch iets vreemds inhoudt. [8]

In beide, het kunnen van de kunst en het vertoon van de uitstalling, laten zich in feite twee met elkaar parallel lopende en wellicht niet van elkaar te onderscheiden krachten voelen, namelijk representatie en presentatie. Beide samen maken ze de presentie, of zo je wil de aura van het kunstwerk uit. Als eerste heeft Louis Marin erop gewezen dat een portret van de macht, en bij uitbreiding ieder kunstwerk, niet kan *representeren* zonder eerst zichzelf, al was het maar als ‘representant’, te *presenteren*. De presentatie vormt als het ware de scheppingsact van het gerepresenteerde. Marin voerde deze logica een stap verder toen hij hieruit, terecht meen ik, althans wat de kunst en haar creaties aangaat, besloot dat de presentatie voorrang heeft op de representatie. [9] De kunst legt de macht van de macht vast, ze ‘richt’ deze ‘op’. De kunst bepaalt de waarde van een waardigheid, in die zin, dat ze letterlijk de instelling van de macht *opstelt*. Kunst als de *étalage* van het ingesteld zijn, van het in voege zijn van macht. Kunst als de *extallatie* van een *installatie*, als men mij deze uitdrukking toestaat. Het is niet

eens zo moeilijk om dit vanuit het mechanisme van de macht zelf te begrijpen: geen machthebbers, ook niet de huidige, zijn gediend van een kwaad imago. Bijgevolg gaat de presentatie door het kunstwerk (of, vandaag, het verschijnen in beeld, in de media), hoewel zij in niets te onderscheiden valt van de representatie die ze oproept en die haar inhoud uitmaakt, niettemin de representatie in rang en belang vooraf. Macht die niet wordt geëtaleerd blijft *installig*. Marins conclusie heeft het niet te onderschatten voordeel dat, in filosofisch opzicht, het *historisch* overwicht van de representatie wegvalt en de aandacht veeleer uitgaat naar de dynamiek van de presentatie. We zullen weldra zien tot welke belangrijke inzichten een dergelijke verschuiving van de wijsgerige oplettendheid kan leiden. Marin heeft, zoals zal blijken, met zijn theorie over de parallellie tussen presentatie en representatie in het machtsportret immers een zeer verdienstelijke poging gedaan om de blik van de filosofie opnieuw op de schoonheid te richten—en op het *belang* van schoonheid—, daar waar kunstfilosofen de afgelopen decennia hun aandacht geconcentreerd hadden op dat andere kantiaanse ‘cliché’—het *sublieme*, le *sublime*, das *Erhabene*...

Kunst en verzet

Tot dusver hebben zich in de probleemstelling twee fenomenen kenbaar gemaakt die het waard lijken verder onderzocht te worden: de samenhang van representatie, presentatie en presentie en hun functioneren binnen de moderne kunst enerzijds, het aanslepende probleem van het belang en de belangeloosheid van schoonheid in de moderne kunstfilosofie anderzijds.

Om met dit laatste te beginnen, er bestaat in de hedendaagse wijsbegeerte een *onderstroom* van theorieën die het kantiaanse concept van de belangeloosheid van de schoonheid, en dus het geloof in het louter *esthetische* karakter van de kunst ter discussie stellen. Ofschoon deze stromingen niet altijd expliciet tegen de kantiaanse esthetica ingaan, is het effect ervan niettemin hetzelfde: gesteld wordt, dat het maatschappelijk belang van de kunst niet (langer) ondergeschikt kan worden gemaakt aan de hogere autoriteit van een zuivere of praktische rede, simpel gezegd aan wetenschap of moraal. Voor wie op deze onderstroom meedrijft zijn de twee meest evidente, want gemakkelijk te bereiken uitwegen afgesloten: het estheticisme van een *Gesamtkunst* aan de ene, en het geloof in een statuut *sui generis* van de kunst aan de andere kant. Het eerste, de *Gesamtkunst*, is kind van de romantiek, met vooral Wagner—maar niet Nietzsche, zoals wel eens wordt gedacht. Het tweede vormt de meest authentieke uitloper van de kantiaanse esthetica. Het eigenzinnig statuut van de kunst is ingeschreven in de beroemde derde bijdrage van Kants faraonische denken, dat naast de grote en indrukwekkende piramide van de logische en wetenschappelijke rede en het niet minder bescheiden bouwwerk van de hogere menselijke zedelijkheid, een constructie van weliswaar geringer formaat oprichtte, de *Kritik der Urteilkraft*.

Maar Kants esthetische piramide heeft slechts een *schijn* van zelfstandigheid, die precies door het concept van de belangeloosheid van het schone in stand wordt gehouden. In werkelijkheid zitten de kantiaanse piramides in elkaar verscholen, en kan de kunst niet langer op basis van het schoonheidsoordeel alléén van de andere domeinen, het zuivere kennen en het praktische handelen, afgezonderd worden. Zo is de aan Adorno toegeschreven uitspraak dat ‘men na Auschwitz geen kunst meer kan of mag maken’, puur kantiaans: ze veronderstelt de mogelijkheid van een betekenisvolle scheiding tussen het ethische en het esthetische. Daarnaast plaats ik de houding van de Italiaanse filosoof Mario Perniola, behorend tot de zo-even genoemde ‘onderstroom’, die in zijn jongste essay *Contro la comunicazione* eigenlijk net het tegenovergestelde beweert: pas ná Auschwitz is kunst mogelijk, ja zelfs noodzakelijk geworden. Kunst is niet zozeer de laatste dam—zoiets krijgt meteen iets apocalyptisch—als wel het bijzonder taaie verweermiddel tegen de verdwazing van de globale communicatie.

[10]

Kunst is... *verzet*. Ziedaar, het hoge woord is eruit!

De stelling dat kunst verzet is mogen we op rekening schrijven van Gilles Deleuze. [11] Je zou haar een wat flauw aandoend politiek activisme kunnen verwijten, ware het niet dat de Franse filosoof in zijn originele opstelling tegenover kunst voorzichtig de *equivalentie* tussen kunst en verzet uitspreekt: ‘Men zou dus kunnen zeggen, op een stuntelige wijze, vanuit het standpunt dat wij hier innemen, dat het de kunst is die zich verzet (*l’art est ce qui résiste*), zelfs indien ze met haar verzet niet alleen is. Vandaar de innige band tussen de verzetsdaad (*l’acte de résistance*) en het kunstwerk. Niet elke daad van verzet is een kunstwerk, alhoewel zij op een bepaalde manier daarvan toch iets heeft (*bien que, d’une certaine manière, elle en soit*). Niet ieder kunstwerk is een verzetsdaad en toch, op een bepaalde manier, is het dat wel degelijk’. [12] Kunst verzet, verzet kunst? Waar is Deleuze mee bezig?

Het antwoord op onze consternatie is eenvoudig: hij is de logische gevolgtrekking uit de kantiaanse aporie over de belangeloosheid van kunst tot het uiterste aan het doorvoeren. Om dat te begrijpen dienen we een concept te introduceren dat tot dusver op de achtergrond is gebleven: het *sublieme*. Het zou ons te ver leiden om het complexe, bochtige en zeker niet altijd consistente denken van Kant over het verhevene (*das Erhabene*) uitvoerig te bespreken. [13] Niettemin kunnen we hier één welbepaalde vraag, namelijk wat een verheven esthetisch gevoel is, anders gezegd waarin het ‘verhevene’ van een gevoel zich precies onderscheidt van een alleen maar ‘schoon’ te noemen smaakoordeel, zonder veel omhaal vanuit een deleuziaans perspectief beantwoorden: de verhevenheid van de esthetische ervaring ontstaat vanuit een verzet—*résistance* van Deleuze, *Widerstand* bij Kant. ‘Verheven’ is voor Kant in eerste instantie datgene wat in kracht of geweld boven iets anders uitstijgt. De ontketende natuur is in die zin verheven boven de mens, ze is hem in macht, kracht, geweld de baas. De mens (h)erkent deze hogere kracht in de vrees (*Furcht*) die hij ervaart wanneer hij oog in oog komt te staan met de orkaan, de tsoenami, de vulkaanuitbarsting: het is zinloos zich tegen dit natuurgeweld te verzetten (*zu widerstehen*). Maar deze eerste ervaring van het ‘dynamisch verhevene’, zoals Kant het noemt, geeft aanleiding tot een tweede. Ofschoon de mens zijn eigen fysieke onmacht moet erkennen in de onweerstaanbaarheid—of onverzettelijkheid—van de natuur vindt hij niettemin in zichzelf een aanleiding om zich op zijn beurt boven de natuur verheven te voelen, namelijk in zijn eigen morele waarde, of in zijn zielskracht (*Seelenstärke*) zoals Kant haar hier ook noemt. Tegen de ervaring van zinloos natuurgeweld kan de mens zich verzetten door zijn morele geaardheid ertegenover of beter nog *daarboven* te stellen. (Klinkt nogal gek. Tot je denkt aan *Live Aid*, *Live 8*, *Tsoenami 12-12*... De vraag is echter niet: is dit gek? De vraag is: is dit *subliem*, en waarom?) [14]

De zinvolheid van een dergelijke sprong van het fysische (de vernietigende kracht van de orkaan) naar het metafysische (de zalvende werking van de ziel) laten we hier even in het midden. Wat ons interesseert is het volgende. Het ideaal van het *sublieme*—dit na lang zwoegen bereikte schitterende resultaat van het kantiaanse spur- en denkwerk, binnen de esthetica zowat de evenknie van het polijsten van de David door Michelangelo—is dus alleen maar te bereiken doorheen een weerstand, of een aantal weerstanden, doorheen ‘dadens’ van ‘verzet’, of een denken in die trant, doorheen het ‘denken van het verzet’ als het ware. Er is een keten van dergelijke verzetsdaden en -gedachten nodig om het sublieme te bereiken—vergelijkbaar met de menselijke kettingen bij bosbranden of dijkbreuken. Kant vertelt het verhaal van deze menselijke *verzettelijkheid* in de ruime (op het randje zelfs *oneindige*) context van een onverzettelijke natuur.

Nu is het punt dat ik samen met Perniola en Deleuze zou willen maken het volgende: *zonder belang geen verzet*. Het concept van het sublieme is ondenkbaar zonder een belang omdat hiervan uiteindelijk de notie van het verzet afhangt. Belangeloze schoonheid is niet van deze

wereld—toch niet van een wereld gedacht als (en vanuit) de natuur. Was het niet alweer Merleau-Ponty die hierop wees toen hij beweerde: ‘*Il n’y a pas d’art d’agrément*’? Vrij vertaald: een kunst die bevallig is, zonder weerhaken, bestaat niet. [15] Met de idee van de belangeloosheid van het schone, fundament van het eerste gedeelte van de *Kritiek der oordeelskracht*, loopt Kant niet alleen vooruit op zijn *metafysische* interpretatie van de verhouding tussen menselijk verzet (*Widerstand*) en kunst, maar verhult hij ook de aporie die precies ten gevolge van die metafysische interpretatie vanaf het gedeelte over het verhevene in de kantiaanse esthetica opduikt. Om het in zijn taal uit te drukken: Kant beschrijft in het kader van het verhevene zeer goed de spanning tussen *Widerstand* (verzet, *résistance*) en *Gegenstand* (ding, materiaal, creatie)—een voor de kunst zonder meer *oorspronkelijke*, ‘zijnsbepalende’ spanning—maar hij doet het enkel om via die weg het belang (het belanghebbende, belangwekkende) van de kunst op te kunnen heffen. Niet voor niets wordt het kantiaanse sublieme genoemd als de voortrekker van de hegeliaanse negatie, met z’n magische, voor de lotgevallen van de kunst letterlijk *opheffende*, vernietigende kracht... Dat de kunst alleen verheven genoemd wordt indien ze verzet wil aantekenen bij een hogere morele of spirituele instantie (een act waardoor ze deze instanties meteen als de hogere erkent), kunnen we bijgevolg op rekening schrijven van de zedelijke prerogatieven van de idealistische filosofie. Waar deze prerogatieven wegvallen, zoals bij Deleuze (of om het minder subjectief uit te drukken: zoals in onze tijd), blijft alleen deze stelling over: *kunst is verzet, verzet is kunst*.

Effict, effect, affect

Welnu, een bijkomende reden om Deleuzes stelling aan te houden, niettegenstaande de wat ergerlijke onvatbaarheid ervan, is gelegen in het volgende. Zowat het hele domein van de actuele kunst, zeg maar sedert Duchamp (wie we daar hebben!), is door nogal wat eigentijdse filosofen, met Lyotard als de belangrijkste, prompt onder de hoge kantiaanse bescherming van het sublieme geplaatst. [16] Voorwaar, een wonderlijke daad. Wat is er immers zo subliem aan het fietswiel? Wel, de uitleg... Subliem is minstens het feit dat men er reeds een eeuw lang in slaagt om op wijsgerige gronden aan te tonen dat dit fietswiel niet alleen een kunstwerk is, maar iets subliems bovendien. Of stel ik me nu al te neerbuigend op? De logica die Lyotard hanteert is die van de presentie, op haar beurt afgeleid van het heideggeriaanse ombuigen van de metafysische schoonheidsleer van Kant in de richting van een veeleer ‘aardse’ esthetica. De inzet is dus niet gering, en kan bij ons, vroeggeboorten van de éenentwintigste eeuw, op volmondige steun rekenen: de kantiaanse ‘hogere moraliteit’ van het sublieme wordt door Heidegger teruggeplaatst in de materie, in de aarde, in het werk als werk, in het lijfelijke wezen zelf, in de zorgende mens die zaait en oogst, in de tempelbouwer, in de denker en dichter... Hiermee keren wij terug naar een Griekse, zogezegd ‘tragische’ of ‘sofokleaanse’ esthetica. [17] Heidegger beschrijft de kunst vanuit haar louter aanwezig zijn, puur presentie: ‘[Het votiefbeeld van de godheid] is geen afbeelding die het gemakkelijker maakt erachter te komen hoe de god eruitziet, maar een werk dat de godheid zelf laat aanwezen en zo de god zelf *is*. (...) *Schoonheid is een wijze waarop waarheid als onverborgenheid weest*.’ [18] Dit *wezen* of ‘gebeuren’ van schoonheid vormt de kern van de kunst als ‘presentie’—bij Heidegger ook *das Ereignis* geheten, bij Lyotard *l’événement* (soms ook *don, donation*), de ‘dynamische synthese’ van alle krachten die ooit het kantiaanse sublieme uitmaakten. [19]

Dergelijke definities van de kunst als presentie laten ons ietwat perplex achter. Wat met het beeld? Wat met de macht (of onmacht) van beelden? En wat met de vraag naar de zin of onzin van de kunst, die toch met het probleem van de macht (of onmacht) der beelden verwant was? Is hier niet een vulgaire omkering van de kantiaanse esthetica aan het werk? Een ideaal van de schoonheid (bij Heidegger) of het sublieme (bij Lyotard) die in plaats van de negatieve impuls

in de sublieme ervaring zoals Kant die beschrijft—mijn morele verhevenheid boven het natuurgeweld kan ik nooit voelbaar maken of tentoonstellen, ik kan haar enkel *raden*, ze blijft mij een *raadsel*—, een compleet *positieve* impuls naar voren schuift? Het sublieme—*aanwezig*? Waar dan? In welke kunst? Is alleen echte kunst presentie? Of is alles wat echt present is kunst? En hoe kan ik er ooit zeker van zijn dat ik de heideggeriaanse ‘werking’ van het present zijn niet verkeerd begrijp of inschat, aanvoel (*aisthèton*)? Hoe ben ik zeker dat ik het echte ook echt als het echte ervaar? Hoe voorkomen dat ik het presente vooralsnog met een loutere afbeelding verwar? Of omgekeerd, dat ik de representatie interpreteer als een presentie? Aporie...

Misschien kan de bijdrage van Louis Marin aan het debat over de representatie ons voor dit soort aporieën enigszins behoeden. Ik wil tot besluit van dit essay zijn denkbeelden over de equivalentie tussen presentatie en representatie aan de hand van een zelfgekozen voorbeeld illustreren, hieruit eigen conclusies trekken, en deze vervolgens nog een laatste maal toetsen aan die andere equivalentie, tussen kunst en verzet, die waarover Deleuze het had.

Ik haal mijn voorbeeld uit de literatuur, meer bepaald uit de briljante roman over de ondergang van de dubbelmonarchie Oostenrijk-Hongarije, *Radetzky-Mars*, van Joseph Roth. [20] Dit verwijzen naar een literair voorbeeld kan in de ogen van sommigen een betwiste strategie lijken, maar ik hoop dat haar deugdelijkheid over enkele ogenblikken mag blijken. Om te beginnen biedt de literatuur talloze voorbeelden van ‘machtsportretten’, en is ze dus net als de schilderkunst een uitgelezen terrein om Marins equivalentie te onderzoeken. Het ene literaire portret is veeleer realistisch, denk aan Tolstoj’s *Oorlog en vrede* of Stendhal’s (openingsscène van) *La chartreuse de Parme*, het andere veeleer ironisch, zoals in Cervantes’ *Don Quichot*, Dostojewski’s *De Idioot* of Louis-Paul Boons *De bende van Jan de Lichte*. Ook de verhaalstructuur van *Radetzky-Mars* is gebouwd op een subtiel en het hele boek door volgehouden spel met een ‘portret van de macht’, of met de presentatie van een representatie om het met Marin te zeggen. *Radetzky-Mars* zou je een familieroman kunnen noemen, al blijft het epos hier beperkt tot welgeteld drie personen: grootvader, zoon en kleinzoon. De eerste was een Sloveense boer, Joseph Trotta, van het dorpje Sipolje, die in het midden van de negentiende eeuw als soldaat diende in het leger van Franz-Joseph I. In de slag bij het Italiaanse Solferino, in 1859, tijdens de oorlog tussen Oostenrijk-Hongarije aan de ene en Frankrijk en het jonge Italië aan de andere kant, redt de soldaat het leven van de jonge keizer. Hij wordt prompt bevorderd, in de adelstand verheven (als vrijheer *Joseph Trotta von Sipolje*) en tot ‘held van Solferino’ uitgeroepen. De tweede Trotta, Franz, de zoon, profiteert honderduit van dit gunstige lot en schopt het, als protégé van keizer Franz-Joseph, tot *Bezirkshauptmann* van een grenskanton. De kleinzoon ten slotte, Carl Joseph, kiest in navolging van de held van Solferino opnieuw voor het leger. Maar de laatste telg is veeleer een zwakkeling, een eeuwige twijfelaar en dronkaard, een dweepzuchtige zonder idealen, zonder ruggengraat. Hem keert het lot de rug toe. De stokoude keizer herinnert zich ternauwernood z’n nobele naam, laat staan de heldendaad van een voorvader in een andere eeuw. En als in de loop van de Eerste Wereldoorlog de kleinzoon bij het halen van een emmertje water stomweg door een scherpschutter wordt neergelegd is de afgang compleet: er zijn geen helden meer. Adieu Trotta von Sipolje. En adieu keizerrijk!

Afgezien van de prachtige beschrijving van dit thema, is het vooral Roths verhaalsstructuur die mij hier interesseert, meer bepaald de manier waarop die structuur de ‘presentie’, om bij het onderwerp te blijven, ensceneert. De auteur gebruikt hiervoor namelijk de techniek die pas veel later door Marin zal worden ontleed, en hij doet het bovendien op een manier die ons, meen ik, verder instrueert over het belang van representatie, presentatie en presentie in de kunst of in één woord over *de macht van het beeld*. In Roths roman is het beeld van de macht uiteraard de keizer, Franz-Joseph I. Gedurende het hele verhaal worden van de keizer

overwegend portretten beschreven, en dit bedoel ik letterlijk: de auteur beschrijft keizerlijke beeltenissen die in ambtelijke kantoren, in herbergen, in huiskamers te vinden zijn. Alleen bij het begin, tijdens de slag bij Solferino, en naar het einde toe, bij een bezoek van de *Bezirkshauptmann* aan zijn vorst, zien we de monarch ‘in levende lijve’. Het bijzondere aan *Radetzky-Mars* is echter het feit dat een tweede portret er de hoofdrol speelt, namelijk het portret van de held van Solferino, Joseph Trotta, vervaardigd door een jeugdvriend van zoon Franz Trotta. Ook dit portret wordt in de loop van het verhaal meermaals uitvoerig door Roth beschreven. Het portret van de macht, in de figuur van Franz-Joseph, en de lotgevallen van het absurde rijk waarover deze keizer (meer niet dan wel) regeerde vormt de sokkel van het verhaal. Roth *presenteert*, om het met Marin te zeggen, de keizerlijke effigie als hoeksteen van zijn *representatie* van de geschiedenis van Oostenrijk-Hongarije (de kroniek van een onafwendbaar verval). De effigie toont waarover en waarom het gaat. Het beeld van de keizer presenteert zichzelf als creatieve instantie van de representatie, het ‘extalleert’ de installatie. Het beeld van de macht stelt eerst en vooral de macht van het beeld tentoon, in het zich presenteren, ofwel in het kunnen tonen.

Op deze kunst is vervolgens bij Roth de realisering van het familie-epos gebaseerd. Het fictieve portret van de held van Solferino, waarvan de fascinatie de imitatie-drang (en daaraan gekoppelde faalangst) van de kleinzoon opwekt, haalt, wat de verhaalstructuur betreft, de kracht van z’n presentatie voor een belangrijk gedeelte uit het overal aanwezige machtsportret van de keizer. Het fundamentele verschil tussen het portret van de keizer en dat van de Sloveense held is evenwel dat in dit laatste geval de presentatie niet langer gericht is op een nabootsing van de werkelijkheid, dus op representatie, maar op wat dan ‘presentie’ heet: de romanfiguren zijn er uitsluitend voor de lezer, de roman is hun leefruimte—hun ‘leeftijd’—, niet de wereld, niet de ‘waar gebeurde’ geschiedenis. Nochtans is hun bestaan alle behalve fictief, want het is evident dat de schrijver uiteindelijk de bedoeling heeft om aan de hand van deze verzonnen personages het werkelijke verhaal van de aftakelende dubbelmonarchie te vertellen, een verhaal dat je in geen enkel archief of officieel geschiedenisboek terugvindt. [21] De presentie haalt de ‘voorbeeldige’ macht van de keizer, of de aura van het staatsieportret fataal onderuit. In die zin is het bestaan van de Trottas veeleer *effectief* dan *fictief* te noemen. Hun ‘presentie’ is dus heel nauwkeurig opgebouwd vanuit het door Marin ontlede mechanisme van de presentatie / representatie. Maar omgekeerd heeft de artistieke presentie van de familie Trotta een even nauwkeurige en dramatische terugslag op de manier waarop macht zichzelf representeert, dank zij het beeld dat zich presenteert. Of omgekeerd, maar minstens zo belangrijk, op de manier waarop beelden, de macht presenterend, representeren.

Ik stel voor om deze in mekaar verstrengelde mechanismen van presentie, presentatie en representatie als volgt te herdefiniëren. De klassieke macht van de representatie (nabootsing, mimesis) noemen we in het vervolg het *effict*. Gebaseerd op een gekend synoniem voor de nabootsing, effigie, verwijst het *effict* naar de opschriften die men vaak in de kunst van de vroege Renaissance aantreft vóór of boven de naam van de kunstenaar: ‘*effigit*’, deze of gene schilderde mij. Het begrip *effict* verwijst naar de werkelijkheid waarop de beeltenis gebaseerd is: ef-fingere, geboetseerd of gebeeldhouwd naar de realiteit. De op de nabootsing en haar interne logica gebaseerde fictie, bijvoorbeeld het verzonnen leven van de Trottas, noemen we in het vervolg het *effect*. Het gaat om de doorwerking van de presentatie in het domein dat strikt genomen niet langer tot de mimesis behoort, maar tot de fantasie, om het simpel te zeggen, of tot de verbeeldingskracht, kantiaanse gesproken. Het is de tweede trap van de representatie, datgene wat je nog meer, bovenop het louter reële, uit de nabootsing kunt halen, het ef-facere, of het surplus geschapen door de artistieke geest. Opmerkelijk is het feit dat deze ‘tweede trap’ tegelijk de afdaling naar een eerder niveau lijkt te veronderstellen: in de

fictie keert het *representeren* terug tot een louter en alleen maar presenteren. Ten slotte wordt het geheel van de op elkaar inwerkende krachten— aantrekkend, afstotend, magisch, magnetisch— van presentatie en representatie, of de manier waarop het kunstwerk (in ons geval de roman *Radetzky-Mars*) present is bij de lezer of toeschouwer in het vervolg het *affect* genoemd.

De actualiteit van de aanpak die door Roth in *Radetzky-Mars* werd gevolgd is gelegen in het feit dat de door hem magistraal beschreven dramatische ondergang van het Oostenrijks-Hongaarse keizerrijk—die zich niet toevallig gelijktijdig met de eerloze afgang van de Duitse keizer en de verdrijving van de Russische tsaren voltrekt—tevens het eindpunt markeert van de klassieke machtsportretten, of het einde van de klassieke beeltenis van de macht. Het markeert meteen de overgang van de classicistische naar de modernistische kunst. Het beeld van de macht maakt plaats voor de macht van het beeld, met achtereenvolgens het tijdperk van de fotografie, van film en televisie, van het digitale beeld. Onweerstaanbaar en onherroepelijk verschuift de klemtoon van het *effict* naar het *affect*, van de ‘presentatie van de representatie’ naar ‘presentie’. Maar deze verschuiving is alles behalve een vervanging. Presentatie en representatie blijven net als vroeger hun rol spelen in de effectiviteit waarmee de hedendaagse beeldenchaos op de toeschouwer inwerkt. Pure presentie is een hersenschim, en het sublieme een zaak van het verleden. Hooguit wordt de traditionele zin van de representatie (het weergeven en legitimeren van een onwrikbaar geachte maatschappelijke structuur) in de richting van een voortdurend opgewekte of op te wekken menselijke *affectiviteit* omgebogen. Bij de opwekking van deze affecties heeft het hedendaagse beeld immers het aller grootste belang. De beeldenstroom—kunnen we hier spreken van een ‘beeldenstorm’?—die onze digitale, mediageile en op sensatie beluste samenlevingen voortbrengen heeft het in affectie nemen en houden van argeloze (?), machteloze (?) toeschouwers (zappers en internetsurfers) als eerste en voornaamste opdracht. De geaffecteerde is de consument—de zwakzinnige, hersensloze, vuistloze kleinzoon van de held van weleer. Voor de wijdverspreide consumptie van geaffecteerde beelden, onze dagelijkse portie visuele flauwekul zonder verpozing, biedt de hedendaagse kunst een soms flauw, soms scherpzinnig alternatief. Dat is het wat Deleuze, en na hem Perniola, bedoelen wanneer zij elk op hun manier zeggen: ‘Kunst is in wezen verzet’. Met het sublieme of met de presentie van een schoonheid die ‘aanweest’, heeft dat nauwelijks nog wat te maken. Het belang van het hedendaagse artistieke beeld is de *kunst* van het beeld en bijgevolg is het belang van de kunst het beeld van de kunst. De kunst is verzet omdat (en zolang) ze kunst is.

Tegenkantingen

Deze verpulvering van het idealisme van de kantiaanse esthetica onder de bewustwording van de onmiskenbare belangen die het beeld en de beeldvorming dienen heeft evenwel een onrustwekkende keerzijde. Deleuze beweerde immers niet alleen dat kunst verzet is. Zoals men zich herinnert keerde hij de stelling ook om: ‘verzet is kunst’. Als de door Marin geconstateerde equivalentie tussen presentatie en representatie—met de ingrijpende verschuiving in de richting van de kunst als *affect* die er het gevolg van is—tezamen met Deleuzes equivalentie tussen kunst en verzet voor de hedendaagse esthetica inderdaad het einde van de belangeloosheid van het schone en de onhoudbaarheid van het sublieme als pure presentie betekenen, dan valt meteen de hele kantiaanse hiërarchie in duigen die aan onze smaakoordelen hun klassieke zin en betekenis verleenden. In het bijzonder verdwijnt de verzekering dat onze appreciatie, onze smaak, nog langer gestuurd zou worden door een hogere morele of spirituele doelstelling (of ‘doelmatigheid’, volgens Kant), laat staan door een hogere kunst. Het doelloze maakt zo, samen met het belanghebbende, zijn intrede als

hedendaagse esthetische categorie. Trouwens, kiezen niet tal van hedendaagse creaties tegelijk deze doelloosheid en dit (commerciële eigen-)belang van de kunst als uitgangspunt? Al dan niet badinerend?

De vraag is nu niet langer: *waarom* is iets schoon, op grond van welke vermogens van de menselijke rede kunnen we aan gevoelens van bewondering en betovering nog een inherente zinvolheid toeschrijven? De vraag is ook niet, omgekeerd: *waarom* is iets banaal, kleinzerig of kleinburgerlijk? De vraag is nu veeleer: op basis van welk *belang* is mijn esthetische ervaring een ervaring van schoonheid. Niet zozeer *welk beeld* bezorgt mij een esthetische ervaring (of ontgoocheling), maar welke esthetische ervaring begeleidt mij in het lezen van de beelden, verandert hun *effect* in mijn *affect*? De omkering van de logica van de klassieke representatie—of de verschuiving van het klassieke ‘beeld van de macht’ naar de moderne ‘macht van het beeld’—heeft zoals gezegd een vorm van *geaffecteerdheid* teweeggebracht die niet alleen de doelmatigheid van de esthetische gevoeligheid zelf onderuit haalt maar die bovendien de rangorde tussen creatie en appreciatie van het werk grondig verstoort. (Zo heeft de *Venice Cube 2005* ‘bewezen’ dat Heidegger maar half gelijk had toen hij beweerde dat in ‘de tempel, die niets afbeeldt, de godheid present is’. Want in de afbeelding van een tempel kan, in afwezigheid van de godheid, het beeld heersen. En het lijkt er vandaag op dat de heerschappij van het beeld in niets meer hoeft onder te doen voor de heerschappij van god.) Zo ook zijn actuele kunstenaars vandaag vaak de eerste toeschouwers van hun eigen werk, zoals wanneer, bij de creatie van een artistieke installatie, éerst aan hen—en aan hen in eerste instantie—de vraag wordt gesteld: ‘Kunt u onze kijkers uitleggen waarom dit volgens u kunst is?’ Dit alles leidt tot een dubbele vraag, die zich zowel voor de kunstenaar als voor de toeschouwer stelt: waar kunnen wij in de huidige, door de media en de business voortdurend aangeblazen beeldenstorm als kunstenaars nog onze artistieke en als toeschouwers onze esthetische ankers uitwerpen? Gesteld dat zoiets als verankering nog nodig zou zijn...

Enkele commentaren naar aanleiding van de aanslagen op de Twin Towers op 11 september 2001 hadden betrekking op het *unheimliche*, ijzingwekkend mooie karakter van deze beelden. Verheven, leerde ons Kant bij het begin van het modernisme, is die kracht die op onweerstaanbare wijze weerstand biedt aan een hogere macht. Maar elke weerstand? Ook dit soort geweld tegen een hogere politieke macht—tegen de Amerikaanse Supermacht? Rond het einde van datzelfde modernisme beweerde Deleuze dan weer: ‘Verzet is kunst’. Maar ieder verzet? Ook deze zinloze (?), doelloze (?), mensonterende weerstand? Was in dit mediageile beeld niet een god aanwezig? En dan nog een god die leeft van een verbod op beelden?..

Onrustwekkend, vanuit een klassiek, kantiaans standpunt zeg maar, is heus niet alleen het feit dat iemand deze beelden mooi kan vinden, maar dat het met de mensheid hoe dan ook tot dit soort beelden is kunnen komen... En nu het eenmaal zover is, hoe konden we door deze beelden ooit *niet* geraakt worden? En wel esthetisch geraakt? In haar herhaling, in haar nabootsing, en in de herhaling van de nabootsing, keer op keer, slaat ons deze verzetsdaad door haar presentie, en door onze eigen betovering erdoor, door ons geaffecteerd zijn, met verstomming. Hoe ons tegen dit sublieme verzetten? Ziedaar de vraag. Of beter, ziedaar *een* vraag, want de modernisering van de kunst en het smaakgevoel heeft ons niet met één, maar met ontelbaar vele van dergelijke vragen opgezaald. Hoe voorkomen dat het met onze esthetische gevoeligheid de kant op gaat die het vandaag lijkt op te gaan? Deze vraag maakt het herdenken van het hele kantiaanse project voor een ‘verlichte’ kunst en cultuur tot een noodzaak voor de toekomst. Daarbij zal, naar ik vermoed, het antwoord op de vraag waar onze artistieke en esthetische *affecties* liggen doorslaggevend zijn. En dus de vraag naar onze reactie op (en verzet tegen) de huidige almacht van het beeld.

Welbeschouwd, is onze vertwijfeling over de menselijke smaak en over de mogelijkheid ervan überhaupt, over de radeloosheid (van en) tegenover de kunst, tegenover schoonheid of tegenover de esthetica in het algemeen ongeveer dezelfde als de vertwijfeling die in de loop van de twintigste eeuw is binnengeslopen in de wetenschappen en in de (christelijke) moraal. Hierin ligt voorlopig onze enige troost: dat het klassieke, kantiaanse project van de verlichte schoonheid in even slechte papieren zit als het project van de zuivere rede en dat van de praktische rede. Troostend is dus de gedachte dat de impasse *compleet* is. Zo is er toch iets dat nog het parfum van totaliteit heeft...

Noten

- [1] Immanuel Kant, *Kritik der Urteilkraft*, §7. Dit kantiaanse onderscheid betreft het verschil tussen het aangename, dat louter subjectief is, en het schone, dat ‘als object van een *algemeen* welbehagen wordt voorgesteld.’
- [2] Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Oog en geest*, Baarn, Ambo, 1996, p. 18-19, vert. Rens Vlasblom (gewijzigd). Zie ook *L’Œil et l’Esprit*, Parijs, Gallimard, 1964, p. 14.
- [3] Michel Onfray, *Archéologie du présent. Manifeste pour une esthétique cynique*, Parijs, Grasset-Adam Biro, 2003.
- [4] Hetgeen onder meer in de analytische kunstfilosofie van Thierry de Duve gebeurt (*Kant after Duchamp*, Cambridge-Londen, MIT Press, 1996 en *Kijk*, Gent-Amsterdam, Ludion, 2000).
- [5] Immanuel Kant, *a.w.*, §5 (Kant onderstreept).
- [6] Zie Olivier Bonfait en Brigitte Marin, *Les portraits du pouvoir*, Rome-Parijs, Académie de France à Rome-Somogy éditions d’art, 2003.
- [7] Het is het portret waarvan Napoleon zou hebben uitgeroepen: ‘David, eindelijk hebt ge mij begrepen!’
- [8] Ik zie hier af van de verdere uitwerking van dit ‘samengaan van het eigene met het vreemde’. Het vertoon van de kunst is het tonen van haar eigenheid, in haar ‘beeld’ of beter haar ‘beeld zijn’, en een gelijktijdig zich lenen tot het vertoon van haar vreemdheid, in het representeren van iets of iemand ‘anders’. In de ‘moderne’ kunst, ditmaal in de strikte betekenis, dus sinds het modernisme, lijkt het dat de kunst op zoek is gegaan naar het samengaan van het *kunnen tonen* met de eigenheid alleen. Het samengaan van het vreemde en het eigene in de kunst heb ik elders proberen uit te drukken als het zich ‘uitstallend uitstellen van zin’ in en door kunst. (Zie *Creat creatura*, in: J. Beerten, P. De Graeve, I. Devisch, *Jean-Luc Nancy en de kunst*, Amsterdam, SUN, 2006.)
- [9] Louis Marin, *Le portrait du roi*, Parijs, Les Éditions de Minuit, 1981, p. 211 vv.
- [10] Mario Perniola, *Contro la comunicazione*, Turijn, Giulio Einaudi Editore, 2004, p. 59 vv.
- [11] Gilles Deleuze, *Qu’est-ce que l’acte de création?*, in: *Deux régimes de fous*, Parijs, Les Éditions de Minuit, 2003, p. 301. (Deze conférence werd uitgegeven op DVD: *L’abécédaire de Gilles Deleuze*, Éditions Montparnasse, 2004.)
- [12] Gilles Deleuze, *t.a.p.*
- [13] Kants denken over verhevene vormt het tweede en veruit belangrijkste deel van zijn ‘Ontledingsleer van de esthetische oordeelskracht’ (*Analytik der ästhetischen Urteilkraft*). Kant, *a.w.*, pp.164-277.
- [14] Kant, *a.w.*, pp. 184-6.
- [15] Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Le doute de Cézanne*, in: *Sens et non-sens*, Parijs, Éditions Gallimard, 1994, p. 24.
- [16] Jean-François Lyotard, *Leçons sur l’Analytique du sublime*, Parijs, Éditions Galilée, 1991, p. 153 vv. Zie in dat verband de treffende opmerkingen van Francis Smets, *Rozen in de*

knop, Antwerpen-Apeldoorn, Garant, 2005, p. 94-95. Ook Michel Onfray, *a.w.*, benadrukt de uitzonderlijkheid van Duchamps oeuvre, zij het vanuit een veeleer ‘cynisch’ oogpunt.

[17] ‘Veel is vreemd op deze wereld / niets is zo vreemd als de mens, / hij reist over de witte zee: bij storm / en ontij reist hij langs de hoge golven. / Jaar na jaar mat hij de aarde af, / godin van alle goden, onsterfelijk en onvermoeibaar. / Hij ploegt: de beesten trekken voren.’ (vert. Johan Boonen)

[18] Martin Heidegger, *De oorsprong van het kunstwerk*, Amsterdam, Boom, 1996, p. 34, 46.

[19] Jean-François Lyotard, *a.w.*, pp. 162-74.

[20] Joseph Roth, *Radetzky-Mars*, Amsterdam, De Arbeiderspers, 1946, vert. Johan Winkler & Annie Winkler-Vonck.

[21] Het vernuft van Joseph Roth bestaat onder andere hierin dat hij van bij de aanvang van de roman omstandig uitlegt waarom de Trottas niet langer in de officiële geschiedenisboeken terug te vinden zijn. *A.w.*, pp. 12-20.

Does art have anything in particular to do with democracy?

Rodrigo Duarte

This question must be carefully approached, for we tend to answer it quickly with a sonorous “yes”. And the reasons for that answer are neither few nor weak. One of the strongest reasons to support an essential connection between art and democracy lies in the supposed origin of both in the ancient Greece. While the latter *cum grano salis* can be accepted to have been invented exactly at that time and place, one could say that the former is much older than that and yet in its greek form, only an embryo of what it happened to be after the Renaissance¹.

The limitations of Greek democracy are very well known today, now that we take into account that not everyone was allowed to vote and to have her or his interests represented at the citizen’s assembly. Furthermore, since the slaves, women and children – numerically very important groups inside Greek society – were not seen as people in the proper sense of the word, they were consequently excluded of the political life. Nevertheless it can not be denied that the concept of democracy did not exist before the “classical” period of ancient Greece. And even if one does not need to be a political thinker to notice that the requirements and the scope of democracy today are totally distant from those in Pericles’ times (and immediately after), it would be a mistake to see the Greek democracy as completely different from – and even opposed to – our contemporary conception.

As for the supposed “origin” of art in the ancient Greek culture, one could say that, although since immemorial times there was already in the main civilizations of non-classic antiquity like Egypt and the peoples of Mesopotamia (and perhaps earlier – back to the cavemen and their rupestrian paintings) something similar to what we call art today, it was only in the ancient Greece with the appearance of the notion of *mimesis* in Plato’s and Aristotle’s philosophy that we have got a concept under which we could include things as different as painting, sculpture, poetry, music, theater etc. Even if the Greek word *techné*, whose translation to the modern European languages is “art”, has an interesting ambiguity in its meaning of “handcraft”, the generality of the near related concept of *mimesis* – negatively by Plato and positively approached by Aristotle² – does not let doubts that, as in Greek politics with the birth of democracy, something new was

¹ Arthur Danto, alluding to Hans Belting’s book *The Image before the Era of Art*, reminds us that, strictly speaking, the concept of art in the modern meaning is an invention of Renaissance, although it would be wrong to say “that those images [previous to the Renaissance/rd] were not art in some large sense”. (*After the end of Art. Contemporary Art and the Pale of History*, New Jersey, Princeton University Press, 1995, p. 3).

² The approach to the matter of *mimesis* in Plato is in the book III of *The Republic*, in which Plato’s discussion culminates in the exclusion of the poet from the ideal city (Cf. *The Republic of Plato*, edited with critical notes, comentary and appendices by James Adams, volume I, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1969, pp. 130 ff.). As for Aristotle’s discussion on the mimesis, the main source is the chapter four of his *Poetics* (Cf. *Aristotle’s Poetics/Longinus on the Sublime*, edited with an introduction by Charles Sears Baldwin. New York, The Macmillan Company, 1930).

born in the realm of ancient Greek culture – something closely associated with our modern conception of “art”.

One indication of that can be found in the fact that antipode-thinkers of modern times like Hegel and Nietzsche have their own ways to point to the existence of art in a superlative sense in ancient Greece. Hegel does it in the theory of the “forms of art” of his *Lectures on Aesthetics*³, according to which, Greek art – especially Greek sculpture – means a perfect balance between matter and mind, the finite and the infinite, form and content. For that reason Hegel conceives Greek art as “classical” – resulting of the fall of the previous form of art, “symbolic”, exemplified by the gigantic buildings of Egypt and Mesopotamia, in which there was a larger tenor of matter, compared to its little tenor of spirituality. As is well known, the further step in the dialectic development of art towards what Hegel calls “romantic art”, encompassing all the art made from the beginning of the Christian age, leads to his thesis of the “end of art”, according to which in the modernity the philosophical thought as the perfect form of spirit of the world would take the place previously occupied by art. I will return to this point later.

As for Nietzsche, we can find in his early work *The Birth of Tragedy*⁴ a very mindful consideration about the aesthetic peculiarity of the ancient Greek culture, concerning the harmony, in its authentic tragedies, of the two opposed (not only anthropological but also cosmological) impulses, the Apollonian and the Dionysian. While the former is a constructive principle and stands for the delineation of images – hence for visualness in general –, the latter means the tendency to return to the primitive chaos, previous to any form, and is near related to the lack of definite form of the sonorous phenomena (viewed under the standing point of its physical properties). To the young Nietzsche these two impulses were historically dissociated: the Dionysian one was typical for the barbarian folks of Minor Asia and the apollonian one meant the first civilizing efforts of the ancient attic tribes to overcome their precarious economic and social situation. Only when the conditions were ripe in the Greek civilization, there was the possibility of harmonizing the two opposed forces, so that a very peculiar genre of artwork appeared, in which the visual, sonorous and textual elements were so well fused, that also the social and political milieu was contaminated by that harmony. Such was, according to Nietzsche, the birth of the Greek tragedy. As is well known, Nietzsche evocated the rising of the tragic age to criticize what he understood to be decadence in the Western culture of his time, which has again some points in common with the Hegelian thesis of the end of art (with the difference that in Hegel this thesis has an irrefutable optimistic tenor, which is not the case in Nietzsche).

Perhaps it may be productive to use both German thinkers to understand what happened with art after the end of Greek classical culture. With Hegel we could see the “romantic” form of art, since its beginning in the early medieval painting, as more “spiritual” and less “artistic”, preparing the modern situation, in which the “prosaic contemporary states” would be the scene of the death of art. With the young Nietzsche we could identify the turning point even before the fall of ancient Greece: in the efforts of some thinkers to

³ G.W.F. Hegel, „Vorlesungen über die Ästhetik I“. In: *Werke 13*. Frankfurt am Main, Suhrkamp, 1989, passim (English translation: *Introductory Lectures on Aesthetics*. Translated by Bernard Bosanquet. London, Penguin Books, 1993).

⁴ Friedrich Nietzsche, “The Geburt der Tragödie“. In: *Werke I*. Edited by Karl Schlechta. Frankfurt/Berlin/Vienna, Ulstein, 1980, passim.

extirpate the Dionysian impulse in their culture. In the tragedy itself it was brought about Euripides’ limiting in the role of the chorus and introducing of dialogic situations which overcharged the Apollonian impulse at expenses of the Dionysian one. In the realm of philosophy the exterminator of tragedy was the Platonic Socrates, with his obsession for the dialogue which should not leave any space to the manifestation of the mysterious forces which challenged the will of the tragic hero.

It is not impossible that this interruption in such an aesthetical and social experience as the Greek tragic age was what made the Renaissance understand itself as – and effectively to look like – a new beginning, which in some extent is expressed in the very name of this cultural movement. The Modern Age brought new possibilities for the democracy as well as for the artistic world, being the rise of subjectivity the true motivation of the three most important happenings of the sixteenth century: the Renaissance in the artistic realm, the Reform in the religious one and the beginning of the mechanist revolution in the scientific domain.

As much as the understanding of the displacement of the point of view is needed to contemplate a painting made with plain perspective, so the personal effort of a believer to understand the passage of the Bible he is reading with no help of the fathers of the Catholic Church, and the use of mathematical methods to grasp the movement of the planets around the sun are examples of the rise of a new kind of subjectivity which was known neither in the Antiquity nor in the Middle Age.

Although this conception of subject revealed its great philosophical and even political importance, it has been historically a target of many attacks due to vested interests; but it is undeniable that the hope of a true democracy still depends on the possibility of development of an emphatic conception of subject and its reflective inwardness.

To understand one of these attacks against subjectivity concerning specially the realm of culture and the arts, it is helpful to take into account the point of view presented in a paper by Herbert Marcuse, from the second half of the 1930’, entitled “The Affirmative Character of Culture”⁵, in which he reflects on the situation of the cultural life since the beginning of the Modern Age. For him, the rise of subjectivity gave birth to a conception of human interiority which was exploited by the bourgeoisie in its struggle for more political power and towards its present condition of incontestable ruling class. Since the rising bourgeoisie needed the support of the lower classes to reach its political goals, but was not willing to concede to them true material gains, the solution would be offering them the possibility of experiencing a realm in which all that matters is the spirituality of the internal life, in face of which the physical goods would – ideologically – appear as only a source of the worst sins and corruption.

In this process the arts play besides religion a very important role, since the notion of beauty, which was in ancient Greece a possible predicate only for material things (or perhaps also for platonic ideas), allows for the first time the meaning of something spiritual, associated with the purity of the personal soul. For this reason, the idea of a collective cultural patrimony gets socially stronger in virtue of its new ideological significance: someone very poor and sick, who were nevertheless able to recognize the beauty of an artwork, should be entitled to do so and the cultural institutions of the society would provide the concretization of her or his aesthetics experiences. If Marcuse

⁵ Herbert Marcuse, “The affirmative Character of Culture”. In: *Negations. Essays in Critical Theory*, with translations from the German by Jeremy Shapiro. Harmondsworth, Penguin Books, 1972.

is right, we owe the creation of public museums and theaters (which still resist the privatization wave of the last decades) not to the generosity of an enlightened ruling class, but to its need to maintain the *status quo*.

So far we could answer the question contained in the title of this paper in the following manner: art does not have anything in particular to do with democracy, since it is committed to the necessity by the powerful of exercising social control throughout human history. This answer does not seem to be right, however, if we take into account that creation and reception of aesthetic constructs has something that escapes the ideological manipulation of the arts by the owners of power, so that the pedagogic role that these activities play over the senses – articulated with the understanding – could even have a liberating effect, that would make the manipulative intent at least ineffective.

I would say that the act of creating artworks, as well as the one of having an adequate experience of them, mobilizes powerful psychic forces associated with the instinctual life, nevertheless without its potential destructiveness, so that the aforementioned subjectivity develops itself in a medium that, in spite of its ideal character, owns a kind of effectiveness.

For this reason – and with a nuance that is slightly different from the early Marcuse's exposure of the "affirmative character of culture" – Adorno thought, since his writing together with Horkheimer, of *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, that, although art had always something to do with domination, it belongs to its essence being the depository of the possibility of liberating humankind from the burden of exploitation and repression. The recognition of both sides of the authentic artworks, as opposed to cultural commodities, appears clearly in the following passage:

The purity of bourgeois art, which hypostasized itself as a world of freedom in contrast to what was happening in the material world, was from the beginning bought with the exclusion of the lower classes – with whose cause, the real universality, art keeps faith precisely by its freedom from the ends of the false universality⁶.

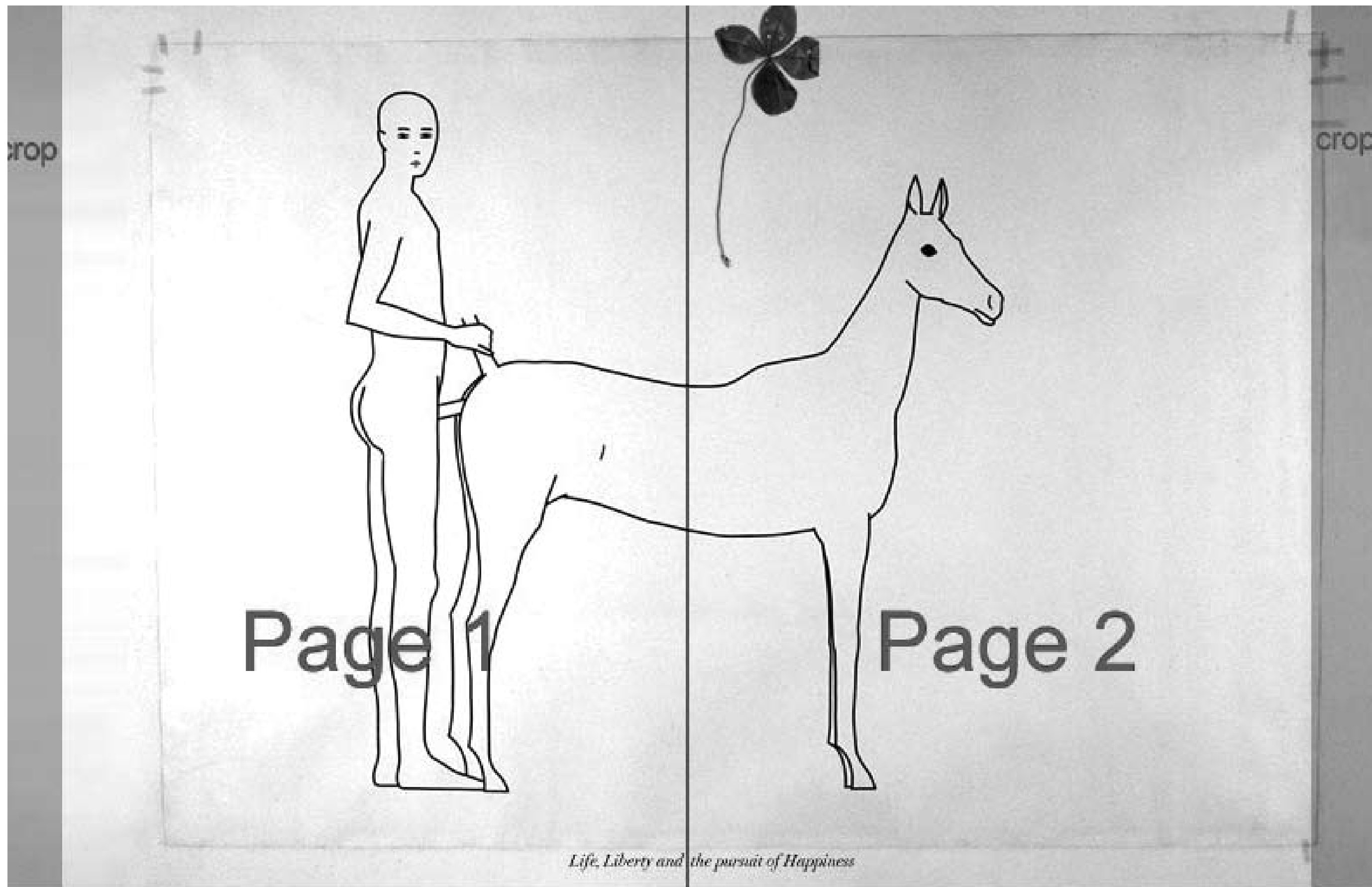
The outstanding idea of this passage is that the would-be exclusiveness of the arts in its superlative phenomena, crystallized in the lack of access to it by the poorer layers of society, means in fact the very universality denied them by the upper classes. If I am right, it is indeed fascinating to realize that there is not anything in the extremely sophisticated art of all times that be essentially opposed to the understanding of the masses, and the factual distance between the former and the latter is due to the manipulation's strategy of the dominant classes, whose major contemporary agency is the culture industry.

In this sense, it is almost comic to hear – as it happens very frequently – from fanatic supporters of mass culture that it is democratic while the "upper culture" is elitist, exclusive, and hence essentially anti-democratic. In my opinion, this charge against the more complex art is a practical way to obstruct the access of the majority of the people to the true aesthetic manifestations of the most interior needs and hopes of humankind. Furthermore this argument is a trick to hide the falsehood of anti-democratic character of culture industry itself, since its products do not count among the authentic aesthetic

⁶ Max Horkheimer and Theodor W. Adorno, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, translated by John Cumming. New York, Continuum, 1996, p.135.

expressions, of which there are only two types: the popular culture and the "upper" art⁷. The former would be an immediate, direct aesthetic expression of the wishes and expectations of a people, while the latter plays the same role in a very sophisticated and complex manner, although very frequently its inspiration comes from popular sources. As popular culture due to its constitutive simplicity is a preferential prey of culture industry and some agencies associated with it like the tourism branch, it tends nowadays worldwide to be extinguished, with some exceptions in Latin America, Africa and some regions of Asia. Although culture industry try to take over the "upper" art as well, its power in this case is limited exactly in virtue of its complexity, so that the former can commercialize sophisticated aesthetic constructs only when its initial strangeness was already overcome and it has already become part of the collective pantheon of the arts. The trade of artworks of consecrated painters and sculptors as the selling of CDs of "classical" composers represent today in global economy a branch of many billion dollars. For this reason Adorno, referring many times to the Hegelian thesis of the end of art, insists that its *avantgarde* manifestations are the only aesthetic expression which preserves its contestation's power in all integrity, since the *nouveauté* in its language functions as a protection against the fast assimilation by mass culture⁸. It is important to remember that, for Adorno, the explicit political content of an artwork is irrelevant to define its relationship to society: a very hermetic one can reveal deep layers of the collective consciousness which would remain untouched by a work explicitly political but aesthetically (that means in the aspect related to form) superficial. Taking into account everything which was discussed above, my answer to the question proposed in the title of this paper is that authentic art has effectively something in particular to do with democracy. But not to the present state of things mistakenly called "democracy", which is more a mass society in which people are given the possibility to vote A or B – frequently not quite different from each other – as it is given to customers to choose product x or y in the consumption's market. Art as a true aesthetic expression of the possibility of humankind's emancipation and its reconciliation with nature may have something to do with democracy only if this word is understood as a situation in which, according to its etymology, the people has the power effectively in their hands, which unfortunately is not the case in the present situation.

⁷ Cf. Rodrigo Duarte, Kulturware und Volkskunst angesichts der „Globalisierung“. *Thesis. Wissenschaftliche Zeitschrift der Bauhaus Universität Weimar*, 4./5. Heft, 2000, 46. Jahrgang, p. 64-9.
⁸ Cf. Theodor Adorno, *Ästhetische Theorie*. Frankfurt am Main, Surkamp, 1996, passim.



crop

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SNAKES

GIRLS

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Page 4

Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness

I'm not sure if art
has much to do with
democracy.

Maybe there is no
reason to connect
the two.

Seems like it might
muddy up both of
them.

Then again, I don't
really know what
art is anyway.



ask a question: (are you lonely?)

3.10 risk¹

3.11 question:

when i place my armies at the beginning of the game,
what strategy should i use?

3.12 answer:

If possible, try to occupy an entire continent at the beginning of the game. This will give you additional armies right from the start. If this is not possible, try to occupy as many adjacent territories as you can. Then, after all the territories have been claimed, place your remaining armies on your border territories as a line of defence against possible attack. At all costs, try not to scatter your territories around the board. Doing so will weaken your position. Your territories will be isolated from one another and subject to capture.

3.20 hidden coup:

To succeed in completing a hidden coup a player usually has to be something of an actor. The first time he takes a penalty card or two, he must seem very upset³ in order to prevent the other players from learning too early in the ‘hand’ what he is trying to do².

3.30 joker:

3.31 question: are art and democracy compatible?

3.32 answer: Yes, art is compatible with everything.
Ha. Compatible but not palatable!

¹ In this classic game of military strategy, you battle to conquer the world. You must launch daring attacks, defend yourself on all fronts and sweep accross vast continents with boldness and cunning. But remember, the dangers, as well as the rewards, are high. Just when the world is within your grasp... your opponent might strike you and take it all away!
from Risk 1980, Parker Brothers

² from Coup d’état, 1966 Parker Brothers.

³ protest. by all means protest your innocence, if you are making a declaration. But if you are making a complaint or objection, you must protest against it.
from The Economist Style Book, 2003

As it is my design to make those that can scarcely read understand, I shall therefore avoid every literary ornament and put it in language as plain as the alphabet.

Thomas Payne



King Kong Club. A place that could have been in every city, in every town. A place where you could be yourself by being just like everyone else. Consider for a moment in your own lives the chance to become someone else. Suddenly your life is put up for lottery in exchange for another. Would things be really so different? King Kong Club was the once in a lifetime opportunity to find out. And it was on offer every night.

In the cloakroom you don't just leave your coat but also your name and your face. In exchange you receive a new identity as an ape and become part of a cloned society. King Kong Club is a place for encounters, at the same time a film set and a cinema. Visitors attend the making of a film and become both its actors and audience.

Gob Squad work collectively, without a director, on the concept, design, devising and performing of their work. Permanent members of the group are Sean Patten, Berit Stumpf, Sarah Thom, Simon Will, Bastian Trost and Johanna Freiburg.

Other artists are invited to collaborate on particular projects. For King Kong Club, Gob Squad are joined by performers Eric Pold, Dariusz Kostyra, Ilia Papatheodorou and Miles Chalcraft. Also sound designers Sebastian Bark, Jeff McGrory and video artist Robert Shaw.

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Amour Fou is Not a Social Democracy: Anti-Capitalism and the Avant-Garde

Gavin Grindon

“...That’s not what democracy looks like, *this* is what democracy looks like...”

This chant, no doubt familiar to anyone who has found themselves on the streets with a radical march or protest confronted by a wall of police, makes the claim that democracy is embodied not by the parliamentary institution and the associated organisations of the state, but by the self-organisation of radical social movements. And since the late 1990s, indeed since the 1960s, what this organisation *looks like* has dramatically changed, as these movements have become increasingly aestheticised; bringing music, performance and street theatre and a multiplicity of other forms of creative activity to bear on what were once sober marches making demands of the formal democratic institutions of the government rather than aiming to replace them. Drawing on a lineage stretching from the Dadaists and Surrealists of the early twentieth century to Reclaim the Streets at its close, radical social movements, in a tendency beginning in the 1960s, have regularly figured the political assertion of democratic autonomy in aesthetic terms.

The contemporary global justice movement regularly engages in festive, aestheticised political action. During the 2005 G8 summit in Scotland, The Clandestine Insurgent Rebel Clown Army used clowning as a means to undermine the authority of the police in direct action situations to breach the protest-exclusion zone around the summit.¹ In December 2002, the Yo Mango group from Spain (their name, meaning ‘I Steal,’ plays on the name of a popular Spanish clothing brand, *Mango*) performed a ‘Yo Mango Tango’ whose confusing absurdity enabled some cheeky ‘un-purchasing:’

The police line protecting the Champion/Carrefour located on Las Ramblas in Barcelona was surprised to find itself crossed by a multitude of tango dancers: suddenly regular clients shed their regular client clothes, to begin dancing around the shelves...to the rhythm of a techno-tango remix, using the most elegant of moves, they yomangoed champagne bottles, passing the cashiers and placing them in the YOMANGO Christmas basket.²

During the protests against the G8 meeting in Genoa in 2001, the creative ‘tactical frivolity’ of the Tutte Bianche (White Overalls) confronted the lines of riot police with the comical but effective combination of inflatables, stuffed toys and foam padding in their own riot uniform which permitted them to push non-violently against, and sometimes through, the police lines.³

Most seminally, in London on June the 18th 1999, Reclaim the Streets organised a festive ‘carnival against capital’ with sound-systems, samba bands, carnival masks and costumes which shut down and overtook the financial district of London, and was a direct and central influence on the form and tactics adopted by the organisers of the demonstrations which famously closed down the WTO meeting in Seattle six months later, as well as upon the subsequent counter-summit actions which have come to characterise the organisation of the anti-capitalist movement. The contemporary



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¹ (Kolonel Klepto and Evil 2005)

² (Anon 2002)

³ See (Anon. 2001)

movement provides a multitude of examples of this aestheticised approach to political action, and not only in terms of the ‘event’ of direct political action in the streets.

The movement also tends to understand its own political activity using aesthetic language. The mass actions against G8 and WTO summit meetings are described as ‘festivals’ and ‘carnivals against capitalism.’ And in its self-reflection, the movement frequently employs poetic, mythologizing language⁴ alongside theoretical perspectives drawn from the avant-garde.⁵

We might turn here to a particular apparently curious development. The notion of an ‘affinity group,’ a contemporary commonplace in activist organisation (which denotes a small group form of organisation, usually for direct action of some kind, which is based on elective affinities rather than on a shared class perspective), was first coined in the 1960s by Up Against the Wall Motherfucker,⁶ a political group (which had formerly been the radical avant-garde group Black Mask) that partly drew on the avant-garde’s historical concern with small affectively-bound groups orientated towards social transcendence (for example, the Surrealists, Situationists or especially the College of Sociology) to understand the new possibilities for political organisation in a society where class had become less central (according to Ben Morea, the group’s principal theorist, he coined the term at a meeting with Murray Bookchin, Herbert Marcuse and Otto Neumann in New York, after Bookchin described the organisation of the anarchist militias in the Spanish civil war around groups of ‘compañeros’. Neumann, giving the notion a sixties spin, defined it as “a street gang with an analysis.”)

Though the Surrealists had sought to ally themselves with the Communist Party, and had aped its form of vanguard party organisation, a tendency inherited by other groups such as the Situationist International, the notion of avant-garde drawn on by these groups from the 1960s to the present entails a different conception. The term ‘avant-garde’ had been coined by the Saint-Simonists, and drew upon military terminology to describe those who were ideologically ‘ahead’ upon a supposed linear timeline, and the term later came to describe those who were creatively in the advance. However, here we might rather stress the sense of the avant-garde not as moving in advance in the sense of superior knowledge or linear historical advance, but in returning to this spatial military metaphor, as a group which breaks or ruptures with its own past. In this trajectory, the avant-garde in fact broke with and deterritorialized the politically vanguardist terms it had inherited. The avant-garde took the form of a continuity of discontinuity, of breaks and ruptures with its past developments as a non-linear movement of creativity and innovation. The same model of ruptures and leaps of innovation, of political creativity against the successive subsumptions and recuperations of capital, marks the history of the working class as itself a continuity of discontinuity of which the avant-garde is emblematic. As C.L.R. James observes, “the proletariat ... always breaks up the old organization by impulse, a leap ... The new organization, the new organism will begin with spontaneity, i.e., free creative activity, as its necessity.”⁷

⁴ See, for example (Delaney 2003) Also Duncombe, Stephen, *Dream: Re-Imagining Progressive Politics in an Age of Fantasy*. New York: The New Press, 2007.

⁵ See, for example (Bey 1991)

⁶ (Morea and Hahne 1993)

⁷ (James 1974) pp.i

How to explain this influential convergence of organisational debates in the avant-garde and anticapitalist groups? Within the trajectory sketched out above, alongside the radical aestheticisation of politics (in terms which refute Walter Benjamin’s famous assertion that such forms of organisation are the preserve of fascism), there has been a concomitant emphasis on direct action, on the creation of alternatives and direct engagements with structures of exploitation and domination, what Katsiaficas has called “The subversion of politics.”⁸ This direct democracy is anti-parliamentary and horizontally organised. Its notion of political participation is posed *against* that of the traditional institution of representative democracy. How are these two tendencies connected: the move towards aesthetics to understand and articulate the political, and the move to redefine the political as the organisation of everyday life?

This shift towards a new non-representational understanding of the role of culture as politics by other means (against, for example, the representational cultural issues of identity politics) can be accounted for in two ways. Firstly, there has been a historical shift that has increasingly placed culture and everyday life at the centre of social and economic life. Secondly, and partly as a result, the radical struggle for the space of everyday life has more often than not been theoretically articulated through the terms of aesthetics, particularly avant-garde and Romantic aesthetics, which has provided a language for the active role of the subject and of the importance of subjective experience as a terrain of struggle that the molar theoretical categories of the orthodox Left lacks. The central claim of this theoretical tendency, reiterated by a number of radical avant-garde and activist groups throughout the twentieth century, has been that ‘the revolution will be a festival.’⁹

In attempting to understand the refusal of work by large sectors of Italian society in the 1970s, Italian Marxist theorists such as Mario Tronti and Antonio Negri argued that workers who, having reached a certain level of productivity and refinement in their productive talents, begin to imagine work not as a discipline but as a satisfaction, will also desire free creative activity, not the absurd regimen of ‘work.’ This situation is a peculiar product of capital’s real subsumption of increasingly large areas of social life to the production of surplus value and the logic of the factory, as described in Mario Tronti’s account of the ‘social factory.’¹⁰ A very similar claim is made in Paolo Virno’s development of the figure of the ‘virtuoso’ as an image of immaterial labour. In fact, Virno’s figure of the virtuoso itself borrows from the figure of the artist as he observes that much labour has now acquired the same problematic as that which first belonged to the artist as performer:

the pianist and the dancer stand precariously balanced on a watershed that divides two antithetical destinies: on the one hand, they may become examples of “wage-labour that is not at the same time productive labour”; on the other, they have a quality that is suggestive of political action.¹¹

⁸ (Katsiaficas 2006)

⁹ For an account of some of these groups and their development of this theory of the revolution as festival, see (Grindon 2006)

¹⁰ For a full account of Marx’s real subsumption thesis and the Operaist development of this thesis in the concepts of the social factory and the socialised worker, see (Thoburn 2003) pp.73-89 and (Wright 2002) pp.152-175

¹¹ (Virno 1996) pp.191

It is entirely relevant in this respect that the avant-garde first appears alongside Taylorism and Fordism. The avant-garde, even when very conservative, developed in very general terms an account of its aesthetic production as free creative activity opposed to everyday life under modernity (that is, to capital's real subsumption of labour both within and outside of the factory). Its refusals also took a form made possible by this society, in new artistic methods made possible by but yet opposed to modernity, such as the Surrealists' turn to the method of bricolage, obsolete objects and the foreign or primitive. This position is not a contradiction, but the very secret of the political engagement of creativity subsumed to capital. And it is this discourse which has been the inheritance of the movement against capital. As both the social factory and the refusal of work spread in the 1960s and 70s, those workers who began to imagine their life and labour not as subsumed to capital's valorisation, but as free creative activity, as self-valorisation, often turned to the language and aesthetics of the avant-garde, who had already imagined their production in these terms. So it was that in the 1960s, that period when the avant-garde was apparently no longer possible,¹² that its values were picked up and developed as the language of political self-valorisation by a multitude of international radicals. Many small groups inspired by this convergence began to appear from this time onwards, from the Situationists in France to the Provos in Amsterdam, Black Mask in New York, the Rebel Worker group in Chicago, King Mob in London, Kommune 1 in Germany, The Metropolitan Indians in Italy, The Orange Alternative in Central Europe, and so on.

Within this inheritance, we can find a number of concepts and themes of the contemporary movement against capitalism which are foreshadowed by the refusals of the avant-garde, which can be seen not so much as a mythological secret history of beautiful but impotent moments, but as a material history from below of moments of refusal and self-valorisation.

In the 1960s, as the social factory began its high period of development and expansion, youth and working class movements often turned back to the avant-garde as these movements, finding everyday life increasingly 'colonised' by capital, engaged not only in the refusal of work but in the creation of everyday alternatives. These movements engaged with the cultural and the everyday not as secondary, superstructural or ideological, but as direct political spheres of social production. The avant-garde, with its 'utopian' stress upon the creation of new, 'other' values in the realm of subjective experience and the everyday provided an image of the very material, subjective 'refusal of work' which these movements carried out.

The avant-garde did not provide a turn to specific other values, but an image of the value of otherness itself to capital's incursion upon everyday life. Thus radicals often turned back beyond Surrealism's positive project for 'the surreal' to Dada's stress upon negation, and characterised their politics of self-valorisation by playfulness, irony and evasion. This tendency first made itself felt with many of the groups mentioned above, but persisted in the writing of American 'post-left' anarchists such as Bob Black Hakim Bey in the 1990s, with their claim that "amour fou is not a social democracy,"¹³ and into the anti-capitalist movements of today.

Art here is not an ideological tool that brings awareness to people unaware of their own 'true' desires and interests, but functions as a compositional tool for articulating, connecting and organising dissent. Aesthetic production is understood here as *already* political, in that it is subsumed to capital and balanced like Virno's virtuoso between wage-labour and political action. Reflecting on the Italian movement of the 1970s and the Marxist school of Operaist and Autonomist theorists who attempted to understand and engage with it, Franco 'Bifo' Berardi argued that one should expand the notion of 'class composition:'

In the place of the historical subject inherited from the Hegelian legacy, we should speak of the process of subjectivation. Subjectivation takes the conceptual place of subject. This conceptual move is very close to the contemporary modification of the philosophical landscape that was promoted by French post-structuralism. Subjectivation in the place of subject. That means that we should not focus on the identity, but on the process of becoming. This also means that the concept of social class is not to be seen as an ontological concept, but rather as a vectorial concept... In the 60s and in the 70s the thinkers who wrote in magazines like Classe Operaia, and Potere Operaio did not speak of social investments of desire: they spoke in a much more Leninist way. But their philosophical gesture produced an important change in the philosophical landscape... I do not like the term "operaismo", because of the implicit reduction to a narrow social reference (the workers, "operai" in Italian), and I would prefer to use the word "compositionism."¹⁴

And as cultural and aesthetic production have come to be modes of social creativity subsumed to the capitalist production of surplus value, they provide models for this becoming which breaks with capital. If the avant-garde once drew its name from the realm of political organisation, it is fittingly appropriate that this Marxian organisational problem of political composition is now not so far from poetic and musical composition, and that political movements of composition draw their language to describe this compositional movement from the avant-garde. And as we begin to speak of social movement as a verb rather than a noun, and of a 'movement of movements,'¹⁵ we find more contemporary radical theorists describing political organisation in terms of musical composition. In his hugely influential essay, *The Temporary Autonomous Zone*, Hakim Bey asserts the validity of "music as an organisational principle."¹⁶ And if this is perhaps a little utopian, this contemporary attempt to understand political organisation using the terms of aesthetics nonetheless touches upon the fact that in the experiments of the contemporary anti-capitalist movement, the composition of real democracy beyond the limits of the state and capital now involves a new non-representational relationship between aesthetics and politics, in the art of organisation.

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¹² The classic argument in this respect is that of (Bürger 1984)

¹³ (Bey 1991)

¹⁴ (Berardi 2004)

¹⁵ On the significance of this lexical slip, see (Leeds May Day Group 2001)

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Neoliberal democracy: in-between the headless (the populist right wing mob attitude) and the thoughtless (the snob attitude)

Histories of the world (that seems to be without a world, as reference to Alain Badiou “worldless world”)ⁱ cannot be read as an excess, or as an error or a mistake to be evacuated as soon as possible. It’s a paradox: developing such histories means today to link them to new media technology, and it is becoming obvious that what was very local has to be connected to global migration, to exclusion of bodies, – to migratory transitional bodies that are really push to the edge of society. If we are interested in what democracy is, in what are the possibilities of really radically rethinking the perspectives of society – if it’s possible to draw a society that is not just a neoliberal economic agreement but a society that can develop a community in which social questions matter and in which social alliances are important, we have to make a turn to real histories. This means that in relation to new media and technology, from Internet on, it became obvious that histories of practices like feminism, like underground, like radicalized theory have to be re-evaluated. It is necessary to substitute the discourse of identity with an analysis of ideology and reflect about contemporary art and culture in regards to biopolitics, capital, class struggle, as well as in regard with new institutional, theoretical, and economical forms of (in)direct expropriation, enslavement and colonization. If we are not to take such a path, then the proclaimed politics will *remain* just a never-ending *play of empty* signs.

I will make recourse to Paul Virilio’s paradigm of the logistics of perception,ⁱⁱ and as well to Badiou’s logics of the world to develop another *logistics* that is that of *contemporary Europe*, and to describe a possible paradigm of what can be termed as contemporary politics of (anti)agency in the global world. As Virilio in his logistics of perception gives a detailed technical history of weaponry, photography and cinematography, illuminating it with accounts of films and military campaigns, I would like similarly to set out ways of perceiving Europe today. To show that as in the mid 1980s perception and destruction, as being argued by Virilio, became co-interdependent, in 2006, this co-interdependency is established between anxiety, superego and the paradigm of the snob.

My thesis is that capitalism not only produce different worlds and modes of lives, but as well cultural and artistic paradigms through which it is possible to say that wars between different worlds (that is as well presented as the “worldless” world) take place on the level of aesthetic, through specific concepts that hegemonize the sphere of art and culture, imposing today a certain way of political (anti)agency, of a status quo, that has to be precisely defined.

In short, what we see in the present moment is, making reference to David Harvey,ⁱⁱⁱ a deliberate project to restore upper-class power, through imposing structural mechanisms of neoliberal governance and of uneven world geographical and economical development.

The three tenses of decisive action, according Paul Virilio analysis – “the past, present and future – have been firmly replaced by two tenses – real time and delayed time – and the future having meanwhile disappeared via computer programming;^{iv} on the other hand, this so-called ‘real’ time, simultaneously contains both a part of the present and a part of the immediate future.”^v



In the face of such a context the philosophical questions of plausibility and implausibility override those concerning the true and the false. The shift of interest from space to time, leads to a shift from the old black-and-white, real-figurative dichotomy to the more relative actual-virtual.^{vi} As argued by Paul Virilio “In two hundred years, the philosophical and scientific debate itself has thus shifted from the question of the objectivity of mental images to the question of their reality. The problem, therefore, no longer has much to do with the mental images of consciousness alone. It is now essentially concerned with the instrumental virtual images of science and their paradoxical facticity.”^{vii} Furthermore, this is one of the most crucial aspects of the development of the new technologies of digital imagery and of the synthetic vision offered by electron optics: the relative fusion/confusion of the factual (or operational, if you prefer) and the virtual.^{viii}

What is taking place I would like to define as a transition from the politics of memory to the memory of that which used to be a political act. Or if, I chose to radicalize this statement, I can ask: What defines global capitalism and neoliberal politics today? The answer is the evacuation of the political with processes not only of confusion and disappearing of borders and precise positions, but with an escalation (using the precise military term of the word) of abstractions, evacuations, empty formalization of protocols of performative politics. It is a war going on, not only for oil, but for the “world(-less) world,” which can only be less, as Suely Rolnik argued, an ever-expanding territory.

In order to try to think Europe not only as a geographical space, but as a conceptual space, a space that has a specific history – although after the fall of the Berlin wall it is more and more common to say that “Eastern Europe doesn’t exist any more” – it is necessary to radicalize this space theoretically and politically.

It will be easy to state, similarly as I stated that Eastern Europe does not exist, that Western Europe does not exist, either, or that what is even more fashionable in the last period, that Europe does not exist, but I will say Western Europe does exist, and Europe does exist. What does not exist, and I will make a reference to Bruno Bosteels text “Alain Badiou’s Theory of the Subject: the Recommencement of Dialectical Materialism,” is Europe as a relationship! As Bruno Bosteels writes, and I will paraphrase this here for the purpose of this text, several years before Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe^{ix} would consolidate the Lacan real, understood as a political key concept, this was already done in Alain Badiou^x work that argued that the real of psychoanalysis presents the impossibility of the sexual as relationship, and that the real of Marxism states there is no class relationship.”^{xi} It exists only as antagonism.

It is possible to state today, after the last events regarding the enlargement of the Schengen zone to be applied as well to the new 10 states of EU, implementation that was so shamefully postponed in the not specified future, that Europe does not exist as a relationship! It exists only as antagonism! If implemented, as proposed in the end of 2006, it would allow full mobility not only of goods, but of people at least from these ten new states from the former Eastern European context. That “Europe does not exist as relationship” is testified as well by all the other former Eastern European states that will be left “for ever” at the borders of EU!

What is the specific history of this new Europe? What can we learn from this history? We can learn not to think about this history as individual identity politics, but as something that can produce radical political concepts of democracy looking historically. Capital emancipates unbelievably. It’s changing clothes, the way of behaving, if we just think of the names given

to it in the time we are living in: social capital, inventive capital, the capital that has a special social attitude, the capital that is emancipated in relation to culture etc. These names show the unbelievable flexibility of capital in coping with time.

Again, what defines global capitalism and neoliberal politics today? The evacuation of the political. Everything is transferred to art and culture, to some kind of politics of moral, ethics and in the last instance it seems that it is about social help. This is how political questions of the world not only in art and culture but also in society are removed. It’s almost impossible to do something relevant today in the social and political space of Europe and the world because of fierce censorship through funding etc. installed and constantly reproduced relations of hierarchy, economical and structural power’s interdependence that demands apolitical projects and (fake) morality. Moreover, the public space is disappearing and private institutions and multinationals that have money are those who articulate, put in balance, sort public needs, histories and commons.

It is about the allocation of capital. Instead of identity politics it is important to analyze the ways we are attached/subjugated to structures of institutional and economical power.

What is the slogan of the day: We no longer work, but create! This is the process of subjectivisation through production in the time of post-Fordist global capitalism. This process employs creation as an activity that re-defines work and literally hides capitalist exploitation. Because of this, the explanation of immaterial labor is of key importance for the explanation of the process of subjectivisation in our contemporaneity. Understanding these processes necessitates the re-connection of creation and the power of resistance, and the freeing of both from the grip of the pimp, i.e. the capitalist system. As Suely Rolnik explains “...[w]e need to place ourselves in an area where politics and art are intertwined, where the resistant force of politics and the creative forces of art mutually affect each other, blurring the frontiers between them.”^{xii} This is an attempt to place us in a thoroughly contaminated area, “first on the side of politics contaminated by its proximity to art, then on the side of art contaminated by its proximity to politics.”^{xiii}

Former Eastern Europe – today embraced by the European Union, or having a new EU “face” – is becoming a place of investments and, therefore, a place of different interests. Economical investments, political pressures, and new legislation politics need familiar cultural and artistic contexts. The way these geographical places and mental spaces with their material infrastructures are made visible, accessible, and friendly, who will be seen as the new actors, agents, producers, artists, curators, and, last but not least, cultural managers, are all part of power structures, fights, money investments and capital issues and branding.

Therefore the only possibility is in the opening of the history of Europe to those questions that was not until now part of “the agenda,” from migration to inclusion and exclusion, analyzing politically contemporary strategies of biopolitics and the allocation of capital and finance. France is an excellent example of contemporary biopolitics, all these so-called immigrants who as a second generation born in France was supposedly included, was in fact excluded precisely through a fake inclusion. Slovenia is as well a shameful case in a matter, with its newly taken measures of “solving” the problem of Roma population in Slovenia. In November 2006 a deportation of a Roma family from a village with a majority of Slovenians took place. Instead of protecting Roma minority rights, the Slovenian repressive state apparatuses, from police to local people bodies, deported a Roma family from the village (in which the family members lived and owned a property) to an abandoned refugee center; the

“civilized” villagers “had enough” of the Roma family, and therefore in a “familiar” manner of a populist mob revolted group they attacked the family and insisted that it has to be for ever removed. The police gave a “protection” to the Roma family with its deportation!

The regime of the EU – its laws, acts of trading, allocating, distributing and investing capital, structural funds, etc., imposed upon all the members of the EU, especially onto its new members (through a meticulous system of equality and inequality) – is not only regulating the mobility of migrants and the politics towards asylum seekers, but also regulating strategies of the labor market and the precarious conditions of labor, not to mention the uneven economical development. It would be wrong to think that all of these protocols have nothing to do with art and culture, and nothing to do with freedom of expression and creativity. They are in fact strongly conditioning the field of art and culture, and the ways in which we organize our lives, the ways we perceive and write history/and not histories.

My thesis is that the changes that has to be defined as antagonistic and not as a relationship are attaining on the level of their esthetical formalization, so to speak, on the level of their formal representational and performative politics models, a dimension of pure and deadly catastrophe. What I want to say? Exists this very important almost axiomatic sentence by Badiou reported and commented in Bosteels when he divides Lacan from Badiou, or vice versa: “If, as Lacan says, the real is the impasse of formalization, then, Badiou suggests [...] that formalization is the im-passe of the real,” which violates the existing state of things and its immanent deadlocks.^{xiv} I would like to put clear this process of the impasse of formalization that have to pass through the formalization of the impasse of the real, as what we see today is precisely a formalization of a status quo, of a deadlock of political agency that is effectuated as well through contemporary performative politics.

Let me explain. There is an almost axiomatic work of art – a sentence uttered by Mladen Stilinovic from Zagreb, Croatia who in 1997 accurately captured multiculturalism as an ideological matrix of global capitalism with a sentence being an art work: “An artist who cannot speak English is no artist!” This sentence, a work of art of the 1990s, synthesized capital’s “social sensitivity” for all those multicultural identities that revealed themselves in the 1990s to the global capitalist world and began to talk to that world – in English, no matter how broken that English was. However, today’s performative logic which is in perfect harmony with the abstraction and evacuation processes of global capitalism and its snobbish posture requires the correction of this sentence: “An artist who cannot speak English **well** is no artist!

Jonathan L. Beller^{xv} in his attempt to formulate a political economy of vision also explores the processes of abstraction and evacuation. He connects the growing abstraction of the “medium” of money in capitalism with abstraction procedures in the fields of contemporary art, culture and theory. I can say, making reference to Beller, that today we are not so much confronted with the abstraction of our senses (this being a typically modern phenomenon), but with the absolute sensualisation of abstraction, i.e. of the absolute sensualisation of the contemporary neo-liberal emptiness within global capitalism. This is a new turn in the genealogy of capitalist abstraction, it is alienation that cannot be treated in the old way, in the way that Adorno described it as the alienation of our senses.

It is characterized by the full sensualisation of the capitalist processes of emptiness and by exposing the totally formalized values that are becoming emptied of all content in a “historical” sense. We can illustrate this with the sudden popularity of Herman Melville’s

Bartleby sentence: “I would prefer not to do it.” This sentence that appears in Melville’s short story »Bartleby the Scrivener: A Story of Wall Street« from 1853 as a “gesture” of refusal is today becoming paradigmatic and is elevated within philosophy as a gesture of the only possible withdrawal from the contaminated and implicated global capitalism. Not just to say NO, but to prefer, in a Bartleby style, not to say no, is not so much a refusal of any specific content, as it is just the formal, empty gesture of refusal!

But a question stays in which spaces and for what reasons, and last but not least, who we can just (re)play refusal as a formal gesture?

A good illustration of the sensualisation of abstraction is two art movies that are not ordinary Hollywood blockbusters. One is the *Lost in Translation* (2003), by Sofia Coppola, and the other the *Broken Flowers* (2005), by Jim Jarmusch.^{xvi} In both films, the image of white capitalist emptiness, hollowness and a disinterest in any kind of engagement, politics or action reaches a maximum. The white kind (portrayed through Bill Murray, the main actor in both films) is engaged only in elevating its own hollowness to a dimension of sensuous delight, that the Second and Third World will never be “capable” of reaching.

In this process we can observe Agamben’s genealogy^{xvii} of the human from animal to snob. Using “paradigmatic forms of the human,”^{xviii} Agamben establishes the genealogy of the human as an arrangement of figures starting from the animal, proceeding toward (Bataille’s) the acephalous, the headless, and ending with a thoughtless figure. The thoughtless figure that is situated at the end of this genealogy is nobody else than the snob.

A snob is a person that adopts the world-view that other people are inherently inferior for any one of a variety of reasons including supposed intellect, wealth, education, ancestry, etc. A snob imitates the manners, adopts the world-view and affects the lifestyle of a social class of people to which he either belongs or aspires. The snob excludes “outsiders” by developing elaborate social codes, symbolic status and recognizable marks of language.

Paradigmatic forms of the human are not just metaphors but (anti)political figures of the human development within the capitalist First World’s genealogy, that is administered by the anthropological machine, which is clearly moving in the direction of an increasing emptying, abstraction and formalization of what is to be perceived as the (civilized) human. These figures can be seen as well as figures of subjectivisation. In *The Open. Man and Animal* Agamben writes about such an increasing abstracted formalization within the genealogy of the human, depicting in such a way the development of the human towards a mere form or a snobbish gesture without a content.^{xix}

With the figure of the snob that is a paradigmatic figure circulating through art, theory and politics, totalizing all these spaces of possible action with complete disinterest in anything outside itself, we can describe the deadly process of a complete emptying of a possible violent, and, if you want, I can state this, militant theory, process and activity, that is in fact the only one that can restate the rare possibility as emphasized by Bruno Bosteels “of overdetermining the determination, and displacing the existing space of assigned places;” the price “to be paid if one seeks to avoid such violence, whether it is called symbolic or metaphysical, is [the monotonous, repetitive stance of] the status quo.”^{xx}

I can propose as well another turn: to reread a decade later Paul Virilio prophetic statement from the 1990s: “The Paparazzo, this is what we are!”^{xxi} as “Just the snob that the white

[upper] class has become.” The snob is installing his emptiness as the last esthetical paradigm of the time we are living in.

I would like to connect this process of abstraction, evacuation and emptiness that is part of the mechanisms of contemporary performative politics to another process that was identified and precisely described by Paul Virilio.

Today, all methods of proving a statement depend on technological instruments and tools, and the constitution of scientific “truth” is, to a profound degree, mediated by technology.^{xxii} Pragmatic acceptance of axioms and specific methods of proof have entered a variety of sciences. Scientific statements have to be effectuated and are thus decisively mediated by technology. Pragmatic performativity is the post-modern sense of truth.^{xxiii} Scientific knowledge is possible to be acquired only through its mediation through technology.

Allow me to clarify this process “of seeing through its mediation through technology” by returning for a moment to photography – summarizing its inner principle by referring to Paul Virilio. »Everything I see is in principle within my reach, at least within reach of my sight, marked on the map of the ‘I can.’^{xxiv} Photography enables the encoding of a topographical memory by establishing a dialectical loop between seeing and mapping. As Virilio claims, it is possible to speak of generations of vision, and even of visual heredity from one generation to the next. However, following Virilio,^{xxv} the perception developed by new media and technologies (called the “logistics of perception”) destroyed these earlier modes of representation preserved in the “I can” of seeing. The logistics of perception inaugurates the production of a vision machine and the possibility of achieving sightless vision, whereby a video camera or virtual technology would be controlled by a computer. Today, new media apparatus (from virtual reality to cyberspace) confer upon us a whole range of visual prosthetics which confront us with a deeply changing positioning of the subject. Changes are effectuated within our bodies, as well, as we are facing an absence of certainty within the visibility of our world. As Virilio would say, the bulk of what I see is no longer within my reach. We have to ask ourselves: What does one see when one’s eyes, depending on new technology, are reduced to a state of rigid and practically invariable structural immobility?

So, on one side we see a systematic production of blindness (this is to what we can compare the naked human eye) and on the other we see the growing tendency to use increasingly sophisticated electronic technologies, not only in science, but also in the leading ideological and repressive state apparatus (particularly within the legal system and among the police). Virilio speaks of hyper-realist representational models within the police and legal systems, to the extent that human witnesses lost their credibility; the human eye no longer remains an eyewitness. On the one side of the paradigm of new media technology, we are witnessing the systematic production of blindness, and on the other, the frightening hyper-realism of a system of total visibility, which is particularly reinforced in legal and police procedures.

The tendency of the leading scopic regime of new media technologies is to produce blindness, while simultaneously, creating a whole range of techniques to produce the credibility of the presence of objects and humans, rather than trying to demonstrate their real existence. Today, this latter process may be illustrated with military and espionage strategies: “It is more vital to trick the enemy about the virtuality of the missile’s passage, about the very credibility of its presence, than to confuse him about the reality of its existence.”^{xxvi} These characteristics serve as reminders of the dimension of time, which, as Paul Virilio suggests, is under siege by real time technologies. “They kill ‘present’ time by isolating its presence here and now for the

sake of another commutative space that is no longer composed of our ‘concrete presence’ in the world, but of a ‘discrete telepresence’ whose enigma remains forever intact.”^{xxvii}

It is crucial to understand the intertwined processes, from technology, through esthetics to philosophy and economy, of just at first sight non connected logistics and logics of contemporary neoliberal societies’ in promoting abstraction, evacuation and emptying of any political and social content a possible agency. This process of evacuation undermines precisely the figure of any consistent and subversive political agency today.

I stated that with the figure of the snob that is a paradigmatic figure circulating from art to theoretical and political contexts, from exhibition to conferences, we can capture the deadly process of a status quo in art and culture. Here the real is, paraphrasing Badiou, that what is subtracted in a new form that is the snob. I would like to make a further analysis of these new apolitical figures, from the snob-as Bartleby-“Murray”-to contemporary hype philosophers to put even more visible this formalization of emptiness (seen in the jargon to be really “sexy”), and the catastrophic proposal it carries to withdraw from every action.

Bruno Bosteels describes, based on Badiou, two possible trajectories of subjectivisation, one is the path from anxiety to superego and the other is the path from courage to justice. In the first trajectory, from anxiety to superego, “the subject occupies an internal exclusion, with regard to the objective structure in which it finds its empty place,”^{xxviii} as in *Broken Flowers* (the figure of Bill Murray is at the very center, but he excludes himself from any action, “dead,” and in such a way as well protected from the world that he brought to the verge of a destruction); and even more this empty place is now canonized through different strategies from sensualisation of emptiness to formalized performative politics.

We might say with Bosteels and Badiou that in Lacan, anxiety and superego, these two subjective figures point towards an excess of the real beyond its placement in the existing law of things. “Anxiety designates the moment when the real kills, rather than divides the symbolic.”^{xxix} What else are the new subjective figures, as “Bill Murray,” or Bartleby for example, than the figures that kill the symbolic precisely with enthroning, through an almost sensual spirituality, the status quo of the contemporary First capitalist DEAD world ORDER. Between anxiety and superego a subject only oscillates in painful alternation, without the possibility of action. At best anxiety and superego indicate the point where the existing order of things becomes caught only between the headless (the populist right wing mob attitude) and the thoughtless (snob attitude), without allowing any new possibility for radical social and political agency to come into being.

For Badiou, the superego is at the same time the law and its destruction. It is the word itself, inasmuch, according to Bosteels; it is only its root that is left. This is the Bartleby “no I prefer not to do anything,” detached in his withdrawal from the world, looking at it from afar, while it is completely falling apart. The figure of the snob, that forecloses any space of activity, from art, culture to theory and finally to politics, and stops any kind of action and change, is the final point, indeed, of this trajectory from anxiety and superego that is today enthroned.

According to the second trajectory, from courage to justice, “a subject stands in a topological excess over and above its assigned placement, the law of which is then transformed.”^{xxx}

Let’s, come to a conclusion. In the end it is possible to be said, that in contemporary philosophy and activist politics the “war” is indeed going on about the location of the void, whether as in Lacan, according to Bruno Bosteels, “on the side of the subject as lack, or, as in Badiou on the side of being as empty set.”^{xxxi} At the moment we are witnessing to a process of giving being to this formalized performative emptiness (absolutely sensualising it), while completely dismissing that what could open the path for a different politics, that says that “the subject of truth is defined by a lack of being.”^{xxxii}

ⁱ Cf. Alain Badiou, *Logiques des mondes. L'Être et l'Événement 2*, Le Seuil, Paris, 2006.

ⁱⁱ Cf. Paul Virilio, *War and Cinema: The Logistics of Perception*, Verso, London and New York, 1989.

ⁱⁱⁱ Cf. David Harvey, *A Brief History of Neoliberalism*, Oxford University Press, USA, 2005.

^{iv} Paul Virilio, *The Vision Machine*, British Film Institute and Indiana University Press, London, Bloomington and Indianapolis, 1994, p. 66.

^v Ibid. p. 66.

^{vi} Ibid., p. 70.

^{vii} Ibid., p. 60.

^{viii} Ibid.

^{ix} Cf. Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe, *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy: Towards a Radical Democratic Politics*, Verso, London and New York, 1985.

^x Cf. Alain Badiou, *Théorie du sujet*, Seuil, Paris, 1982.

^{xi} Cf. Bruno Bosteels text “Alain Badiou’s Theory of the Subject: the Recommencement of Dialectical Materialism?,” in Slavoj Zizek ed., *LACAN - The Silent Partners*, Verso, London and New York, 2006, p. 140.

^{xii} Cf. Suely Rolnik, “The Twilight of the Victim: Creation Quits Its Pimp, to Rejoin Resistance,” *Zehar*, No. 51, 2003, p. 36.

^{xiii} Ibid.

^{xiv} Cf. Bruno Bosteels text “Alain Badiou’s Theory of the Subject: the Recommencement of Dialectical Materialism?,” p. 141.

^{xv} Cf. Jonathan L. Beller, “Numismatics of the Sensual, Calculus of the Image: The Pyrotechnics of Control,” *Image [&] Narrative*, web magazine on visual narration, No. 6, February 2003, <http://www.imageandnarrative.be/mediumtheory/jonathanlbeller.htm>

^{xvi} Coppola and even more Jarmusch with their film histories are firmly contextualised within the art film scene.

^{xvii} Cf. Giorgio Agamben, *The Open. Man and Animal*, Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2004.

^{xviii} Ibid., pp. 9-12.

^{xix} Ibid.

^{xx} Cf. Bruno Bosteels text “Alain Badiou’s Theory of the Subject: the Recommencement of Dialectical Materialism?,” p. 141.

^{xxi} Cf. Paul Virilio, “Der Paparazzo, das sind wir,” in *Der Spiegel*, Nr. 37, from 8.9.1997. S.220.

^{xxii} Cf. Heinz Paetzold, “Definitions of the Postmodern Status of Knowledge,” in H. Paetzold, *The Discourse of the Postmodern and the Discourse of the Avant-Garde*, Jan van Eyck Akademie, Maastricht 1994, pp. 14-21.

^{xxiii} Ibid., p. 16.

^{xxiv} Paul Virilio, *Vision Machine*, British Film Institute and Indiana University Press, London and Bloomington, Indiana, 1994, p. 7.

^{xxv} Ibid., chapters 1 and 2.

^{xxvi} Cf. Virilio, pp. 43-44.

^{xxvii} Paul Virilio, “The Third Interval: A Critical Transition,” in Verena Andermatt Conley, ed., *Re-thinking Technologies*, University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis 1993, p. 4.

^{xxviii} Cf. Bruno Bosteels text “Alain Badiou’s Theory of the Subject: the Recommencement of Dialectical Materialism?,” p. 143.

^{xxix} Ibid.

^{xxx} Ibid.

^{xxxi} Cf. Bruno Bosteels text “Alain Badiou’s Theory of the Subject: the Recommencement of Dialectical Materialism?,” p. 154.

^{xxxii} Ibid, 155.

DEMOCRACY AND THE ART OF LYING: ON THE USE AND ABUSE OF *FICTION* IN
POLITICS

Olivia Guaraldo

It was 1972 when Hannah Arendt published in the *New York Review of Books* her essay ‘Lying in Politics. Reflections on the *Pentagon Papers*’. The essay commented on the recent publication of the 47 volume ‘History of U.S. Decision Making Process on Vietnam Policy’ (commissioned by Secretary of State Robert S. McNamara in June 1967 and completed a year and a half later). The scandal at the core of the publication of this Report had to do with the fact that it was not meant to be published, at least not in the way that the *New York Times* got hold of it. The *Pentagon Papers* were, in fact, a ‘top-secret, richly documented record of the American role in Indochina from World War II to may 1968’ (Arendt 1972: 3). The embarrassment of the Nixon administration – which, shortly after, had to deal with another, more famous scandal – in receiving the news that the public had become informed of the years of lies and deception in Vietnam, was observable in its futile attempt to silence Daniel Ellsberg (the Pentagon ‘expert’ and member of the Rand Corporation, who was responsible for leaking the Report to *The New York Times*). The NYT scoop of the *Pentagon Papers* precedes the *Washington Post* revelations on the Watergate Building infraction, with the consequences that we are all familiar with. Those were the days, we could say, when the revelation of a scandal mattered, when public opinion was still receptive, aware, able to respond and react to lying, deception and misconduct of those in power.

But what did these 47 volumes tell the American public? Surprisingly, they did not reveal any hidden information, any secret complot, anything that was not known to the majority of the citizens. As in fact Arendt herself notes, the report ‘contains nothing to support the theory of grandiose imperialist stratagems’, and again, the ‘*Pentagon Papers* revealed little significant news that was not available to the average reader of dailies and weeklies’ (Arendt 1972: 45). One of the moral qualities of the Report consisted instead in the will of the so-called Pentagon experts to produce an impartial self-examination and an objective analysis of their deeds. These experts or ‘problem solvers’ - who were asked to evaluate the policies they had been proposing and implementing - had been ‘drawn into government form the universities and the various think tanks’ (9-10), they were men of science, learned experts ‘in love with theory’. One of their main peculiarities, in fact, was their reliance on game-theories and system analyses, and they were

‘eager to find formulas, preferably expressed in a pseudo-mathematical language, that would unify the most disparate phenomena with which reality presented them’ (11).

What was at the core of the scandal, according to Arendt - who reports the words of Daniel Ellsberg, ‘How could they?’ - is the systematic denial, on the experts’ side, of factual reality as it came to them from intelligence information. The lying at the basis of the U.S. Vietnam policy did not consist in hiding some secret plans from the American Public, but in neglecting substantial factual information, in pretending that theory could prevail over facts. In order to remain consistent with their theories – based on mathematical calculations, game theories and other abstract criteria – the problem solvers neglected simple and solid facts, such as the absence of any connection between China and the Soviet Union (which would have been a justification for the Vietnam War as a containment of China, and a proof of the existence of a solid and consistent Communist block), and the absence of any strategic interest in ‘liberating Vietnam’ from the ‘Communist menace’ (intelligence reports told President Johnson in 1964 ‘with the possible exception of Cambodia, it is likely that no nation in the area would quickly succumb to Communism as a result of the fall of Laos and South Vietnam’). Further to this, the ‘global’ provenance of the South-Vietnamese insurgency – another justification for the war as being ‘imported’ to South Vietnam by foreign communists – had been dismissed by the CIA, which reported in 1961 and in 1963 that ‘the primary sources of Communist strength in South Vietnam are indigenous’ (Arendt 1972: 25, quoting the *Papers*).

What is at stake, here, according to Arendt, is not simply the traditional use of lying in the sphere of power, the use of secrecy in order to achieve specific political ends, the well known practice of *arcana imperii*, but the construction of a reality that is, so to say, fictitious, deprived of its basic elements -facts – in order to comply with a theory, according to which the experts and decision makers should have been able to discover ‘laws by which to explain and predict political and historical facts, as though they were as necessary, and thus reliable, as the physicists once believed natural phenomena to be’ (Arendt 1972: 11).

The problem, says Arendt, is that political science, in contrast to the natural sciences, deals with contingent facts, and ‘reality never presents us with anything so neat as premises for logical conclusions’ (12). Therefore the scientific, or pseudoscientific attitude with which the Pentagon experts eluded facts in order to make a theory or hypothesis come true, resembles the philosopher’s will to ‘eliminate the accidental’, as Hegel would say.

Hannah Arendt’s entire work has been devoted to fight this ‘speculative’ attitude – that which desperately seeks to eliminate the accidental- in the sphere of politics. The problem of the Western political tradition is that it does not have what Arendt calls a ‘pure notion of the political’, thereby meaning that every attempt at interpreting, understanding and changing

political reality has always been characterized by an excessively theoretical approach. The *Pentagon Papers* in this respect represent the governmental, scientific, up to date version of the Hegelian aversion from contingency. But whereas the philosopher reflects ex-post upon reality (according to Hegel's famous definition philosophy is like the owl of Minerva, which 'spreads her wings only with the falling of the dusk') and aims at comprehending it in his system in order to posthumously eliminate contingency, the political theorist and expert is not only a man of thought but also a man of action and does not have either the contemplative attitude of the philosopher nor the meticulous loyalty to factual, given reality of the natural scientist, who deals with matters that are not necessarily man-made. The political scientist deals with matters that are man-made and more often than not is tempted to not simply observe the world of human affairs, but also to change it, to make it conform to a certain theoretical model he has in mind. The man of action who is also a man of thought, because he deals with accidental things – things that could have been otherwise- is constantly tempted to eliminate the potential contingency of political reality by means of making it fit into theory. These basic reflections brought Arendt to consider the issue of lying in politics not as a moral question, but as an epistemological one. Arendt's implicit message seems to hint at the following judgment: willful and deliberate ignorance of facts, rather than mistake in their evaluation, is much more dangerous than willful lying.

As a matter of fact, Arendt, following Aristotle, considers politics as the sphere of contingency, of things that 'could be otherwise'. It is therefore an eminently political possibility to undo that which exists in order to start something new. Not differently from the great father of the strategic use of lying in politics, Machiavelli, Arendt is persuaded that there is a strict link between politics as the art of changing reality and lying as the art of *imagining* things that are not there. 'We are free to change the world and to start something new in it. Without the mental freedom to deny or affirm existence, to say "yes" or "no" – not just to statements or propositions in order to express agreement or disagreement, but to things as they are given, beyond agreement or disagreement, to our organs of perception and cognition – no action would be possible; and action is of course the very stuff politics are made of.' (Arendt 1972: 5-6). Politics, in other words has nothing to do with stable criteria, rigid and unchangeable, according to which one should govern reality. On the contrary, politics is the constant attempt to elaborate visions of reality that are different from the existent ones. Imagination is the instrument through which the political agent can obliterate a given reality and produce a vision of the new.

'In other words, the deliberate denial of factual truth – the ability to lie – and the capacity to change facts – the ability to act – are interconnected; they owe their existence to the same

source: imagination' (5). To act and to lie are therefore strictly interrelated, insofar as politics is the sphere of contingency, of things that 'could be otherwise'.

On the other hand, though, politics has to do with facts, with the concrete and material taking place of events, that, as such, can hardly be ignored or dismissed. In a previous essay, titled *Truth and Politics*, Arendt reports a sentence by French Prime Minister Clemenceau, who, when asked about the responsibilities for the outset of First World War, what the historians would eventually tell on it, said: 'This I don't know. But I know for certain that they will not say that Belgium invaded Germany' (Arendt 1968: 239). Politics, in other words, has to do with the radical possibility of change – through imagination and action – and the equally strong persistence of events, facts that happened and as such cannot be denied. Political actors must be aware of this duplicity, and must, so to say, act accordingly.

Imagination, according to Arendt, is connected to human freedom, insofar as it is a mental faculty that relies upon human spontaneity. By re-interpreting Kant's *Critique of Judgment*, Arendt refers to imagination as the most 'political' of our mental faculties, insofar as through imagination we can practice what she calls 'enlarged thinking', namely the possibility to make present in our minds different standpoints and re-produce mentally the different perspectives that constitute political reality (Arendt 1982). Imagination can give us the possibility to broaden our individual perspective by assuming a different standpoint, by accepting within our mental framework possible different paths of meaning. Politically speaking we could say that if imagination gives us the opportunity to imagine things that are literally not there – to deny factual reality in order to change it – it does so not by shaping a fictitious reality that should work as a substitute, but simply by making us aware of the contingent nature of political reality. It can help us understand different standpoints, allowing us to think *with* others and not in solitude – and by so doing it can produce non-existent visions of reality that can guide us in our political actions. In fact imagination – as Arendt understands it – is linked to the plurality of human kind – to the fact that each being is unique and different from every other – and offers the chance to practice this plurality in one's mind.

It is not by chance that Arendt considered storytelling as a means to understand past political events by virtue of its capacity to offer a fictional rumination on events that often allowed a better understanding of reality than simple historiographic cause-effect explanations. Reality, in its plurality and contingency, is the sphere of the unexpected, of the unpredictable, and as such cannot be accounted for in mechanical terms, for they may result too simplistic and reductive. Storytelling, instead, offers us a different way of understating reality, a way that respects its contingency and unexpectedness. Imagination, in this respect, plays a crucial role, since it can help us build stories that, as such, are more faithful to reality than any objective and

therefore scientific report. Creative literary imagination, for example, can help us understand decisive political phenomena better than a causal explanation based on a supposedly scientific argument: Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* tells us more on imperialism than any history text-book, Proust's *Recherche* is more significant than any sociological interpretation on the role of the intellectual in 19th century France, and so on. The political use of fiction, as Arendt adopts it, has to do with the necessity of elaborating different means of understanding reality that do not reduce it to a stereotype, to a muster, to statistical data, but seeks instead to come to terms with its essential unpredictability (for good and for bad). (Arendt, 1951; 1958; see also Disch 1994; Guaraldo 2001). Whereas imagination literarily performed can be politically interesting and useful, fictive productions that are based simply on calculated schemes and theories can be politically disastrous.

There is, in fact, a different use of fiction that, as such, is politically dangerous, and it comes down to the abuse of another mental faculty, that of logical reasoning. When shaped in order to radically deny reality in its factuality and contingency, logical reasoning can produce non-existent visions of reality that, as such, are ready and packed, uncontestable in force of the purported cogency of the scientific method. The fictions produced by this type of mental activity radically violate the principle of contingency that informs the political sphere. In the first case – that of imagination, a faculty radically alien to the proceedings of logical reasoning – the fictions of the mind guide political actors in their will to modify the present *iuxta propria principia*, namely respecting the contingency and plurality of politics. In the second case – that of logical reasoning – the fictions of the mind are meant to *substitute* reality and its contingency. This is to say that there can be a physiological use of lying in the sphere of politics that relates to the possibility of change and novelty (for Arendt, the very essence of the political) and a pathological one, where what is at stake is not the instrumental and occasional use of lying, but a systematic, deliberate production of a fictive reality, disregardful of both contingency and factuality.

The scandal of the *Pentagon Papers*, in other words, testifies of this pathology, which, in the end, can be defined as the systematic abuse of fiction in the sphere of politics. Imagining a different world does not equate to building a fictitious one. There is, in other words, a radical difference between innovative – even revolutionary - political actions and the totalitarian experiment of fabricating a new reality, through ideology, propaganda and terror.

That is to say that, given the above sketched Arendtian framework, the ‘revelations’ of the *Pentagon Papers* told the American public opinion and tell us today two major things.

First: the theories of the problem solvers, surprisingly enough, did not concern the pursuit of some decisive national interest in South Asia, nor did it have to do with the welfare of the nation, but simply with its image. In fact, what strikes the reader is that among the ever shifting justifications for the war, what remains stable is the question of American ‘credibility’, its image as the world Superpower. What emerges, therefore, is an interesting new kind of ‘banality of evil’ where what is at stake is not the normal, ordinary nature of evil doers (as it had been the case of the many Eichmanns under Nazi rule in Germany), but the ignorant, mediocre political quality of the officials leading the United States of America. The reason for twenty years of war, massacres, and destruction, was not the greedy and imperialistic policy of the superpower, but its stubbornness at following the game-theories of some think-tank experts. The parody of a cold-war conflict, as depicted in Stanley Kubrick's *Doctor Strangelove*, seems more plausible than reality itself.

Second: what emerges from the report is the fact that no free country is immune from what one could call a totalitarian drive, which consists not only of the desire to manipulate public opinion through deliberate lies, but also in fabricating a new reality, in which facts are manipulated either by being inserted into a general scheme of explanation that ‘eliminates the accidental’ or by being constructed anew. This was what ideology did under totalitarian rule: it offered an image of reality that contained no element of contingency, but instead, inserted every single fact into the logic of an idea, fabricating a consistent reality that as such did not exist. People seemed to be satisfied with a view of reality that ‘made sense’ while the world outside seemed to have lost one. The totalitarian abuse of fiction is well known, and that political experiment warns us of the difference between simple, occasional lying – as some sort of indispensable *instrumentum regni* – and a systematic denial of facts, which opens up the viability of a violent substitution of reality with a consistent fictional scheme. One could even say that totalitarians abused fiction to the point that what they constructed as ideology was then implemented by terror, and the fiction became eventually true.

Even if one should be very cautious about comparing totalitarian regimes and democracy it is nevertheless palpable that Arendt, when speaking of the Pentagon experts, detects in them a very dangerous totalitarian inclination. What in fact emerges at the end of Arendt's reflections on the *Pentagon Papers* is that the political scientists who were in ‘love with theories’, mostly theories substantiated by calculations and numbers rather than views of the world, had been the disciples of the cold-war ideologists, the anti-Communists who determined the comprehensive ideology of Washington since W.W.II. They had been former Communists, and this is why, says Arendt they ‘needed a new ideology by which to explain and reliably foretell the course of history’ (Arendt 1972: 39). The love for theory stems not simply from a scientific approach to

reality – that of the Pentagon experts – but from familiarity with consistent manipulation of facts, as was the case of the anti-Communists at work in Washington. For Arendt anti-Communism is no less an ideology than Communism, and as such, it contains all the failures of a monolithic, simplistic, yet appealing view of reality. The political use of a monolithic view of reality – that is ideology - is treacherous, because it goes far beyond mere lying, or hiding of the truth.

Another mechanism is at work there: in order to comply with a consistent view of reality, the ideological interpretation tends to accept as factual truth that which instead is part of a theory, a logical construction that covers reality. The banality of the theories at work in the U.S. Vietnam policy – the theories of the problem solvers, who, unlike their former teachers, did not have any ideological comprehensive view of history but simply dealt with the *image* of the U.S., does not diminish their politically lethal effect. ‘Sheer ignorance of facts, deliberate neglect of postwar developments’ became the hallmark of the cold war anti-Communist doctrine first and then of the so called ‘problem solvers’ of the Vietnam War: ‘They needed no facts, no information; they had a ‘theory’ and all data that did not fit were denied or ignored’ (ibid.).

At the core of this love for theory, be it an ideological view of the world, or simply a domino-theory according to which the situation in Vietnam would determine the situation in the neighboring countries, is the inability to cope with contingency, to deal with factual experience as a source for decision making. The banality of evil reached, in Vietnam, a new level of absurdity: the goals of the war, as such, were as hypothetical and volatile as the policies that implemented it.

What does this story tell us today? It tells us that that level of absurdity, of deliberate manipulation of facts was insane, lethal and politically wrong. Game theories and system analyses caused heavy losses, in terms of human lives and economic resources, not to speak of the hundreds of thousands of civilian Vietnamese who died. Yet it tells us more. Arendt always warned against easy analogies in the sphere of political history, since she believed that politics and history both had to do with the new and the unexpected, for which there can be no comparison or assimilation to precedents. Yet the temptation is too strong, since those reflections seem to offer a way that enables us to read the present. One could therefore say that *comparisons with the past are useful insofar as they simply allow us to detect differences and discover novelties, shifts in that contingent reality of which politics is made of*. Using Arendt today can help us understanding that the political abuse of a fictional mental construction, or ideology – which negates existent factual information and produces non existent ones - can reach an even more absurd level of banality of evil, worse, in its potential effects, than that of the Pentagon

‘expertise’ on Vietnam. (Parenthetically now the domino theory would probably be more adequate than then to explain the effects of the Washington policy in the Middle East.) The mental attitude of today’s Washington experts – more familiar perhaps with the anti-Communist ideology of the Cold War than with the problem solvers’ mathematical attitude – is no less irresponsible, no less defactualized, no less ignorant of facts, no less disregarding of information and experience collected by the intelligence in the Middle East. Nevertheless those game-theories and system analyses, the tools of the political scientists of the prestigious think-tanks, are nothing compared to today’s innovative awareness of the political importance of a systematic *abuse* of fiction. In an unprecedented coalition of media, governments, informed public, and terrorists what is today at stake is not only the act of defactualizing and deliberately ignoring stubborn facts, historical situations and regional specificities, but a much more creative act of invention, that which fabricates evidences together with visions of the world, pretending they were true. If the problem of the Vietnam War was that of ignoring the facts that stood against a successful conclusion of the conflict, and pretending that goals had been achieved, now the political use of deception has reached a new level: the justification for the war relies on facts that as such are made up, fabricated since they do not exist in reality (the weapon of mass destruction lie is one among the many, perhaps the more telling in this respect).

There is moreover an even more lethal abuse of fiction in the Islamist ideology that conceives of the West as a monolithic empire of sinners and apostates. On both sides of the fence there are elements that seem to coalesce together in making the prophecy of a clash of civilizations come true. The relationship between theory and reality is reversed, and the latter is not simply adjusted to the former – through lie, deception, neglecting of facts – but the former dictates the means by which to fabricate the latter. It goes without saying that what both those fabrications lead to an endless destruction.

Furthermore, historically speaking, today’s ideological impetus is essentially different from the ideologies and theories that informed the Washington administration at the time of the Vietnam War. ‘The problem solvers did not judge, they calculated’ (Arendt 1972: 37), says Arendt, but what made their calculations differ from the ideological purports of today’s neoconservative ideology, was the ‘checks and balances’ of the Cold War, the equilibrium that the numerous regional conflicts of the time contributed to maintain. What we are left with, after the fall of the Soviet Union and the continuous denial of factual truths by Washington, is a dangerously enhanced faith in what the *image* of the only superpower left in the world can achieve. Apparently they see no restraints to the spreading not simply of American interests, but more significantly of American values, and this has to do with the American image, as some kind of *democracy logo* that should conquer all the political markets of the world.

In its omnipotence delirium, today's ideology differs from that of the problem solvers of the Vietnam War, in this sense: the latter relied on the evidence of mathematical, purely rational truth while the former has transformed the rational choice argument into a religious, moral one. Truth no longer reveals itself as a mathematical formula but through moral statements, blatantly colored with vague religious tones¹. The fabrication of reality relies upon unverifiable truths, and this is why perhaps today, differently from the times of the Vietnam War, the importance of facts, their acknowledgment, does not play any major political role.

In this respect, Arendt, at the time, considered with a certain – perhaps excessive - optimism that the public did disapprove of the behaviour of the experts, and was informed, critical, oppositional: 'The divergence between facts-established by the intelligence services, sometimes by the decision makers themselves...and often available to the informed public – and the premises, theories and hypotheses according to which decisions were finally made is total' (Arendt 1972: 24).

In those days there was an informed public, and the *NYT* revelations contributed to increase the already strong awareness of the public, which had long before started to protest against the insanity of the Vietnamese enterprise. Arendt, in fact, gives credit to the press and its democratic role when she affirms: "so long as the press is free and not corrupt, it has an enormously important function to fulfill and can rightly be called the fourth branch of government" (Arendt 1972: 45). Factual information of all kinds were available to the public, so that it won against the lies and manipulation of the experts: 'The fact that the *Pentagon Papers* revealed hardly any spectacular news testifies to the liars' failure to create a convinced audience that they could join themselves' (Arendt 1972: 35). What struck Arendt at the time was the fact that the 'problem solvers' of the Pentagon were from the very beginning self-deceived, in the sense that they relied firmly on their ability to make theories come true, through systematic denial of facts. Convinced since the beginning of their 'overwhelming success, not on the battlefield, but in the public-relations arena, and so certain of the soundness of their psychological premises about the unlimited possibilities in manipulating people ...they anticipated general belief and victory in the battle of people's minds. And since they lived in a defactualized world anyway, they did not find it difficult to pay no more attention to the fact that their audience refused to be convinced than to other facts' (ibid.).

The distance with today's situation could not be grater. Not only do the 'experts' of today's U.S. administration fabricate evidences and facts that are simply not there, but they also succeed where the problem solvers failed, that is in creating a convinced audience that easily buys a

¹ On the political use of the term "evil" in presidential discourses from Roosevelt to George W. Bush, and its progressively moral and religious connotations, as well as its vagueness, see the interesting article "Evil's Political habitat" by Jodi Dean (Dean 2005, especially pp. 69-75).

monolithic and fabricated view of the world². The propaganda means to do it are now much stronger and effective than 35 years ago. The problem nowadays lies in the fact that factual truth is known, documented, acknowledged, but the convinced audience neglects it and prefers to stick to the fabricated version of that factual reality (the connection between Saddam Hussein and al Qaeda, the "factual" possibility of an expansion of democracy) or simply reduces it to another possible manipulation from the side of the enemy or those who strongly disagree with government policies (who are often accused of sympathizing with terrorists for their unwillingness to buy the monolithic view of the world constructed after 9/11. See Butler 2004). The banality of evil seems to have reached an unimaginable level of credulity and stupidity. Speaking of stupidity, I would like to conclude by quoting an article by Naomi Klein, which appeared on *The Nation* on Jan. 26 2004. The article, significantly, is entitled "The Year of the Fake". According to a FBI alert, reports Klein, police patrols were asked to keep their eyes on people carrying almanacs, while making their routine investigations on drivers pulled over for traffic violations. Why Almanacs? Because there are 'filled with facts... and according to the FBI intelligence Bulletin, facts are dangerous weapons in the hands of terrorists, who can use them "to assist with target selection and pre-operational planning"' (Klein, 2004). Klein concedes that the blacklisting of Almanacs was a fitting end for 2003, a year that waged open war on truth and facts and celebrated forgeries of all kinds. 'This was the year when fakeness ruled: fake rationales for war, a fake President dressed as a fake soldier declaring a fake end to combat and then holding up a fake turkey.' What we are dealing with is no longer a political use of lying, nor the imaginative use of fiction in order to change reality, but a systematic abuse of fiction, which becomes, eventually, a farce, and it is not by chance that Klein uses the word 'fake'. Lying always presupposes a notion of truth, while faking has abandoned the very term, and moves on the level of the fictitious, of the fabrication of a plausible yet non existent reality. Klein concludes: 'I'm no longer convinced that America can be set free by truth alone. In many cases fake versions of events have prevailed even when the truth was readily available...Bush is remaking America in the image of his own ignorance and duplicity. Not only is it OK to be misinformed, but as the almanac warning shows, knowing stuff is fast becoming a crime'.

² See, for a detailed analysis of public understanding of the invasion of Iraq, Lee Salter (forthcoming) who, in an interesting article on the BBC representation of the war, reports some interesting data: '[...] tenuous – and unlikely – links between the Iraqi government and al Qaeda asserted by the US government must have contributed to some 70% of Americans believing, against "factual truth", that the Iraqi government had something to do with the terrorist attacks on New York and Washington in September 2001 (*Washington Post* 6th September 2003: p. A01. Even by 2005 47% of Americans believed that former President Hussein 'helped plan and support the hijackers' [Harris Poll #14, 18th February 2005], which was largely inferred in President Bush's speeches [*Christian Science Monitor*, 14th March, 2003][...])'. I would like to thank Lee Salter for having provided me with the unpublished manuscript of this article.

I've recently returned from a trip to the US, visiting family for the holidays. Due to various delays, I spent far more time in Atlanta airport than I would have liked. On my journey into the US, I was particularly pained, not the least because of the culture shock I experienced despite having grown up there. I was moved to tears, seeing so many young people dressed in desert fatigues, knowing that they may kill or be killed. Perhaps they share the belief of one young man I met who told me that, as a soldier, he had given up his right to think for himself. I also hadn't realised how intense the culture of fear in the US had become, or perhaps how much my perceptions had changed over the years. I was shocked by airport stories. Very regular announcements terror alert status was at "orange". Loudspeakers invaded my consciousness, telling me again and again to maintain control (of my bags) at all times, in the interest of airport and personal security, and to report suspicious people or unusual activities to the nearest law-enforcement officer.¹ I think of how hypnotism works, depending on repetition of key phrases which gently shut down critical mental faculties. Starhawk, a pagan activist and writer, puts it in slightly differently language: 'these voices seem reasonable, sensible. But any Witch can recognise a spell being cast.'²

And what is the effect of this spell, reinforced by large screens broadcasting CNN? It may be some sympathy, at least, for the belief that security, individual and collective, comes from constant control, from fear of difference, in ourselves and others, and from protection by those who claim unquestionable authority backed up by threats of violence (e.g. law-enforcement officers). In other in words, we should all give up right to think for ourselves. 'The counterspell is simple: tell a different story'³.

In definitions of the erotic that goes beyond a narrow focus on sex developed by radical feminists such as Audre Lorde⁴ or Shulamith Firestone⁵, these airport stories are decidedly unerotic (as are airports themselves!). Rather than nurturing our connection with the deep joys of living and our individual capacities to help create the world we live in, these stories encourage the disconnection upon which domination depends. They were certainly driving me to the edge! At one point, talking to these disembodied voices, I accidentally muttered aloud 'get out of my head'. A man, looked at me quickly, startled. Yeah, I thought, it's me that's crazy. Or maybe these terror warnings are acts of terrorism themselves. I think of Starhawk's analysis of terrorism and it's erotic alternatives.

The goal of terrorists, whether of the freelance or the state variety, is to fill all our mental and emotional space with fear, rage, powerlessness, and despair, to cut us off from the sources of life and hope. Violence and fear can make is shut down to the things and beings that we love. When we do, we wither and die. When we consciously open ourselves to the beauty of the world, when we choose to love another tenuous and fragile being, we commit an act of liberation is courageous and radical as any foray into the tear gas⁶.

1 I was also frequently informed that the people employed to clean up after me and my fellow travelers, maintaining an excessive level of hygiene, were all very happy to do this and it wasn't anything to do with poverty or racism.
2 Starhawk (2002) *Webs of Power: notes from the global uprising*. Gabriola Island, Canada, New Society Publishers, p155.
3 *ibid*.
4 Lorde, Audre (1993 [1978]) 'The Uses of the Erotic: The Erotic As Power' in H. Abelove, M Barale & D Halperin (eds) *The Lesbian and Gay Studies Reader*. New York, Routledge.
5 Firestone, Shulamith (1970) *The Dialectic of Sex: The Case for Feminist Revolution*. New York, Morrow.
6 *Ibid*, pp 153-154.

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~ ~ ~

Faster, harder!
Faster, faster, harder, harder!

Sometimes I rejoice in intensity.
Other times, what I crave, what I desperately need is

Slowly, gently, softly, so subtly
I barely know what's happening
I just know deeply that it's right.

Sometimes I love the comfort of the familiar
safety and security in a warm centre.

Other times I thrive on experimentation
stretching and risking on a sharp edge.

I want to move to a rythm I help create
listening to myself, listening to the other(s).

Sex? Storytelling? Democracy?
Oh, dear ones, all that and more.

~ ~ ~

I really, painfully, don't understand why the rules should be different, or even how they can be. What happens to sex and to storytelling, imagination and desire, when what is so often called democracy moves to the ever quickening desperate rythm of a dying economic pattern trying to feed more and more when there is less and less to eat? What happens to democracy and to sex, connections and choices, when stories on screen and paper tell much the same truth, as though there were one, when so few trust enough to tell the stories deep in their bones, when so many have forgotten how to listen? What happens to storytelling and to democracy, art and rythm, when sex is presented as the sole source of the erotic and yet de-eroticised, standardised in desire for profit and in fear of desire?

~ ~ ~

In an essay on storytelling, Ursula Le Guin expresses her disgust with bestselling novels and offers, in erotic terms, the alternative of storyteller who listens to the reader.

The blurbs on their covers often highlight the coercive, aggressive power of the text -- compulsive page-turner, gut-wrenching, jolting, mind-searing, heart-stopping -- what is this, electroshock torture? [...] Rather than grab, frighten, coerce, or manipulate the consumer, collaborative writers try to interest a reader. To induce or seduce people into moving with the story, participating in it, joining their imagination with it.

Not a rape: a dance⁷.

⁷ Le Guin, U. K. (2004). 'A Matter of Trust.' In *The Wave in the Mind: the talks and essays on the writer, the reader and the imagination*. Boston: Shambhala, pp230-231

So too, an erotic democracy is not one based on fearful citizen-consumers, but of fellow dancers. As Chaia Heller envisions, 'an erotic democracy [...] decentralizes power and allows for direct, passionate participation in the decisions that determine our lives.'⁸ This participation, based on mutual recognition, is 'a "socio erotic" dance of separateness and connection, a nuanced dialogue which actually enhances and develops the subjectivity of both dancers.'⁹ This anarchist vision of democracy is not merely a hope for a future world, but also a depiction of how erotic, democratic rythms are moving in the world today. Practices of Nonviolent Communication (NVC), in part an effort to shift from a culture of domination to one of connection, move through a dance of expressing oneself, receiving the other and connecting compassionately with oneself¹⁰. Capoeira angola, a dance/martial arts practice that enabled people enslaved in Brazil to liberate themselves is still being practiced by many who desire liberation from more subtle froms of enslavement¹¹. Rave culture is a form of resistance to the commodification of dancing¹². The Clandestine Insurgent Rebel Clown Army invite others to play, to dance, to move and be moved, resisting authority¹³. Banksy's t-shirt design showing armed and masked Zapatistas playing football demonstrates the erotic, playful nature of the democracies they use force to protect¹⁴. On a smaller, everyday scale, hot sex can be an erotic, democratic dance.

Can you imagine a workplace where no one was always on top? Where if you got bored playing secretary (or cleaner, or organiser), you could work things out so you could play a different role? Or if you didn't want to play a role, you could work out ways of sharing all the tasks so you got to try a little of everything?¹⁵ Can you imagine a workplace where everyone tried to make sure that everyone else's needs were met, where boredom was a sign that something has gone horribly wrong and we really need to talk about it? Can you imagine an economy where dancing and playing is free, rather than a 'market' for 'profits' or an activity to be contained? Where non-essential work stops because the weather is gorgeous and folk would rather go to the beach? Can you imagine structures for making decisions for a workplace, a home, a neighbourhood, a village or a region where everyone is encouraged to speak for themselves rather than 'elect representatives'? Think about it the other way around - imagine sex where some people dictate to others the 'right' way to do it and threaten violence against those who break the 'law'. Sex where some focus on their own needs, ignoring the needs of others. Sex where you felt like you had no choices, because that's just the way it is. I imagine that sex like that is easier for many of us to imagine (or remember) than is erotic democracy. Maybe sex is so often less than it could be because the ability to listen to others, to pay attention to our own needs and desires, to negotiate boundaries and explore possibilities could do with more practice than most of us get in a culture of fear. Before even practising, one has to be able to imagine.

The counterspell: tell different stories.

⁸ Heller, C. (1993). For the love of nature: Ecology and the cult of the romantic. In G. Gaard (Ed.), *Ecofeminism: Women, animals, nature*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press, p 240.
⁹ Heller, C. (1999). *Ecology of Everyday Life: Rethinking the Desire for Nature*. Montréal: Black Rose Books, p82.
¹⁰ Rosenberg, M (2003). *Nonviolent Communication: A Language of Life*. Encinitas, CA: PuddleDancer Press.
¹¹ Cooper, N. (Director) (n.d.) *Soma: an anarchist therapy*. More info at <http://somadocumentary.com>
¹² See e.g., Hemment, D. (1998). 'Dangerous dancing and disco riots: the northern warehouse parties' in G. McKay (Ed.), *DIY Culture: Party & Protest in Nineties Britain*. London and New York: Verso.
¹³ See e.g., Jordan, J & Fremeaux, I (aka Kolonel Klepto & Major UpEvil) (2006) 'The Clandestine Insurgent Rebel Clown Army goes to Scotland via a few other places' in Harvie, D; Milburn, K; Trott, B & Watts, D *Shut Them Down! The G8, Gleneagles 2005 and the Movement of Movements*. Leeds and New York:Dissent!/Autonomeia
Dissent!/Autonomeia. Online at <http://www.shutthemdown.org/Resources/Ch%2021.pdf>; and Fremeaux, I & Ramsden, H (forthcoming - 2007) 'We disobey to love: rebel clowning for social justice' in Clover, D & Stalker, J (eds) *The Art of Social Justice: Re-Crafting Adult Education and Community Leadership*. Leicester: NIACE
¹⁴ For more on Zapatista football, see <http://www.zmag.org/content/showarticle.cfm?ItemID=7984>
¹⁵ As advocated in Participatory Economics (ParEcon). See, e.g., Albert, M. (2003) *Parecon : life after capitalism*. London:Verso. Online at <http://www.zmag.org/books/pareconv/parefinal.htm>

the state as institution, but as a cultural pattern of relationships.

The state is not something which can be destroyed by a revolution, but is a condition, a certain relationship between human beings, a mode of human behaviour; we destroy it by contracting other relationships, by behaving differently.²⁰

How do people come to relate to each other differently? By telling different stories.

~ ~ ~

One morning, not that long ago, I answered the door in my dressing gown to the sight of a man from ScottishPower. He asked me why I had chosen to switch to a different energy supplying company. As I explained their chosen one with a slightly better environmental policy, I slowly realised, not only did he have intensely beautiful eyes, but that they were trained on me. I went on to say, performing a bit for this beautiful man, that of course all corporations and indeed capitalism in general is bad for the environment. He agreed, his eyes glowing, but what could he do? He had a mortgage to pay. I'm not quite sure why, perhaps out of fear, I was suddenly channelling some broken record of anarchist propaganda and said, we need resistance on the inside too. That was it. His beautiful eyes looked away and the connection was lost.

I feel a sense of grief for what was lost when I remember that morning. I would have liked to have listened, to better understood the rhythms of his life, of his desires and of mine. When I replay the incident in my mind, I change the ending. I ask him, what would you like to do?

~ ~ ~

The state as institution and the everyday relationships of power on which it depends are characterised by representation, by speaking for others, by saying who they are and what they (should) want. Erotic democracy, on the other hand, is characterised by listening²¹. The stories of novelists and philosophers can inspire desire for erotic democracy and help and people to imagine their own lives. Enacting those desires, realising that which can be imagined, depends much more on really listening, giving ourselves and each other space to tell the stories that really matter. To really listen, to empathise with the joys and pains of each others lives, is incredibly challenging. It means overcoming the strategies of disconnection that so many of us have developed to deal with the pain of living in cultures of domination²². It means letting go of the identities and roles that divide us²³. Fortunately for us, storytellers have been practising, developing exercises to help those who desire it to listen to themselves, each other and the more than human world of which we are a part²⁴. Everyone has to work out for themselves what best enables them to listen and then find others to help them practice this. For, as Le Guin notes, 'nobody can do anything very much, really,

20 Quoted in Gambone, L. (2001) *For Community: The Communitarian Anarchism of Gustav Landauer*. Montreal: Red Lion Press. Online at http://dwardmac.pitzer.edu/Anarchist_Archives/bright/landauer/forcommunity.html

21 This is already happening. See e.g., Notes from Nowhere (2003) *We Are Everywhere: the irresistible rise of global anticapitalism*. London, Verso; Kinsman, G. (2006) 'The Politics of Listening, Asking Questions, and of Opening Cracks in the Fabric of Capitalism' online at http://auto_sol.tao.ca/node/view/2371; Tormey, S. (2006). "Not in my Name": Deleuze, Zapatismo and the Critique of Representation.' *Parliamentary Affairs* 2006 59(1):138-154.

22 Macy, J. and M. Brown (1998). *Coming Back to Life: practices to reconnect our lives, our world*. Gabriola Island: New Society Press.

23 Heckert, J. (2002) 'Maintaining the Borders: politics and identity'. *Greenpepper*, Autumn: 26-28. Online at <http://squat.net/cia/gp/hom3c.php?artid=161&back=/cia/gp/hom.php>

24 Examples I've found inspiring include: Macy, J. and M. Brown (1998). *Coming Back to Life: practices to reconnect our lives, our world*. Gabriola Island: New Society Press; Rosenberg, M (2003). *Nonviolent Communication: A Language of Life*. Encinitas, CA: PuddleDancer Press; and Starhawk (2004). *The Earth Path*. San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco.

alone.²⁵

~ ~ ~

Drawing on various things I've learned about listening over the years, I recently helped to organise a conference on anarchism and sexuality. I was totally overwhelmed by the caring, co-operative and listening culture that evolved over the course of the event. I've often felt like crying at academic conferences, usually out of a frustrated desire for connection and equality. At this conference, I was very close to tears because those desires were given freedom to play and, unlike other events, I would have felt ok if I had cried. Expression of emotion and vulnerability were not only intellectually consistent with the anarchist, feminist and queer traditions inspiring the conference; they were embodied in my experience of it. Like others I've spoken with since, I left the conference feeling very sensitive. I almost cried in the train station café, seeing people who clearly did not want to be doing the work they were doing, despite their efforts at emotional labour demanded of them (i.e., acting as gracious hosts for the customers/guests). I hurriedly drank down my peppermint tea, anxious to catch my train and to escape the pain of the fast-paced workplace, only to be informed by an electronic screen that my train was late. I sat on a cold metal chair, bound with others in a straight line, grieving the loss of the erotic democracy I had experienced the day before when a young woman sat down next to me. Apparently, I still carried with me some of the empathic, listening culture of the conference because it wasn't long before she told me that she had recently tried to commit suicide. Her story, so congruent with the conference topic, struck me profoundly. She was Pakistani and in a clandestine, forbidden, romantic relationship with a young Bangladeshi man. The pressure of lying to her disapproving mother, studying mathematics at university and keeping up appearances with her friends (she told me that she was always the one laughing) had become too much and she overdosed. Desperate to help, I told her about an upcoming feminist health gathering and gave her a copy of Ursula Le Guin's *Four Ways to Forgiveness*, a book of stories whose themes include love's dependence on community to thrive. She expressed interest in the gathering, looked slightly dubious at the book, and thanked me before rushing off to meet her lover who had just arrived on the train. It wasn't until later, with a friend's help, I realised that my gift was not the stories I had given her, but my willingness to listen to hers.

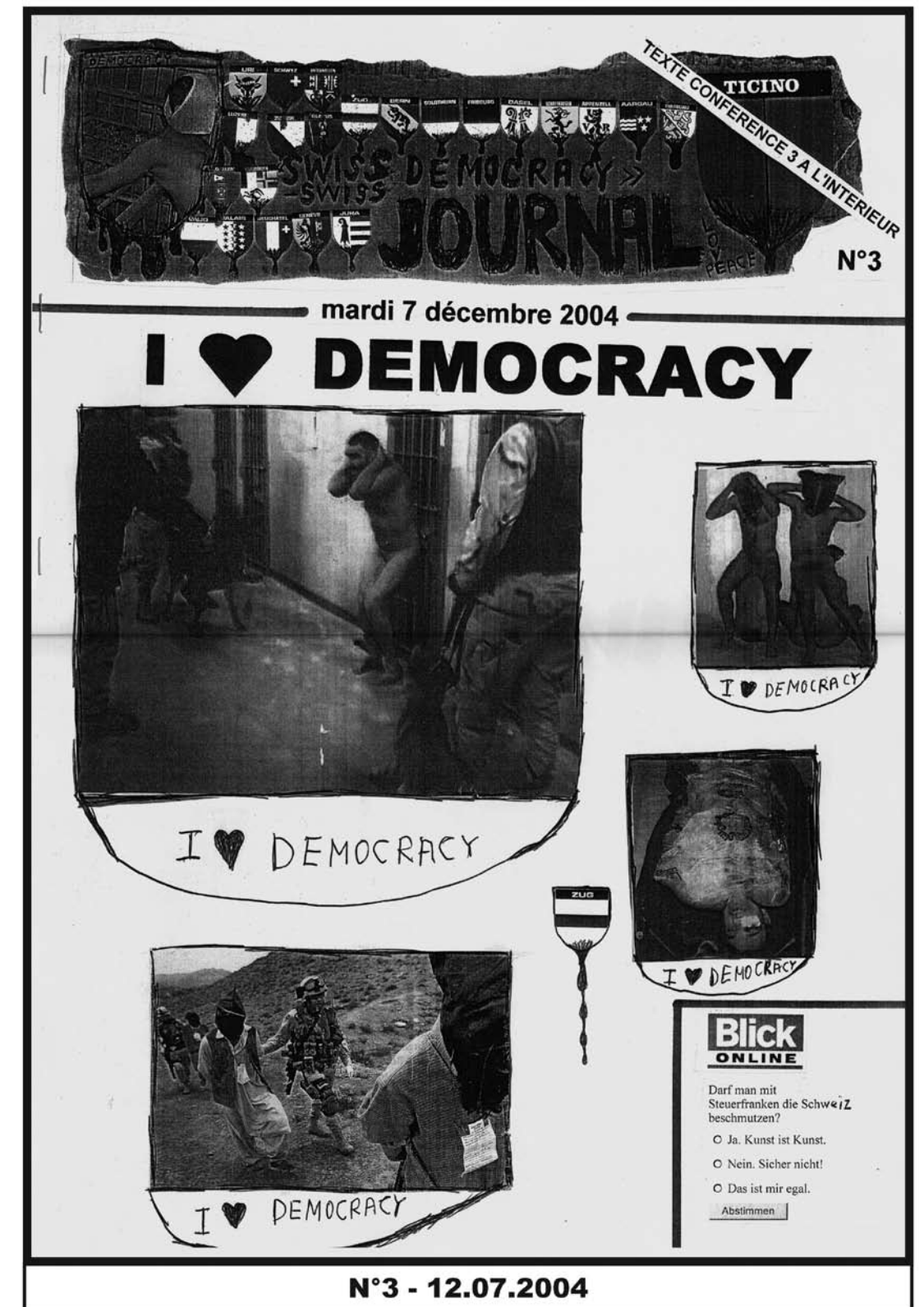
25 Le Guin, U. K. (2004). 'The Operating Instructions .' In *The Wave in the Mind: the talks and essays on the writer, the reader and the imagination*. Boston: Shambhala, p209.

UStrust



I WALK IN THE DOOR
 AROUND ONE O'CLOCK
 I OPEN THE DOOR
 MY HUSBAND'S SNORING
 EVERYONE'S ASLEEP
 I WONDER
 WHY AM I LIVING
 WE HAVE NOTHING
 TO TALK ABOUT
 NO TIME TO TALK
 NOTHING TO DISCUSS
 I DEPEND ON EVERYBODY
 FOR EVERYTHING
 IN THE HOUSE
 YOU SEE THE WALL
 IT'S PRISON HERE.
 TRUTHFULLY, IT'S PRISON
 WE CAN'T GO TOGETHER
 THEY WILL TAKE US AWAY

THOMAS HIRSCHHORN «SWISS-SWISS DEMOCRACY JOURNAL»





"THE MAKING OF AMERICANS"

transcript of Will Holder publicly reciting a recording
of himself reading Gertrude Stein's "The Making of Americans".
(excerpt)

As part of IF I CAN'T DANCE I DON'T WANT TO BE PART OF YOUR
REVOLUTION, Edition II, Part II: Feminist Legacies and
Potentials in Contemporary Art Practice, de Appel, Amsterdam.
January 13th & 14th, 2007

Some time then there will be every kind of a history of every one who ever can or is or was or will be living. Some time then there will be a history of every one from their beginning to their ending. Sometime then there will be a history of all of them, of every kind of them, of every one, of every bit of living they ever have in them, of them when there is never more than a beginning to them, of every kind of them, of every one when there is very little beginning and then there is an ending, there will then sometime be a history of every one there will be a history of everything that ever was or is or will be them, of everything that was or is or will be all of any one or all of all of them. Sometime then there will be a history of every one, of everything or anything that is all them or any part of them and sometime then there will be a history of how anything or everything comes out from every one, comes out from every one or any one from the beginning to the ending of the being in them. Sometime then there must be a history of every one who ever was or is or will be living. As one sees every one in their living, in their loving, sitting, eating, drinking, sleeping, walking, working, thinking, laughing, as any one sees all of them from their beginning to their ending, sees them when they are little babies or children or young grown men and women or growing older men and women or old men and women then one knows it in them that sometime there will be a history of all of them, that sometime all of them will have the last touch of being, a history of them can give to them, sometime then there will be a history of each one, of all the kinds of them, of all the ways any one can know them, of all the ways each one is inside her or inside him, of all the ways anything of them comes out from them. Sometime then there will be a history of every one and so then every one will have in them the last touch of being a history of any one can give to them.

This is then a beginning of the way of knowing everything in every one, of knowing the complete history of each one who ever is or was or will be living. This is then a little description of the winning of so much wisdom.

This is now a history of a number of men and women from their beginning to their ending; these will have then the last touch of being that a history of any one

can give to them, sometime it will be that any one who ever was or is or will be living, sometime then it will be even if they have had only a very little of any living, sometime then it will be that every one will have the last touch of being, a history of them can give to them, sometime then in my feeling there will be a history of every kind of men and women, there will be a history of every one from the beginning to their ending, every one will have sometime before the ending the last touch of being a history of them can give to any one.

So then we go on to our beginning of giving a history of every one from their beginning to their ending so that sometime there will be done a history of every one and every kind of one and all the nature in every one and all the ways it comes out of them. Every one then will be full then of the being a history of every one can give to them, every one of them will have that last touch of being a history of them can give to any one.

And so to commence again with the history of many of them and all the kinds there are of men and women.

Sometime then there will be a history of every one of every man and every woman from their beginning to their ending. Sometime there will be a history of every one and every kind of them and more and more then every one will understand it, how every one is connected with every one in the kind of being they have in them which makes of each one one of their kind of them. More and more then this will be a history of every kind and the way one kind is connected with the other kind of them and the many ways one can think of every kind of men and women as one more and more knows them as their nature is in them and comes out of them in the repeating that is more and more all of them.

There are then many kinds of them but all of them can be divided into the two kinds of them the independent dependent kind of them, the dependent independent kind of them, and more and more there will be a history of all of them so that more and more any one can see it in them. There are always then many kinds of men and women in these two kinds of them and sometime there will be a history of all of them.

To go on then now with the Hersland living in the ten acre place in that part of Gossols where no other

Unlike democracy
the goal of art
and its practices
is not consensus

—Chus Martínez

Murmurs of Art and Democracy¹

‘I like the bit where you can watch the telly.’²

‘Let them paint walls’ was a response to a growing number of unemployed teenagers in the 1970s. ‘This served to demonstrate forcefully the impotence that had resulted from the community arts movement’s decade of grant addiction.’³

In 1976 there was a petition by local people to remove a mural painted by young unemployed people on a Job Creation Programme on the gable end of Voelas Street, Toxteth, Liverpool⁴.

In 1984 a mural called The People of Greenwich Unite Against Racism was painted on the side of the ironmongrer Skillmans in Market Hill, Woolwich. The mural was by the Greenwich Mural Workshop and was commissioned by the Greater London Council. In June 2008 the local paper, The News Shopper reported that ‘People have spoken of their shock after a 24-year old anti-racism mural was painted over’.⁵

‘Hail to this action against police state inforced "diversity" nonsense. It only took 24 years! Such feelgood multicultural propagandist, state-friendly crap is the reason we feel obligated to "save" (read: bomb) other peoples lands to oblivion. Paint over the rest of that imperialist nonsense and erase it from memory!’⁶

In 2008 Munira Mirza, Boris Johnson’s new Cultural Advisor removed the anti-racism message from London’s Rise music festival and barred the Cuba Solidarity Campaign from participating, stating ‘it is no longer appropriate to have overtly political organisations involved in the programme or in the community area’. Instead she wants to ‘keep the vibe positive’ and ‘make Rise fun.’⁷

‘Why the hell is public money subsidising this shindig at all? If so, why not subsidise quiz nite at the Dog and Duck? If folks want to have a party, fine, but let them organise and pay for it themselves. Get real Boris, cut off the money for this nonsense.’⁸

‘If I were Chancellor of the Exchequer I would close down the Arts Council and thus save not only the spirit of our times but also the tax-payers’ money.’⁹

¹ Collated by Sophie Hope on 6 July 2008.

² Feedback from a participant of Liverpool Biennale of Contemporary Art’s STAR project in *I liked Everything: Celebrating New Audiences* by Anna Hassan, Arts Council England, North West, 2004, p.43.

³ *Community, Art and the State, Storming the Citadels* by Owen Kelly. London: Comedia, 1984, p. 35.

⁴ From an unlabelled newspaper cutting. Source: Victoria and Albert Museum, Arts Council of Great Britain (Vam/ACGB): ACGB/112/313/Box No.1.

⁵ *Anti-racist mural painted over* by Mark Chandler, News Shopper, 23 June 2008.

⁶ Response to *Anti-racist mural painted over* by Mark Chandler posted by For Our People, Drexel Hill, United States on 25 Jun 08.

⁷ *Mayor drops anti-racism message* by Matthew Taylor, guardian.co.uk, June 17, 2008 and *Doing anti-racism for real* by Munira Mirza, guardian.co.uk, June 17 2008.

⁸ Response to *Doing anti-racism for real* by Munira Mirza posted by EastEndInfidel on 19 June 2008.

⁹ From an article written in 1954 by Frank O. Salisbury in response to the Arts Council’s support of modern art, *Ugliness is of the Devil* in St. Martin’s Review, 5 Feb 1954. Source: Victoria and Albert Museum, Arts Council of Great Britain (Vam/ACGB): ACGB/32/286.

Art, Democracy and Assassination:

The Case of Yitzhak Rabin

Dana Arieli-Horowitz*

In addition to its immediate implications, terror is a matter of symbols.

Those engaged in terror hope to establish an alternative set of symbols and to

eliminate democracy; not only are their actions intended to change reality,

they imagine an entirely new world. For them terror is in a sense a

metaphoric act with dramatic components, and therefore it is not surprising

that since September 11, 2001 the symbolic, aesthetic, and dramatic aspects

of terror have been explored by various thinkers, including the influential

works of Zizek.¹

Assassination, a kind of terror aimed against the political, in most

cases democratic establishment, and its symbols, is a fascinating research

question which has received a great deal of attention.² Some societies

continue to deal with the implications of political assassination decades after

the event, as is the case with the Kennedy assassination.³ However, while

the institutional aspects of terror and assassinations have been well studied,

the influence of terror on culture has hardly been considered.

In this article I focus on the response of the Israeli artistic community to

the assassination of Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin in November 1995.

The artistic responses to acts of terror have received almost no attention in

the research literature. This negligence is surprising, given that terror in

* I wish to express my deepest appreciation to each of the artists I have talked with and to thank them for access to their thoughts and creations. This brilliant community has taught me how to rethink politics. I wish to apologize for using just a tiny fraction of the valuable information they have presented me with.

general and the assassination of Rabin in particular was, and still is, a very inviting topic for artistic interpretation.⁴

The assassination of Rabin shook the foundations of Israeli society; it exposed schisms, rifts, and disagreements and posed challenges which Israel has not yet begun to face. Studying the artistic reaction to this event will shed light on the boundaries of the national imagination⁵ in a given period, exposing both the dominant and critical worldviews within Israeli society.

In his 1995 *From Art to Politics* Edelman claimed that artists create a “repertoire of images”⁶ which affects our perceptions and notions in politics. Following Edelman I would like to argue that art functions in every society as a sophisticated mode of communication, a sophisticated language which contributes to an understanding of the interrelations between art, culture, society, and politics.

Research on symbols is essential in societies where almost every act has political dimensions. If artistic creation is one of the main sources of symbols within a society, then studying the artistic reactions to political events may shed light on the various symbolic universes⁷ existing within that society. In the Israeli case there is a unique need to study these symbolic universes because of their effect on political behavior. Israel is a very politicized society and therefore it is almost impossible to draw clear lines between art, culture, and politics. The artists’ political burden is evident in both the topics they chose and their worldviews; it is therefore not surprising that in some of the interviews I conducted with them artists have argued that the idea of art for art’s sake is a luxury ill suited to the unique political conditions in Israel. The Israeli case is unique and fascinating because a vast majority of the artists did

react to the assassination, even artists who normally refrain from political issues and see their art as apolitical. This voluntary mobilization requires an explanation, as it stands in contrast to current trends in the research on Israeli society which stress individualism and the collapse of the collective value system. Is it possible that this voluntary mobilization was a result of the need to fight for democracy? How did the artists choose to react to this threat on the Israeli democratic system? Can it, on the other hand, reflect uneasiness and critical opinions regarding the Israeli democratic order? Such questions will stand in the core of this article.

The Artistic Reactions to Political Assassination

This article is based on full-scale open interviews I have conducted with 25 leading Israeli artists from different generations, artistic movements, and styles between 2002 and 2005. Even though each artist has a different level of commitment to the Israeli society and a different political attitude, most of the artists interviewed reacted to the assassination in some way. Their work therefore offers insights into the role of the visual arts in the depiction of a political democratic system in general and political assassinations in particular. Their considerations as to whether or not art should deal with the assassination are crucial to an understanding of the interrelations between art, culture, and politics and of the various political schisms within Israeli society.

I will focus here on the ways in which visual artists responded to the assassination of Yitzhak Rabin. This unique incident in the history of Israel produced a vast array of responses at all levels of society.⁸ Different sections

of Israeli society developed their own specific ways of representing the assassination. One unique sociological phenomenon which appeared included the “youth of the candles”; it has received significant attention.⁹ The intensity of the public response to the assassination was not surprising, and was similar to that in other countries where senior political leaders have been assassinated.¹⁰ The spontaneous response faded away. It has been replaced with a series of attempts to commemorate the late Prime Minister¹¹ and to deal with his death through a process of creating an alternative civic culture in which the visual arts play an important role.

The immediate reaction to the assassination is not the focus of this article. Instead I will focus on the visual arts, assuming that a meaningful repertoire of images will develop from this long-range sophisticated form of communication. They contribute to the establishment of the national imagination and are therefore of great importance. I would argue that studying the various representations of the national imagination while focusing on the visual arts is quite useful.

Some art exhibitions were held in Israel and the United States to commemorate the first and second anniversaries of Rabin’s assassination, but since then the topic has received almost no scholarly attention.¹² One possible explanation is a lack of perspective; there have been many cases where trauma led to a silencing of the Muses, and artists did not respond for a period of time.¹³

The art produced in Israel in response to the assassination is far from being stylistically homogeneous, and therefore I suggest looking at the reactions of the artistic community while focusing on two major issues:

- 1) What can be learned from the timing of the reaction? Some works anticipated the assassination while others were done immediately after; still others appeared later. What does artistic prophecy indicate and is there something unique about the artists’ processes of mourning?
- 2) What can be learned from the contents of the responses about the boundaries of the national imagination? Some artists stressed the universal aspects of the assassination, while others saw it as a threat to the coherence of Israeli society and the end of the Zionist dream. In certain cases the assassination is described in the context of the Jewish Bible, as contradicting Jewish tradition, or as a trauma which can be compared with that of the Holocaust.

The questions of timing and contents clearly cannot be completely separated from one another, and some overlap exists.

The final section of this paper concentrates on how the artists’ position themselves relative to the dominant or formalist worldviews within Israeli society. This section is devoted to critical and anti-establishment positions which have mainly been expressed by the younger generation of Israeli artists.

Prophecy or Mourning: The Timing of the Artistic Reaction

The shock of the assassination led to a variety of spontaneous responses among artists. These immediate reactions were later considered by some artists to be “non art” or “low” art. The division between immediate and delayed responses to the assassination overlaps that between “low” and

“high” art.¹⁴ The concentration of most of the artistic activity after the assassination in “low” media such as graffiti and posters is not surprising;¹⁵ it stemmed from the immediate need to react.

Graffiti appeared spontaneously after the assassination. It was produced by and aimed at the general population, and was mainly found in the cities. Donner has included many examples of this sort of graffiti in the catalogue *Map of Memory* and has argued it represented a “spontaneous commemoration” and a transformation of the site where Rabin was assassinated (later renamed “Rabin Square”) from the public arena to a private one.¹⁶

The spontaneous commemoration is beyond the scope of this discussion, but its function as an area of commemoration did stand at the center of a later artistic creation. In a series of photographs entitled “The Day After”, Miki Krasman and others dealt with the graffiti-filled walls at the center of Rabin Square. “We glued some photos of Rabin and next to them photos of soldiers and scenes dealing with the occupation. Sometimes we came at three o’clock in the morning and glued our works. It is interesting how some of those pictures survived while others were taken off the wall immediately. When we put up a picture of [Benjamin] Netanyahu it was taken off immediately, as was the case with the Palestinians.”¹⁷

Other artists preferred to delay their reactions. One example can be seen in the work of David Reeb, one of the leading political artists active in Israel. Reeb’s decision to delay his response was not accidental; it resulted from the overexploitation of the assassination by other artists. He explained that “in the case of Rabin the whole state was mobilized and therefore I had

absolutely no motivation to create. Every other thing in those days had something to do with Rabin, I did not want to become a part of it.”¹⁸ When Reeb was asked to do a painting for an exhibition commemorating the first anniversary of the assassination, he refused. In 1999 he came across a series of photos by Miki Kratzman depicting Rabin and Arens as one replaced the other as Defense Minister [figure 1]. “The photos looked very interesting since they showed a different Rabin. The figures [Rabin and Arens] are obviously very political and the occasion was political but they all look very humane. This is why I found it interesting. It could well be that because I knew he had been murdered it became fascinating, in a morbid way.”¹⁹ Reeb’s persistence to depict Rabin in the midst of a political scene, one that is a reflection of the democratic order is aimed at emphasizing and stability of the political system.

For some artists, the decision not to deal with the assassination yet is the result of a need for time to grasp the event.²⁰ The need for a substantial period of time can be seen in the interview with Micha Ullman. Ullman believes it will take a long time before he will be able to react to Rabin’s assassination and that there is a need for a significant gap. For Ullman, born in Israel in 1939, Rabin’s assassination is similar to the most traumatic event the Jewish people have experienced. “I have no doubt that the assassination of Rabin is an event of enormous meaning, it is beyond any scale. Like the Holocaust. I do not want to say Holocaust because somebody might think that this is slighting it, but it certainly shakes the foundations of our temple.”²¹ Ullman use of such a radical expression is no accident; during the interview

David Reeb



he expresses continuously his fears regarding the stability of the Israeli Democracy.

Constructing the National Imagination: The Contents of the Works

While the timing of the artistic reaction can be very telling about the worldviews of the artists within Israeli society, the contents of the works of art indicate something about the way in which the national imagination is being constructed. In this section I focus on the various ways in which the assassination was seen by the artists.

Most of the artists chose not to deal with the image of Rabin or with that of his assassin directly. As they explained in the interviews, this choice reflected their view of the role of the artists in society. For them, mobilized art did not fit their role in a democratic society. Direct depiction of Rabin would be too obvious and would give the impression that their art was explicitly meant to be a tool for commemoration.

At the same time, the few artists who did deal with the two figures directly are known as political artists. As late as 1999 Igaël Tumarkin, probably the best-known political artist active in Israel, used a photograph of Rabin as a model for a series of sculptures. During the interview, Tumarkin stressed that the initiator of the project was an Israeli gallery owner and that the work had been ordered. Even though he is a political artist accustomed to accusations that he uses his art as a tool, Tumarkin explained that he is unhappy with this project. as it hardly resembles Rabin.²²

It is not surprising that Tumarkin, the *enfant terrible* of the Israeli art world, was the only artist from the “elder” generation (artists born before 1948)

brave enough to use the image of Yigal Amir,²³ as he did in a series of works done for the first anniversary of the assassination. In this case Tumarkin again stresses the “low” qualities of these works and argues that they were made “to serve as posters”. He thus appears to see a connection between the contents of the work and the “quality” of the product.

Pinchas Cohen Gan also chose an image of Rabin for the center of his “From Herzl to Rabin to Infinity” (Figure 2). Cohen Gan used the famous image of Herzl on the balcony in Basel when he proclaimed the idea of the state of Israel, and linked it with black stripes to a photograph of Rabin. The artist chose a photo which had been distributed in the daily newspapers after the assassination together with Clinton’s words “Shalom, Haver” from the end of his obituary. Cohen Gan’s choice to place both images on the back side of the canvas may hint at his belief that the assassination marked the end of Zionism. However, he has stressed that he hardly ever engages himself directly with political issues or figures. For him Rabin was an exception. “It’s because I knew him. It touched my heart. I was in a state of depression after the murder. Even today it does not make sense, it is not clear yet. It is full of contradictions. There is something dark about it. It is a dark event in the history of the Jews. In our history.”²⁴

Though there are a small number of works in which Rabin’s image appears directly, most of the artistic reactions to the assassination were inferred and indirect. These sophisticated depictions hint at the boundaries of the national imagination of Israeli society and suggest several interpretations for the assassination and its outcomes. The decision to depict this political event using inferred and indirect images is a fascinating one; it reveals a rich

Pinchas
Cohen-Gan



repertoire of images reflecting pluralism in a democratic society. I would like to suggest a broad division of these works into universal, Zionist, and religious interpretations. This division of the interpretations used by the artists may suggest something about the components of the Israeli national imagination in an era of political instability.

Rabin's Assassination as a Threat to the Coherence of Israeli Society

Most of the works done after the assassination stressed its tragic dimensions; it threatened the very essence of Zionist values and the coherence of Israeli society. This unprecedented event led some artists to question whether Israeli society could survive, to reflect on the strength of Israeli democracy, and even, in some cases, to criticize Israeli myths and symbols which seemed to have led to the assassination.

In the period immediately after November 1995 the photographers Gilad Ophir and Roi Kuper began to work on "Necropolis", a project that depicts desiccated, isolated, and abandoned army camps along the border between Israel and Egypt (Figure 3). For Ophir this was the only possible way to face the assassination. "Rabin's murder completely changed our perspective toward photography. It gave a much less optimistic feeling. I was moving into a more apocalyptic, pessimistic [mood] than I had previously. I cannot say that it changed the level of creation. I assume that the act of photography stayed pretty much the same. It affected consciousness."²⁵

Ophir worked on military subjects, also depicting a Mercedes Jeep used as a target on an army shooting range. The strong feelings of destruction, neglect, decay, and solitude apparent in his works do convey a

Gilad Ophir



sense of pessimism. His choice of army targets in the midst of a peace process reflects Ophir's position on the current state of Israeli myths and may hint at the idea that admiration of the military in Israeli society may have led to this outcome. The viewer is confronted with the sobriety of killing and the certainty of death, and the choice of a German vehicle as the target just adds to the context of death.

"Ash Cities" were Joshua Neustein's way of dealing with the assassination. "I started with "Ash Cities" after the assassination of Rabin and I have continued since. My reaction is never direct."²⁶ While Neustein's art hardly ever deals directly with political figures or events, choosing Winston-Salem, North Carolina as his first ash city was hardly accidental. Neustein explained that "the city interested me because their history resembles that of Israel. They began in the eighteenth century with a wonderful socialist utopia and gradually became a violent and oppressive society.... Israeli society also began with an idea and high motivation, but in my opinion it has turned into one of the most oppressive societies. I do not mean oppressive toward the Arabs. I am talking about the relations among the Jews themselves."²⁷ Choosing Winston-Salem as a symbol of destruction and using the word "ash" in the title hints at Neustein's pessimism and his feeling that the assassination represents extremism, a threat to the democratic order but also suggests the end of the coherence of the society. As in Ophir's work, the word "ash" in itself might hint at the Holocaust as well.

Ido Bar-El used street signs; the ones he did before the assassination were blue and white guide signs, while those after November 1995 are yellow warning signs. Looking back on the work, he noted the change of colors.

"What becomes evident is that the signs I did after became yellow. It is a very strong thing as opposed to the blue and white I did before." [Figure 4] The yellow color did not serve only as a warning. When I asked if he was referring to the yellow patch the Jews were forced to wear during the Holocaust, he said, "for Jews that is obviously the case. There were warning signs. They present discomfort, they were big signs with a clear yellow presence."²⁸

For Bar-El the assassination symbolized a new encounter with the death of his father but even more the death of the collective father of Zionism. "My father served under Rabin in the *Palmach*. He passed away a few years ago. So Rabin became, in a certain way, a substitute. He was a collective father, no doubt.... On the personal as well as the institutional level, there is really nothing more horrible than this.... It's regarded as the end of the state, the end of our dream." No wonder the "end of the state" is reflected in the removal of the official colors of the Israeli flag [blue and white] and replacing them with colors of warning signs.

The assassination is also seen as the end of Zionism in the work by Cohen Gan, "From Herzl to Rabin", and in Kovner's series "The End of the Dream". In the latter, done after the assassination, Kovner chose to indicate the end of the dream by using symbols of Zionism such as the cow, a down-to-earth animal representing praxis, and the heron, symbolizing the sky and vision. However, the heron is dead (Figure 5). Kovner recently completed another work dealing with the assassination. "Normally I do not react politically. But I completed in New York a big picture I worked on for two years (2001-2002). I called it "Dead End". It's a huge wall with many windows and doors and they are all closed. I look at it as the Jewish

Michael Kovner



Ido Bar El



karma.... After the assassination I felt the need to react to the current situation.”²⁹

The assassination as leading to a “dead end” can also be seen in the work of Larry Abramson. His feelings about the peace process and the chances of achieving a solution are summed up in his 1998 work “Shalom, Shalom”. A variety of meanings are encompassed in this brilliant work; using the Hebrew word “Shalom” twice hints not only at the inability to achieve peace under the present circumstances but also at Clinton’s “Shalom, Haver”.

Deconstructing the Hebrew word shalom into its four constituent Hebrew letters and thus to eight different panels/paintings was intentional. “I feel I can start working on something when it reaches a stage that it is so full that it becomes empty. Only then it is possible to look at it from the beginning. Here I was starting to look again at the word shalom. I think it represents a complete reconstruction. It is apparent in every letter.” When I asked if this work was done in reference to Rabin’s assassination or to Clinton’s sentence Abramson insisted that he was not thinking about either one. “I wasn’t thinking about Rabin. What was I thinking of? I was thinking about destruction, about ruins.”³⁰

Rabin’s Assassination Compared to the Holocaust

Rabin’s assassination was seen as an event of such magnitude that some artists reacted to it as being equivalent to the Holocaust. These artists probably chose the Holocaust as a comparison because they wanted to express the deviant nature of the event. They found in the assassination a

grain of destruction that contradicted the essence of Jewish tradition and Jewish religion as they understand it. It is therefore not surprising that these artists, most of them secular, chose a comparison with the Holocaust, as in both cases religious beliefs stand at the center of the events.

In his reaction to the assassination, Motti Mizrachi explicitly used symbols that can be seen as referring to the Holocaust. He placed the words “Shalom, Haver” written in Braille on an image designed as a bar of soap (Figure 6). For Mizrachi this was the only possible way to deal with the assassination. “I was referring to the inability to listen and communicate. I did many works on the topic of “Shalom, Haver” most of which I placed on the arm, like the [tattooed] numbers from the Holocaust, but in Braille. Like a tattoo.”³¹ This straightforward creation needs no interpretation; it is extremely provocative and leaves its audience with a strong sense of the inability to bridge between different sections of society. While there may be no chance for dialog, there are different layers of interpretation. Mizrachi is far from clear; he does not explain which sections within society cannot interact, nor why he looks at this event as being as traumatic as the Holocaust.

Boaz Arad chose a different angle to argue that the assassination was as unusual in the history of Israel as the Holocaust was in the history of the Jewish people. In his video work “Loop, or the Library of Yigal Amir” (Figure 7) he created a comparison between Adolf Hitler and Yigal Amir; the artist himself wears a mask of Hitler and stands in front of a camera. In the back we can see Hitler’s/Amir’s library. Arad explained that “Amir is the outcome of violent incitement and acts according to the statement included in the Passover Haggadah ‘in every generation men rise up against us’.”³² The title

Motti Mizrachi



Boaz Arad and Miki Krazman



of the work hints at the switched identity, and Arad suggests that the real oppressor now acts from within. He is aiming not only at the complicated relations between religion and the state in Israel, but also at the fact that Israel now has its own Hitler, one who cannot be considered part of society.

Critical, Anti-establishment, and Post-Zionist Reactions

The vast majority of the artists who express such critical positions belong to the younger generation (born after 1960). These artists prefer direct and explicit contents and do not see the politicization of their art as a problem. Art with overt political contents which deal directly with the figure of Rabin or his assassin is often found among these artists, as in the case of Boaz Arad's "Loop, or the Library of Yigal Amir". This is not the only work in which Arad, an Israeli video artist and photographer, reflected critical views of society.

Unaware of Krasman's photos of Rabin Square at the time, Arad chose it as the site for his activities. His work dealt with the commemoration of commemoration, hoping to testify to what he saw as a national denial of the assassination evident in the "establishment" decision to remove the graffiti from the walls. "I believe that the graffiti was stopped because the authorities were afraid it might lead to civic revolt. They thought that having the crowd writing graffiti and expressing their thoughts was 'dangerous to the regime'. The power of this place was unlimited, therefore there was a need to eliminate it. And that's what they did. They created a 'sterile site'. They covered the whole place. Even the graffiti was covered. There is nothing authentic about this place anymore. It was corrupted.... It was very important for me to commemorate this moment."³³ In his photographs Arad depicts the process

of framing the walls in order to stop the graffiti. His critical position and ironic point of view are evident in the images of religious people helping to give the square its new design (Figure 8). Arad critical position towards the Israeli establishment is evident also in the movie *20:40*.

This movie was a mutual work of Arad and Kratzman and it was completed in 2002. It tries to reconstruct the actual assassination, on Saturday, November 4, 1995 at 20:40 P.M. Both artists stress their uneasiness with the fact that in an era of mass communication there exists no media coverage of the assassination. In the absence of such a formal document no wonder conspiracy theories thrive. To reflect their uneasiness, various people, none of them real actors, were asked to memorize the event and explain in front of the camera what they remember. The outcome is a very ironic and critical film which has sometimes caused its audiences to laugh. Arad has reacted to this fact. "I would like people to ask themselves why they are laughing about Rabin's assassination. How did it become a comedy?"³⁴ While some sectors of Israeli society would probably find this movie offensive, the very fact that it was made shows that art which is critical, post-Zionist, and not willing to adhere to collective and establishment positions was produced as part of the process of commemoration.

Summary

The art produced in Israel as a response to the assassination of Rabin is varied and far from stylistically homogeneous. While the artists responded to the event with differing degrees of intensity and dealt with different aspects, it is still surprising that most of the artists (22 of 25) voluntarily mobilized

Boaz
Arad



themselves to react to the assassination. In addition, of the three who have not yet reacted, two claim that they are still going to do so.

A number of conclusions can be drawn from the artistic reactions to the assassination, some of them relevant to the effects of terror on democratic societies. The act of the assassination, aimed at a symbol of power, was so provocative that it led to a reaction which crossed borders. At the same time, the different contents, iconography, and meanings of the works of art indicate pluralism

In the Israeli case, the reaction to the assassination stemmed from a feeling, shared by most artists, that it posed a threat to the coherence of society and the political system and was aimed at a symbol at the heart of the political establishment and democratic society. The artists' need to react stemmed not only from the fact that this was an exceptional political event, but mostly from their understanding that the assassination represents a crucial turning point in the history of Israel. The artists were therefore willing to put aside, for a while, their individualist worldviews and subordinate their creation to collective issues. During the years after the assassination some of them chose to foster consensus and return to common or agreed-upon components of the national imagination.

This shared belief may explain why some of the artists chose to compare the assassination to the Holocaust, and may also explain why the reaction was not limited to "political" artists. While it was expected that artists such as Tumarkin, Reeb, and Geva would react, as they normally deal with political issues, the reaction of the rest of the community is striking. Even those who normally refrain from political themes and see their art as apolitical

chose to express their point of view. As the interviews showed, the assassination was the first political event in the history of Israeli society which made some of these artists react.³⁵

The debates over official commemoration continue in Israel, but it is clear that the scale of this event shook the foundations of society. This is probably the best explanation why some artists explicitly compared the assassination to the Holocaust, while others suggested indirectly that Rabin's assassination should be seen in the perspective of Jewish history and not only in the context of Israeli politics or the peace process. The choice of such a point of view is not accidental; it reflects the trauma Israeli society is facing, one that led to an almost universal need to react. Only time will tell what the role of this polarity of visions and various interpretations will be in the shaping of Israeli society and its national imagination.

List of Illustrations:

- figure 1 David Reeb, **Untitled**, 1999
- figure 2 Pinchas Cohen-Gan, **From Herzl to Rabin to infinity**, 1995
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- figure 7 Boaz Arad, **Loop, or the library of Yigal Amir**
- figure 8 Boaz Arad and Miki Krazman, **21:40**, 2002

¹ Slavoj Žižek, *Welcome to the Desert of the Real*, London: Verso, 2002.

² David C. Rapoport, *Assassination and Terrorism*, Toronto: CBC, 1971; Franklin L. Ford, *Political Murder: From Tyrannicide to Terrorism*, Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1985; Walter Laqueur (ed.), *The Terrorism Reader: From Aristotle to the IRA and the PLO*, New York: Meridian, 1978.

³ There are other Western countries where senior political figures have been assassinated. For Weimar Germany see Emil J. Gumbel, *Vier Jahre politischer Mord*, in: Kaes, Jay, Dimenberg (eds.) *The Weimar Republic Sourcebook*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994, pp. 100-104. The assassination of President John F. Kennedy has received some scholarly attention. See Art Simon, *Dangerous Knowledge: The JFK Assassination in Art and Film*, Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1996.

⁴ For a more detailed discussion of Rabin's assassination and its reflection in the Israeli art scene see: Dana Arieli-Horowitz, *Creators in Overburden: Rabin*

Assassination, Art and Politics, Magnes – the Hebrew University Press and Bezalel, Jerusalem, 2005 [In Hebrew]. One can argue that the diplomatic incident between Israel and Sweden on January 17, 2004, resulting from an art installation by Dror Filer, is a good example of this argument.

⁵ Anderson uses this concept and claims that newspapers and novels exemplify the first appearances of imagination in eighteenth-century Europe. See Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, London, 1983.

⁶ Edelman explains that our political attitudes are derived from a repertoire of images which is mainly based on works of art. See Murray Edelman, *From Art to Politics: How Artistic Creations Shape Political Conceptions*, Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1995, p. 1.

⁷ For a detailed discussion of symbolic universes and their meanings, see Nachman Ben-Yehuda, *Political Assassination by Jews: A Rhetorical Device for Justice*, New York: State University of New York Press, 1993, pp. 7-11.

⁸ Ben-Yehuda has emphasized that, though political figures have been assassinated since the establishment of the State, none was as senior as Rabin. Most of the assassinations he studied (from 1880 to 1980) occurred before 1948. See Nachman Ben-Yehuda, "Saturday Evening, 4 November 1995, Kings of Israel Square, Tel Aviv: Political Murders in Israel," *Alpayim*, 12 (1996): 182, 192 (Hebrew).

⁹ For the "youth of the candles", see Tamar Rapaport, *The Voice of the Youth – All of the Youth? The Responses of Youth to the Assassination of Rabin*, Jerusalem: Institute for Researching Advancement in Education, The Hebrew University, 1997 (Hebrew); Avishai Margalit, "How Will We Remember the Assassination of Rabin" in *Political Assassination: The Murder of Rabin and Political Assassinations in the Middle East*, Charles S. Liebman (ed.), Tel Aviv: Am Oved, 1998, p. 62; Haim Hazan, "Rabin's Burial Ground: Revisiting a Zionist Myth" in *The Assassination of Yitzhak Rabin*, Yoram Peri (ed.), Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2000, p. 237.

¹⁰ For the assassination of John F. Kennedy and the mourning patterns that followed, see John Hellmann, *The Kennedy Obsession: The American Myth of JFK*, New York: Columbia University Press, 1997.

¹¹ A great deal has been written about the commemoration of Rabin. See for example Eliezer Witztum and Ruth Malkinson, "The Cultural and Social Construction of Mourning Patterns" in *The Assassination of Yitzhak Rabin*, pp. 244-256; Michael Feige, "Yitzhak Rabin: His Commemoration and the Commemoration of his Commemoration" in *Contested Memory: Myth, Nation and Democracy*, Lev Grinberg (ed.), Beer Sheva: Humphrey Institute for Social Research, 2000, pp. 39-64 (Hebrew).

¹² Catalogues were published for the exhibitions commemorating the first and second anniversaries of the assassination. These, however, did not include explanations or theoretical analysis; they only provided a list of the works displayed and spontaneous responses by citizens from the period directly after the assassination. See Batya Donner, *Map of Memory: The Commemorative Space for the Memory of Yitzhak Rabin*, Tel Aviv: Eretz Israel Museum, 1996 (Hebrew); Susan T. Goodman (ed.), *After Rabin: New Art from Israel*, New York, The Jewish Museum, 1997.

¹³ For example, the artistic response to the Holocaust was delayed, in some cases for more than twenty years. See Ziva Amishai-Maisels, *Depiction and Interpretation: The Influence of the Holocaust on the Visual Arts*, Oxford: Pergamon Press, 1993.

¹⁴ The distinction between "low" and "high" is common in the scholarly literature on the visual arts as a result of the exhibition of the same name, though recently often criticized. See Kirk Varnedoe, Adam Gopnik (eds.), *High and Low: Modern Art, Popular Culture*, New York: The Museum of Modern Art, 1990.

¹⁵ Linda-Renée Bloch, "Rhetoric on the Roads of Israel: The Assassination and Political Bumper Stickers" in *The Assassination of Yitzhak Rabin*, pp. 257-279.

¹⁶ Batya Donner, *Map of Memory: The Commemorative Space for the Memory of Yitzhak Rabin*, pp. 89, 91. Illustrations are included in pp. 36-37, 48. Vinitzky-Sarrousi discusses the urban dimensions of the response in Vered Vinitzki-Sarrousi, "Between Jerusalem and Tel-Aviv: Rabin's commemoration and the discourse of national identity in Israel," *Contested Memory: Myth, Nation and Democracy*, Lev Grinberg (ed.), Beer Sheva: Humphrey Institute for Social Research, 2000, pp. 19-37.

¹⁷ Interview with Miki Kratsman (b. 1959), October 23, 2002.

¹⁸ Interview with David Reeb (b. 1952), September 23, 2002.

¹⁹ Interview with Reeb.

²⁰ Out of the 25 artists interviewed only 3 did not react to the assassination (Gerstien, Ullman and Rosen). Rosen claimed that he is currently working on the topic. Interview with Roe Rosen (b. 1963), December 12, 2002.

²¹ Interview with Micha Ullman (b. 1939), September 30, 2002.

²² Interview with Tumarkin.

²³ Uri Lifschitz did a series of works on Margalit Har-Sheffi, a student at Bar-Ilan University who was later convicted for not passing along the information she had regarding Yigal Amir's plans to assassinate Rabin. Interview with Uri Lifschitz, (b. 1936) July 21, 2003.

²⁴ Interview with Pinchas Cohen Gan (b. 1942), October 16, 2002.

²⁵ Interview with Gilad Ophir (b. 1957), September 3, 2002.

²⁶ Interview with Joshua Neustein (b. 1940), November 4, 2002.

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Interview with Ido Bar-El (b. 1959), December 12, 2002.

²⁹ Interview with Kovner.

³⁰ Interview with Larry Abramson (b. 1954), November 27, 2002.

³¹ Interview with Motti Mizrachi (b. 1946), August 26, 2002.

³² Interview with Boaz Arad (b. 1956), November 28, 2002.

³³ Interview with Arad.

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ This comment was repeated in a few interviews but I found it particularly telling in the case of Lea Nikel. Interview with Lea Nikel (b. 1918), January 7, 2004.

JACQUES LACAN—
...si vous vous êtes
là comme ça exprimé
devant ce public,
qui en effet est
tout prêt à entendre
des déclarations
insurrectionnelles,
mais qu'est-ce que
vous voulez faire?

—Benoit Marie

Art and Terror: The Israeli Case

Dana Arieli-Horowitz

Radical changes swept over Israeli Society all through the 1990s; individualistic, post-collectivistic, post-Zionistic, and even A-Zionistic are just some amongst many adjectives by which it was described by its analysts. So it seemed logical that as I set out to study the interrelations between art and politics in Israel I would find a “matching” art world; one that is escapist, individualistic, and apolitical, one which tend to acknowledge art for art’s sake.

Israeli art has complex relations with history and politics. Some of the “official” spokesmen of the Israeli art world, art historians, art critics, and art educators, even claim that from the 1960s through the 1980s Israeli Art didn’t dialogue with Israeli politics.. Except for a few known political artists, they add, most artists waived their right to fly political banners. Israeli art institutions, either reacting to this phenomenon or sustaining it, tended to keep politics out of the museums.¹

But was this really the case? Could the art scene of a hyper-political society truly be apolitical? Could a collectivist society, in which art served as a leading tool in the process of nation building, suddenly become one where art was a reflection of a post-collectivist, post-Zionist trend, with no reference to the political or historical contexts?

As we shall see, if there was ever a phase in Israeli art where it appeared to be apolitical, this phase certainly came to an end during the last two decades. There have always been waves of the political in Israeli art. Some of them were connected to the period of nation building and the desire to use art as a reflection of ideology. Controversial wars, such as those in 1973 and 1982, and controversial issues such as immigration also found echoes in Israeli art. The debate over the preferred solution to the Palestinian conflict has also appeared in Israeli art. Still, these waves seemed to disappear after a while, leaving the

scene to those who claimed that art should not deal with the political unless it was willing to become a political poster.

Looking at art produced in Israel over the last two decades I believe that there is a need for a complete change in perspective which should lead to both studies of the enduring political wave sweeping Israeli art since the 1990s and a rewriting of the historiography of Israeli art. After visiting over fifty studios of leading Israeli artists during the last four years, I believe that I can claim that the political is very much evident in all facets of cultural activity. From the beginning of the 1990s, a young generation of artists who were not willing to obey the logic of art for art’s sake have been giving the political center stage. The political is not just an echoed in the art scene but rather a leading inductive factor.

There are indeed artists, who do not deal with the political, yet the majority does, and to such a great extent that it seems almost impossible to distinguish where politics ends and art begins. The overwhelming presence of the political in the Israeli art world leads me to question the official historiography of Israeli art.

This paper is dedicated to one particular case study; it deals with reflections of acts of terror in an artistic framework.² These fragmented reflections, so heterogeneous and intense, call for an explanation. After carrying out yet another case study, one which concentrated on the political assassination of Israeli Prime Minister Y. Rabin in 1995,³ I would go as far as underlining the impellent need for an in-depth reexamination and rewriting of the interrelations of art and politics in Israel; going back as far as 1906 the year Bezalel was founded...

In the following pages I present a preliminary typology which may facilitate different readings of Israeli art dealing with terror. Certainly, there is a need to further study the reactions of the artistic community to terror. Hopefully, some of the works discussed can be explained using the following typologies.

National trauma and Cultural trauma

Jeffery Alexander claims that a *national trauma* occurs when a group of people feel that they have experienced an event which marked them deeply. Such an event is so powerful that it may affect their future behavior.⁴ Following Alexander I will use the term ***cultural trauma***, which I believe fits situations where national traumas are apparent in all spheres of culture and creation. I think that it is appropriate to use the term cultural trauma only when the vast majority of artists within a community react to a specific event. Not all national traumas will produce cultural ones, and only in rare cases is there an intensity of reaction in the artistic sphere to justify this term. These reactions share a repeated theme which is probably the result of the remarkable traces left on those exposed to the same national trauma. In addition to the repeated theme there should be a variety of styles and techniques which is characteristic to art produced within a democratic system. Therefore, although at first glance this theme may be interpreted as mobilized art, it is actually much more complex, reflecting heterogeneous world views, calling for a deep comprehension of the various layers of the creative works.

In this paper I claim that the acts of terror known as the *Al Aqsa Intifada*, or the *Second Intifada*, to which both Israeli and Palestinian societies were exposed during the years 2000-2004, produced a body of creative work which fit the term cultural trauma. There are many precedents for art reacting to terror,⁵ and I certainly do not claim that politics and terror force their way into art only in Israel, nevertheless, the uniqueness of the Israeli case is due to its intensity, its all-embracing extent, and the variety of styles which artists use when dealing with terror.

Art produced in reaction or in relation to terror is the focal point of the present discussion. The artistic community unconsciously and unintentionally produced a flood of creation with terror at its core; most of the artists I interviewed reacted to acts of terror⁶ by depicting both the Israeli and the

Palestinian sides. This intensity points to a cultural trauma; a fascinating and a thrilling one which reflects heterogeneous world views.

Not only does the intensity of the art justify the term cultural trauma, it appears that the methods, techniques, and materials chosen by the artists in some cases, hint at a post-traumatic reaction and even at a post traumatic therapeutic treatment. Some artists feel a need to go back to all the places where acts of terror have occurred; others try to digest horrifying images taken at the scene.

A fascinating example of a process of creation which seems to have had therapeutic value comes from the studio of Gal Weinstein [born 1970]. Weinstein took the images of Saddam Hussein's sons Cusai and Uadai, and through the materials he chose to work with hints, perhaps unconsciously, at creation as therapy.⁷ [image 1] When the viewer looks at these 100x70 cm. images, he immediately feels that something is wrong. When I asked Weinstein how he got hold of the images he answered that they were the images of Saddam Hussein's two dead sons, released by the American media probably as part of its war propaganda. Weinstein uses felt, hardly a commonly used material in fine arts and certainly not today. If felt ever comes to mind in a creative context, the context is crafts and recreation hour in an old-age home. We connect felt with therapy.

The term therapy is suitable in Weinstein's case because a lot of work was needed in order to achieve his results. The effect of the felt becomes even more chilling given the long hours Weinstein had to spend with the images of the dismembered, crushed, distorted figures of the two dead sons of Hussein. Yet the artist does not turn away from horror - he faces it, acknowledges it, crossing looks with the disaster and holding on.

The process Merav Sodaey [born 1970] is experiencing while working on her terror art is yet another attempt at art as therapy. Sodaey takes images of buses after they were blown up and translates them into her own private, imaginary scary fairyland. [image 2] Her bus line 32a is based on a press photograph of the 32a bus line after it was blown up in Jerusalem in June 2002.



This overly familiar news-image of the smoking skeleton of what once was a bus whose massacred passengers are laid out in rows packaged in black plastic bags turns into a glittering, shimmering, and seductive scene. "There is a chilling contrast between the content and the form, between the subject matter and the decorative aesthetics of the work, which makes it almost unbearable", says curator Tami Katz Freiman.⁸ Like the *Zaka*⁹ organization who nominated themselves responsible for cleansing the "scene" and obsessively collecting all remains of flesh for burial, Sodaey adds detail to detail and translates horror into kitsch. At first glance it looks like a beautiful pointillistic work, and indeed there are visible traces of pointillistic technique when she uses felt-tip pens on silk paper. Sodaey's techniques give me the impression that she is not only hoping to heal herself through art, but that she also, like Weinstein, is dealing with the trauma hands on.

In addition to buses Sodaey has tackled the theme of the female suicide bomber. Female suicide bombers are a unique political and sociological phenomenon which appeared in the second Intifada. As a female artist she concentrates on erotic temptation when approaching this issue. Palestinian terrorist organizations invest great resources in recruiting young men and women for their jihad. They try to persuade the men that if they were to sacrifice their lives for the liberation of their land from the Zionist conqueror they would gain 72 pure virgins in heaven. Female suicide bombers are coxed by the promise of a wedding to be celebrated in heaven with their betrothed - the male suicide bombers. Thus Sodaey stresses the irony in the title of another work, "Female suicide bombers for male suicide bombers". This time, she uses images from the media that she works into a beautiful, if chilling, alienation. Her use of acrylic on canvas is done with the intention of imitating Gobelin needlework. Even though the image is one of a body hacked to pieces, the needlework processing makes it seem detached and far away.

Israeli art dealing with terror hints in many cases at post-trauma. Michal Heiman [born 1954] says that she has been collecting blood stains, that is, images of blood from the media, for many years, yet during 2002 she felt the

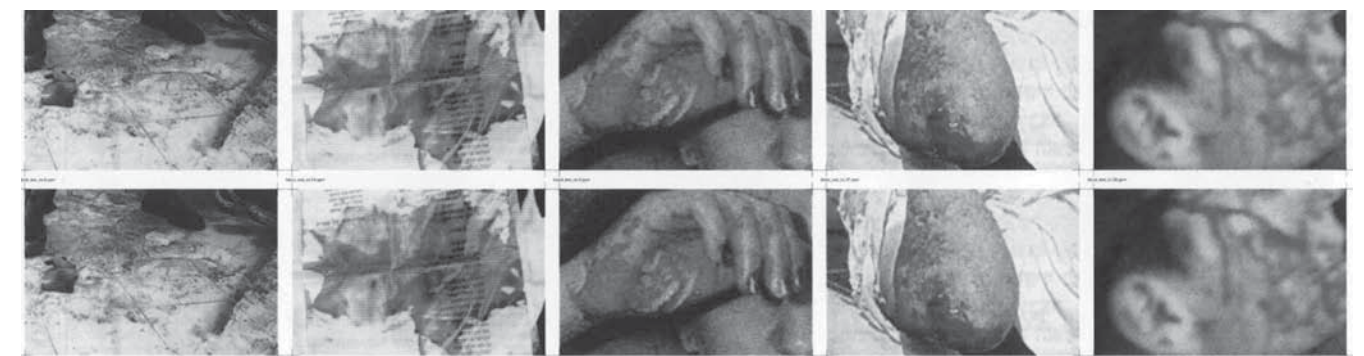
need to take them out of their immediate context and draws and presents her series of numbered blood tests [image 3] She took the stains out of context, doubled each of them, thus stressing the color red– she succeeded and rendering unto her work a sensational and horrifying effect. As in the case of Weinstein, her work faces the horror; artist did not turn her face away from it. Yet, unlike Weinstein, it is not clear whose blood is on display. By removing the blood stain from its context the viewer is confronted with its universal powerful essences. It is as if she wants to declare that blood is blood is blood. In her reaction to terror she does not reveal whether it is Palestinian or Jewish blood.¹⁰

In “Aftermath” Yoav Horesh [born 1975] revisited, over a period of several years, all the sites where suicide bombings had occurred. Going back to places where everything happened appears to me to be another type of post-trauma reflected through art. The images hardly provide any testimony of the horror that happened there. Horesh uses clean black and white images that have nothing to do with the overwhelming, messy, and red reality characteristic of such scenes. I believe that the power of these images comes directly from the artists’ choice of black and white, which hint better at the horror of terror [image 4].

The choice of black and white instead of "true" colors may also be connected to the obsessive tendency of Israelis to clean the terror site and resume normalcy immediately. This need to immediately cleanse the scene is part of a larger phenomenon which assumed tyrannical dimensions in Israel – the need to completely wipe out tragedy¹¹this frenetic drive to put a lead on pain and suffering, certainly does not help to recover from trauma. This tendency to wipe out reality reminds me of the way Jewish Holocaust survivors were received in Israel; they too were obliged to sweep away their past and forget everything they left behind.

Direct media art

Why do we tend to remember images? Do images shape our political conceptions? Is it reasonable to believe that images could affect our political




behavior? How do these images influence the Israeli art-world? Why do artists quote them in their creations?

In *Regarding the Torture of Others* Susan Sontag claimed that “for a long time – at least six decades – photographs have laid down the tracks of how important conflicts are judged and remembered. The western memory museum is now mostly a visual one. Photographs have an insuperable power to determine what we recall of events”. She then sustains that the defining association of people everywhere with the Second Gulf War will be connected to photographs of tortured Iraqi prisoners or the capture of Saddam Hussein.¹² I believe she is right and that these images are now part of our [western] memory museum.

Israeli artists’ arsenal of images of terror is part of the collective memory. Edelman was among the first to understand the importance of such a “repertoire of images”. In his 1995 *From Art to Politics* he claims that in some cases these images might even affect our modus operandi and lead to different behavior in politics.¹³ It is very difficult to assess what, if any, influence images have on our political behavior; it is easier to define the collective bank of images.


The images Israeli artists use to deal with terror are in some cases taken directly from the media, where they first appeared, and they quote or “plant” them in their art with hardly any manipulation or interference. I call these non manipulative creation *direct media art* because the viewer is confronted with an image that is almost a twin of the original; there is hardly any adaptation or processing. It is as if the artist decided to waive his right to interpret and chose instead to remain “loyal” to “reality”. Before trying to explain this fascinating phenomenon I would like to demonstrate what I mean by direct media art.

In 2004 Dganit Berest [born 1949] worked on "The Wall" which included among other elements, an image of a suicide bomber looking us directly in the eye. The image she chose appeared in the press and looked as if taken during the interrogation of the bomber or while in the hands of the security services. The image in question is the one of Ramez Obeyed, the suicide bomber who blew himself up right in the center of Tel Aviv, at the entrance to the Dizengoff shopping mall, killing thirteen people on the eve of Purim, March 4, 1996. 

5]. Such a simple and blunt image of a terrorist raises many questions but primarily it reminds us that there is no monster behind the "dry" terminology the Israeli media uses. One wonders "he is so young", "his teeth are very bad", "why does he look at me this way". The bottom line is: this is human.


The images of the suicide bombers are direct, but they are not shocking. The faces are those of human beings, one might detect even a certain empathy sometimes: what economic conditions might have led a person to commit suicide in such a way.

A different feeling emanates from the images of David Tartakover [born 1944]. Tartakover, a graphic designer and a politically engaged artist, knows how to shock. Here again there are images taken directly from the media with the approval of the photographers and with hardly any interference, yet here we don't have the faces of the suicide bombers but rather the results of their acts; the art becomes an implement of the sensational and the shocking.



His series “I am here” is based on press photographs depicting acts of terror. Every image that he uses was taken at the scene of a suicide bombing aftermath. At first sight it appears that Tartakover does not change the original image, a closer look though shows a green banner announcing "I am here" which is the artist addition plus place and date of the attack. . The original image was taken in this case by Ziv Koren, yet Tartakover always adds to the original his own image wearing a yellow vest, as though he took part in the rescue. He puts on a vest which has the word "artist" instead of "doctor", "paramedic", or "police", printed on it.. Tartakover uses press images with very strong colors, so much so that play of green banner and red might a prima vista, it seems a Benetton ad. However, once the topic becomes clear, the effect is chilling and very scary.


“I am here” stresses the fact that terror is everywhere; it might strike you in your favorite café. In Tartakover's case, though, Choosing to be there, especially given the artist's radical left-wing political views, cannot be seen as a mobilization or wanting to express empathy. There must be more to it. In my opinion Tartakover reacts here to the radical change we are facing in the new terror era

where breaking news will arrive and images will engulf you instantly and totally. Privacy-invading news generates the sensation of having actually been there. There is certainly a very big question as to how artists can respond to this phenomenon. Tartakover responds by choosing to blur, narrow, and almost eliminate the gap between art and media. He seems to be telling the viewer that in order to stay relevant he must react immediately, maybe suggesting that the artist is incapable of producing images as powerful as the ones which appear in the media.

Israeli artists, such as Tartakover, can be very critical of the political circumstances positing that it is the occupation that leads to Palestinian terror. "Holding" is another series by Michal Heiman that deals with the reality in the occupied territories. It can also fit the direct media art category. In the blood stain series there are images taken directly from the media but there she chose parts of the image, sometimes enlarging it and in other cases multiplying it and the result is quite different from the original. In "Holding 14" she points to very basic human activities such as holding and bonding which failed to interrupt.  As you can see she sometimes stamps the photos with the phrase "photographer unknown", this is done in order to stress the anonymity of some of the Palestinians press photographers, as opposed to the Jewish ones, who are credited for their work. "Holding" includes images of both Jews and Palestinians performing or gesticulating in the same way, choosing specific events where both become victims of the local madness.

Tartakover and Heiman both reduce the gap between their art and the media to nothing. Both artists underline the media as the source of their images, exposing themselves to eventual criticism by those who may read these images as mobilized and too close to reality. Choosing non-altered, direct media images does not fit with the idea of art as a sophisticated channel of communication. Rendering art immediate and concrete, means taking a risk it also means practically narrowing, almost eliminating the gap between media and art. Those who are not aware of the political beliefs of the artists may understand this overtness, this transparency as a political manifest.

The reality in the occupied territories is at the center of the activity of Miki Kratsman [born 1959], a committed press photographer. Toward the end of the 1980s David Reeb [born 1952], probably the most active and best known political artist in Israel, became aware of Kratsman's photojournalism. His photos became part of the bank of images Reeb uses in his paintings. Their mutual and fascinating collaboration has been going on ever since and is based on an affinity of world views.¹⁴ It is apparent, for example, in Kratsman's "Om el Phaem" , "translated" by Reeb to "Where are the Soldiers" ¹⁵. Kratsman's image depicts everyday reality in the occupied territories where men are stripped of their clothing so that they can be searched for explosives. The viewer is confronted with a colorful image of a group of teenagers, all standing with their shirts and hands¹⁶ in the air, and waiting for the soldiers to come and carry out their meticulous body search. This bizarre "freeze" is "translated" by Reeb, enhancing its absurdity through the use of color. The title "Where are the Soldiers" is used by Reeb to stress the context so that if a viewer should not think that the young boys are dancing or fooling around. Beyond the topic, this work is yet another example of the sophisticated interrelations between media and art in. One can read Reeb's brilliant translation as another type of direct media art.

As news editor Doron Solomons is increasingly exposed to raw footage of carnage and violence and the difficulty of mediating this material to the public is a key professional concern for him. In "Father" [2002, ] he expresses the existential fears shared by parents on both sides, The "Father" is both Palestinian and Israeli and the voiceover simultaneously speaks Arabic and Hebrew. Like Sodaey he also focuses on two Palestinian female suicide bombers and includes a poignant "silent" moment as they are about to record the usual clip to be broadcast after the attack. The viewers see them drink and cough during the preparation for the take. This is not the actual shot which will be made public. These moments help the viewer understand the burden of the moment and the tension involved.¹⁷ Another frame from this video shows a suicide bomber, intercepted at an intersection and tackled by a robot.

There is yet another form of direct media art, one which though based on images published by the media, makes an effort to disguise its origins or to use the media in a more sophisticated manner. David Wackstein [born 1954] uses media differently; his works are based on caricatures which appeared in Arab newspapers. He chooses mainly caricatures that depict Israelis as the oppressors; in most cases, they are shown as Nazis. “Swastika”, 2001 and “Settlers”, [image 11 + 12] are just of the examples. The fact that an Israeli artist chose such images as a point of reference is both perplexing and fascinating; does he identify with the criticism, believing, as a left- winger, that Israeli society deserves such an image, or is he sustaining the extreme opposite opinion, namely that producing and publishing such images share the anti-Semitic points of view of the Nazis.

Weinstein’s “Udai and Cusai” (discussed before) are certainly images that fit the direct media art category, and so as does another example from his work which is also based on the media. In his “Man/Dog teams” [image 13] Weinstein places steel wool straight on the wall. Wolf dogs are being led by figures that resemble policemen or soldiers. The dogs may be searching for explosives in what seems to be an ordinary scene known to every Israeli. Yet there is another layer that leads beyond the immediate. Choosing this imagery may trigger an association which is deeply rooted in Israeli collective memory. The Nazis used wolf dogs to search for explosives and humans on various occasions. Using a repertoire of images based on the Holocaust as part of the vocabulary of contemporary everyday life in Israel at the beginning of the twenty-first century can hardly pass as accidental. I believe it calls to attention the continuous stress experienced by citizens whose sense of security and concepts of home versus front are completely shattered. This might be very well be the of the encounter between successive cultural traumas.

Aesthetics and Terror, or Political Abstract

In a conversation recently held with Micha Ullman [born 1939], a leading Israeli artist, he claimed that the interest artists show in terror may be the result of a

similarity in world views; radicalism, anarchism, and the breaking of conventions are just some of the affinities between artists and terrorists. Ullman’s statement does not seem controversial given Art movements such as Futurism and Dadaism, whose members sustained that violence and terror are legitimate tools which must be used if artists were to gain influence. These world views originated at the end of the nineteenth century, when thinkers and philosophers such as Bakunin and Le Bon were praising terrorism, claiming that violence had an intrinsic moral value and was a necessary implement to purify the world of degeneration.

After September 11 the notion that acts of terror have aesthetic value became popular. Thinkers such as Zizek in his *Welcome to the Desert of the Real* referred mainly to images of the collapsing Twin Towers, trying to explain the fascination they created and claiming that terror was aesthetic.¹⁸ These images associated with terror became powerful tools in the postmodern bank of images. Not surprisingly, artists such as Damien Hirst in England were quick to assert that September 11 was one of the most aesthetic visions he had ever experienced.¹⁹

Dealing with terror in art poses a great dilemma; on the one hand there is the threat that choosing terror as its topic, art may be reduced to a political banner. On the other hand and especially over the recent years, art with no reference to context may easily become irrelevant,. I believe the solution chosen by some of the artists is brilliant; they took themes from sites where suicide bombings took place, yet the element chosen was treated in an abstract manner. The result is thus not too obvious. I find the term *political abstract*²⁰ suitable for describing this kind of work as they so perfectly mix aesthetics and politics; the themes are certainly political, taken from a concrete context, yet there is an effort to leave them as abstract and as universal as possible. Such images do not clearly indicate the exact location nor the time of occurrence, so that although the viewer may recognize a concrete political context there is always another layer of meaning. Political abstract art reacting to terror is a very sophisticated and unique form of creation used to depict terror. The uniqueness is derived from a

balanced look at a complex political reality, one which reflects a world view that is both escapist and ironic.

Guy Raz' [born 1964] photos are an example of political abstract art.²¹ In his project "Two Seconds", which is still in process, he relates directly to acts of terror. He is fascinated with time; two seconds is the time it takes the suicide bomber to trigger his explosive belt. Two seconds is also the time that Raz keeps the aperture adjuster open [Image 14]. Like Horesh, Raz chooses sites in Israel where acts of terror have happened. Ironically, the way his buses are literally spread all over the image, turns The result into something surrealistically beautiful though it represents terror. It is an image which maintains its aesthetics despite depicting act of sheer horror.. Raz No doubt is trying to deal with the notion of terror as aesthetics; probably the same aesthetics which Hirst had in mind. Raz succeeds in creating a political abstract. If the viewer wishes he may ignore the time and the place as they are left unclear.

Carmit Gil's bus presents another layer of political abstract. Gil [born 1976] participated in the 2003 Venice Biennale where her work was part of the central pavilion. In 2002, when she completed her bus, no one in Israel could have seriously taken it for a vehicle of public transportation. Nevertheless, her interpretation differs sharply from that of Raz'. [image 15] The red and fragmented remains of the bus represent, beyond their immediate context, an abstract way of dealing with open space. When asked about her intentions, the artist referred to Perec's writings and particularly to his *Espèces d'espaces*.²²

Sharif Waked's [born 1964] "Chic Point" serves as another example of political abstract art. Trying to show the huge gap between his previous experience as an art student and his everyday reality of a Palestinian at the roadblocks. Roadblocks were treated before by Krastman and Reeb but Waked chose to stage a fashion show in which the models wore clothes appropriate for the body-search at the roadblocks [image 16]. "Chic Point" is a seven- minute video-art clip released in 2003. A fashion show in such a miserable reality and the name of his video are both extremely ironic.

Looking at the Israeli art of the last two decades, it would seem that political issues are treated using different styles, techniques, and themes. The complexity and heterogeneous nature of the reaction to terror in Israeli art makes it possible not only to identify a cultural trauma but also to differentiate between direct media art and political abstract art.

¹ This "estrangement" may be the result of the nation-building period when artists were sometimes accused of producing mobilized art.

² Terror has always been present in Israeli art. During the early 1970s Pinchas Cohen-Gan [born 1942], then an art student at the Bezalel art school, was exposed to one of the first waves of terror in Jerusalem. In one of these attacks he was in the market buying a kilo of bananas. A second later a bomb split the air and the fruit-seller's head was blown off. Ever since Cohen-Gan has been painting heads. Dganit Berest also dealt with terrorists. In her work TWA from 1998, she used images of airplane hijackers.

³ I have recently published my conclusions regarding the assassination of Rabin in Dana Arieli-Horowitz, *Creators in Overburden: Rabin Assassination, Art and Politics* (Jerusalem: Magnes, 2005).

⁴ Jeffrey C. Alexander, "Toward a Theory of Cultural Trauma," eds. Jeffrey C. Alexander *et al.*, *Cultural Trauma and Collective Identity* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004), 1-30.

⁵ Spain, Northern Ireland and after September 11 the US are just a few examples. Recently the *Rote Armée Fraction [RAF] Exhibition* show at the KW Institute for Contemporary Art in Berlin led to a huge debate. This exhibition focused on German art dealing with the Red Army Fraction, which was responsible for a decade of terror from 1968-1977. It includes depictions of controversial individuals such as Ulrike Meinhof of the Baader-Meinhof terrorist organization, sometimes with great admiration. Gerhard Richter's 1988 work "dead", exhibited as part of his *18 October 1977* series, was presented at this exhibition. Benjamin Buchloh's "note on October 18, 1977" sheds light on this debate.

Literature on art and terror is just beginning to appear. See Gene Ray, *Terror and the Sublime in Art and Critical Theory* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005).

⁶ Unfortunately just a fraction of them are discussed in this paper.

⁷ Weinstein's work was shown last year in *The New Hebrews: A century of Art in Israel* exhibition in 2005 in Berlin.

⁸ See: Tami Kats Freiman, "Kitsch or Trap: On Seduction and Beauty" in: *History and Theory: Protocols*, E-Journal, History and Theory Unit, Bezalel, Jerusalem.

See:

<http://bezalel.secured.co.il/zope/home/he/1126095346>

⁹ The Zaka organization is an ultra-orthodox organization which voluntarily handles the remains of victims of terror acts.

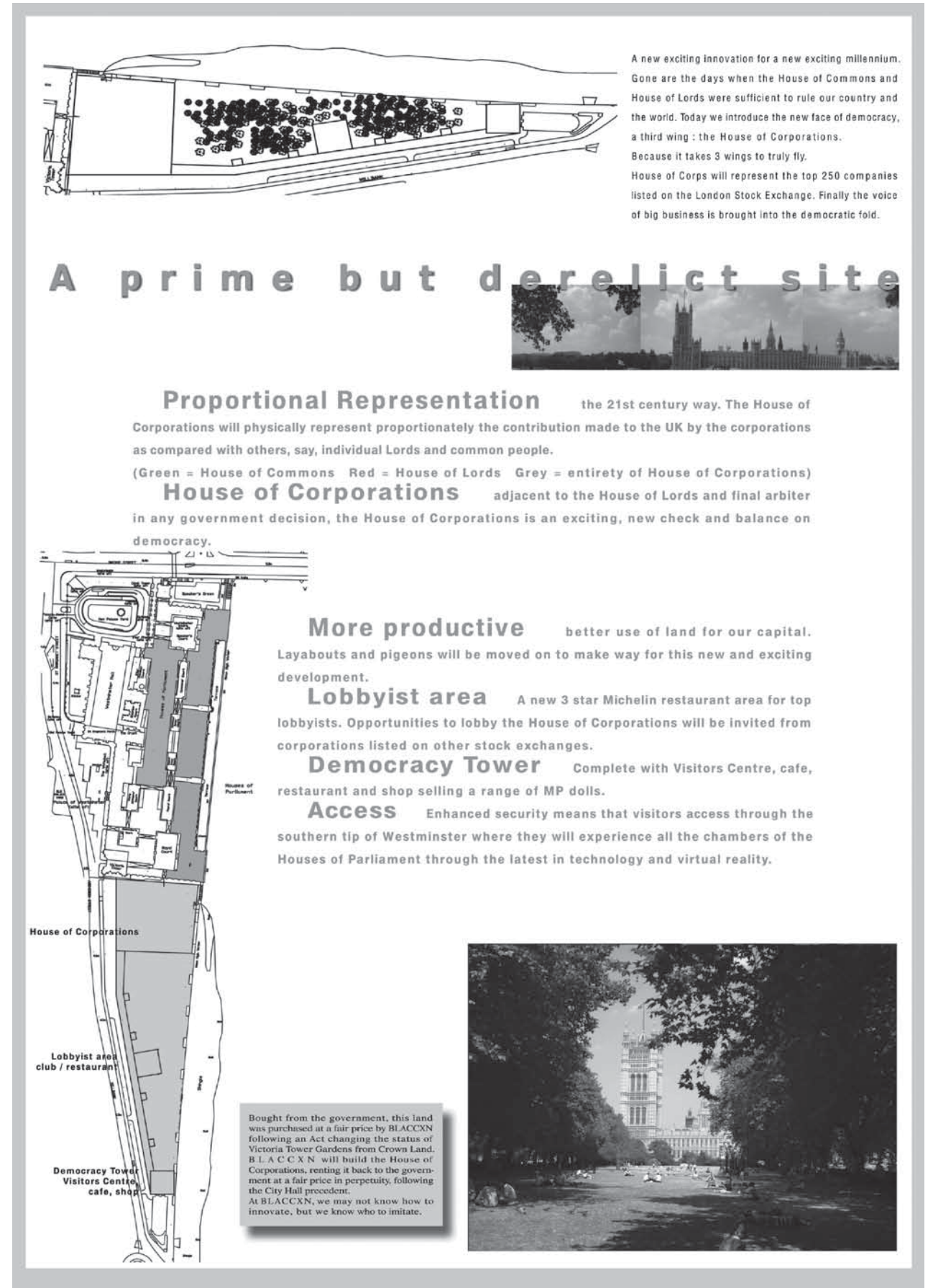
¹⁰ One of the blood stains included in Heiman's series is a very famous one; it was found in the pocket of Israeli Prime Minister Y. Rabin immediately after he was assassinated.

¹¹ Here Sodaey work and Zaka organization come to mind.

¹² Susan Sontag, "Regarding the Torture of Others", *New York Times*, May 23, 2004.

¹³ As a political symbolist Edelman started studying visuals and their importance in Politics during the 1960s. He believes that our political attitudes are derived from a repertoire of images which is mainly based on works of art. See Murray Edelman, *From Art to Politics: How Artistic Creations Shape Political Conceptions* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1995), 1.

- ¹⁴ The exhibition *Control* at the Israel Museum in 2003 dealt with the collaboration between Reeb and Kratsman.
- ¹⁵ This is one of three similar images by Reeb all entitled "Where are the Soldiers".
- ¹⁶ I wonder if Kratsman or Reeb had in mind, the image of the child raising his hands up in the air. I believe most Israelis would refer almost immediately to this specific image of the Holocaust. I wish to thank Israel Peretz for stressing this point.
- ¹⁷ Solomons could be seen as paying tribute to Heinrich Boell's *Mutkef*, collected silence. Sergio Edelsztejn, *Doron Solomons' Video Works: Mind the Gap* (Tel Aviv: Center for Contemporary Art, 2006), 3.
- ¹⁸ Slavoi Zizek, *Welcome to the Desert of the Real: Five Essays on September 11 and Related Dates*, London: Vero, 2002.
- ¹⁹ In an interview with the BBC held one year after September 11, Demian Hirst said that the attacks were "visually stunning" artworks and that the perpetrators "needed congratulating". Quoted in Charles P. Freund, "The Art of Terror", *San Francisco Chronicle*, 6.10.2002. One can only wonder if Hirst would still have made the same claim in London after the terror of summer 2005.
- ²⁰ Guy Raz gave the title "political abstract" to a series of his works.
- ²¹ Raz has been dealing with barricades since 1992. He started photographing the roadblocks the Israeli army uses during his service as an officer in 1992. The dissonance between being an artist and a soldier was so strong that he was released from further service. The roadblocks gradually developed into the tunnel-roads that bypass roads were turned into during the second Intifada.
- ²² Georges Perec, *Espèces d'espaces* (Paris: Editions Galilée, 1974).



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(Green = House of Commons Red = House of Lords Grey = entirety of House of Corporations)

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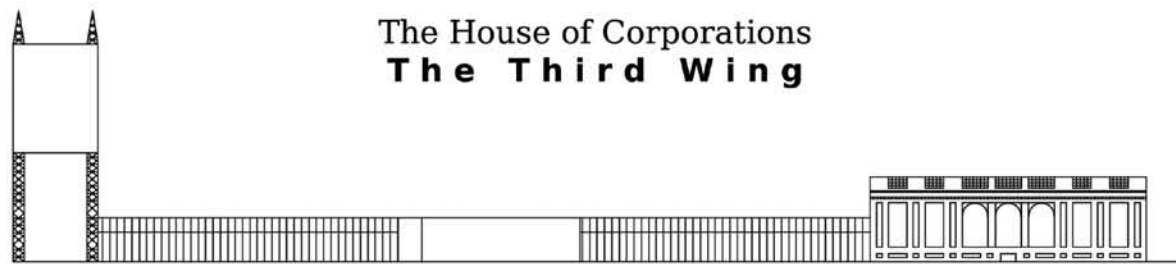
Democracy Tower

Complete with Visitors Centre, cafe, restaurant and shop selling a range of MP dolls.

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The House of Corporations The Third Wing

new * exciting * innovative

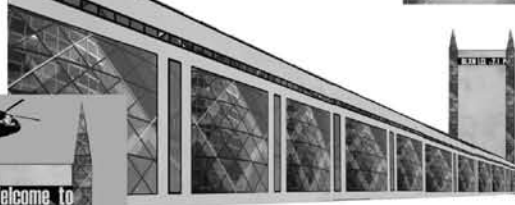
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House of Corporations



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and shiny shininess

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newness & the shiny shininess.

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Members of the House. Secure
walkway from helipad to House to
ensure safety and anonymity
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High Definition Screen

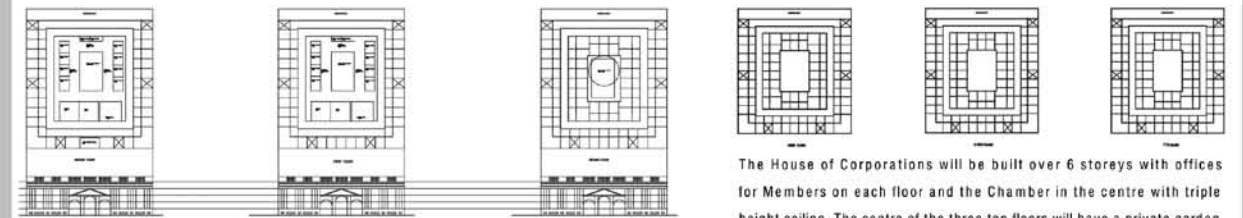
Showing all the latest celebrity news and sports results. The latest in technology, the screen is best seen from as far away as possible.

Gardens

A beautiful English garden will be planted with English Oak, Beech, Birch and a carpet of bluebells in the Spring. To ensure the long-term sustainability of the gardens despite 'climate change', there will be a system of irrigation and air-conditioning. At BLACCXN, we look to the future and prepare for it.

Access

The two monuments currently in Victoria Tower Gardens will be moved to the front of the Visitors Centre. Here they will be best appreciated. The anti-slavery monument and the monument to Emmeline Pankhurst, suffragette, will be fully accessible for members of the public. The magnificent Rodin, 'The Burghers of Calais', is also accessible - just visible from the glass entrance to the House.



The House of Corporations will be built over 6 storeys with offices for Members on each floor and the Chamber in the centre with triple height ceiling. The centre of the three top floors will have a private garden. Each floor will be served by six lifts to ensure discretion and privacy.

The market - democracy meritocracy

Space

Generous offices for Members plus area for staff. Location of Members' offices will depend on annual average ranking in FTSE250. All Members will have a platform within the Chamber. The magnitude of amplification will depend on Member's rank. The higher the rank, the bigger the loudhailer.

Style

The chamber of the House of Corps will reflect the vision and grandeur of its Members. See plans for the interior of the Chamber of the House of Corporations (below right), inspired by the Moderne Bauformen early 1940s German style magazine.

Sanctuary

Members will find a private arboretum on the third floor of the House of Corporations where they can go if they wish to avoid the 1 in 60 million members of the public with access to the beautiful English garden. This oasis will contain specimen samples of trees endangered throughout the world like teak and mahogany.

Beautiful wood panelling

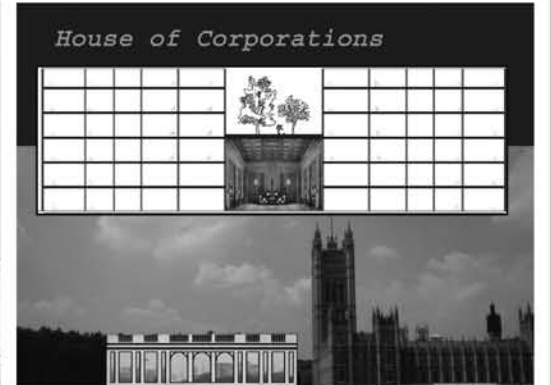
Because Members appreciate the best that nature can afford, the Chamber will be clad in beautiful and precious hardwoods including teak and mahogany.

Ancient Greek Agora

The lobbyist area and restaurant will have, as its central feature and symbol, an authentic Ancient Greek monument, an 'agora' or marketplace. The inspiring democracy of the Ancient Greeks began in the space of the agora. We, BLACCXN, the government and all the founders of the House of Corporations are thrilled to have this tribute to market democracy here in the heart of London.

This agora, imported straight from Turkey, was acquired in exchange for Turkish membership of the European Union - quid pro quo. An easy case to make in the EU given England's long and illustrious custody of the best of foreign cultures (the British Museum testifying to that history), we simply pointed out how appallingly the Turks treat their precious inheritance. (see right) The agora at the heart of the House of Corps symbolises the market at the centre of democracy.

We want you to say:
'Thus has it ever been!'



4

pursue conversation:

- 4.00 diplomatic¹ phase: During this phase, Players meet to discuss their plans for upcoming turns. Alliances are made and strategies are set. These 'diplomatic negotiations' take place before each turn. Negotiations last 30mn before the first turn and 15mn before each turn thereafter. Negotiations may end sooner if all players agree. Conversations, deals, schemes, will greatly affect the course of the game. During diplomatic negotiations, players may say anything they wish². Some players usually go to another room or organize private groups of two or three. They may try to keep their conversation secret. They may try to overhear the conversation of others. These conversations usually consist of bargaining or joint military planning, but they may include exchanges of information, denunciations, threats, spreading of rumors, and so on. Public announcements may be made and documents may be written, made public, or kept secret, as the players see fit. These discussions and written agreements, however, do not bind a player to anything he/she may say. Deciding whom to trust as situations arise is an important part of the game. Using Conference Maps during diplomatic negotiations is an excellent way to keep track of locations, strategies, alliances.
- 4.10 self-dislodgment: A country cannot dislodge or support the dislodgment of one of its own units, even if that dislodgment is expected. This is one time when support is refused or negated when it would otherwise be legal. However such orders can be written for other reasons, such as creating a standoff.

¹ At the beginning of the 20th century Europe was a complicated cauldron of political intrigue. You are about to change the course of history in your favour.
from A game of international intrigue, Diplomacy 1961.

² (Art can go fuck a doughnut.
Democracy can take a flying fuck at the moooooooooon)
after Kurt Vonnegut's Slapstick or Lonesome no more

Ditto or 'the same as what has been said'

Ditto, which at first glance seems a handy and insignificant sort of word, actually has a Roman past. It comes from dictus, "having been said," the past participle of the verb "to say." Italian detto or ditto meant what said does in English, as in the locution "the said story." Thus the word could be used in certain constructions to mean "the same as what has been said".

The following images are a hauntological re-arrangement of sorts, featuring art/works by Marcel Duchamp, Francis Picabia, Vladimir Tatlin, Buckminster Fuller and Joseph Beuys, and are paired with their non-art counterparts.



Rope & Washer Pump

A human-powered and hand-operated pump designed to lift water from 20-meter depth. The water output rate for an adult is 20 liters per minute. The pump is appropriate for farmers in bringing water to the desired place in the field from sources like dug well, river and perennial pockets at different land contours.

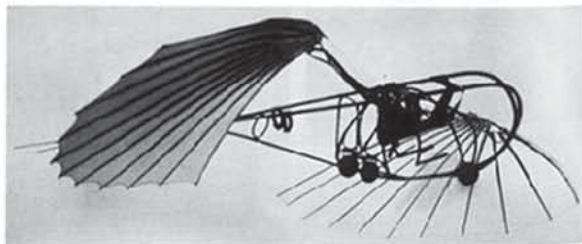
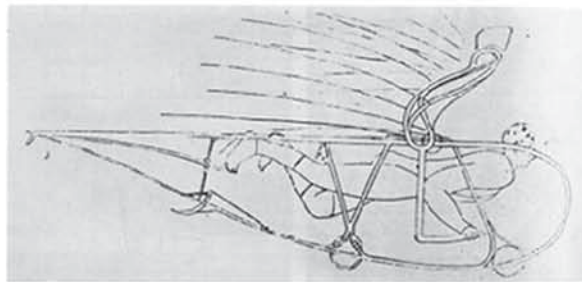


Pedal Operated Rice Mill

Developed in Manipur under the project called Science & Technology for Women. Hence, it has been named NINGOL, which represents the women and the housewives.

Features

- a) Height and handle are adjustable to suit any build.
- b) Designed to make exercising an enjoyable experience while milling.



Treadle Pump

A water-lifting device, similar in principle to the hand pump. The difference lies in the fact that a hand pump consists of a single barrel and one has to pump up water with one's hands, where as the pedal pump comprises two cylinders and it requires foot operation. Yet, it is so easy that even a child, woman or an old person can operate it. One may even make a comfortable sitting arrangement and pedal while being seated.



Biogas Kiln

Large prisons, each housing typically 5,000 prisoners, are a legacy of the troubled past of Rwanda. Sewage disposal from such concentrated groups of people is a major health hazard for both the prison and the surrounding area. The prisons also use fuelwood for cooking, putting great pressure on local wood supplies.

The first prison biogas plant of this kind started operation in 2001, and has run with no problems since then. Each prison is supplied with a linked system of underground digesters, so the sight and smell of the sewage are removed. The biogas is piped to the prison kitchens, and it halves the use of fuelwood. The fertilizer benefits both crop production and fuelwood plantations.



Wangari Maathai

The first African woman to win the Nobel Peace Prize who was praised by the awarding committee as "a source of inspiration for everyone in Africa fighting for sustainable development, democracy and peace."

A pioneering academic, her role as an environmental campaigner began after she planted some trees in her back garden. This inspired her in 1977 to form an organization primarily of women, known as the Green Belt Movement, aiming to curtail the devastating effects of deforestation and desertification. Her campaign to mobilize poor women to plant some 30 million trees has been copied by many other countries.



By breaking down elements in photographs, cutting them up and reconstituting them, a critical narrative on opposing futures can be presented visually. The resultant images are visual maps of human choice. Swords into ploughshares is materialised into an image of a democratic future and the human hand crushes the inhuman missile. Art can struggle to articulate the democratic voice of the silenced billions



ANATOLE ATLAS—
je peux vous
répondre, je peux
faire une chose,
c'est la révolution

—Benoît Marie

049



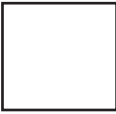
Bus Stop

“I had a few weird experiences when I first came here. First week- I was going for a jog when the police officers stopped me and asked for my ID. I didn’t have it on me but I gave them my info and the police officer told me that someone had reported a ‘suspicious looking man’ running by the bridge. Two weeks later- I’m waiting for the bus and I see a police car slowing down, pulling up to the bus stop. Yes. . . again someone had reported a ‘suspicious looking man’ standing at the bus stop! It was so absurd I wanted to laugh- I didn’t know how to calm my neighbors so I went to Walmart and I bought a couple of ‘USA’ t-shirts. It seemed to have worked- I had no problems after that and now I think people around here know me better.”
N.S.D.



Austin Bergstrom Airport

“Like most travelers I feel nervous in the waiting time before a flight. I replay the statistics in my mind that show flying is safer then driving. But these unspoken concerns about flying have been replaced with new concerns about making it to my flight. Now when I travel, I always shave and wear non-threatening clothes to the airport (no t-shirts with Arabic/Urdu script writing, no pants with too many pockets). At the airport I try to avoid the wrong kind of eye contact with edgy passengers. I am never sure whether or not to look at people. I am not sure if people are looking at me out of boredom or suspicion. I always try to prepare myself for any sudden surprises like a luggage check, or a glitch in some badly designed database. In 2002, I was stopped from boarding on my flight to Austin because part of my last name ‘Abbas’ showed up on a watch list. Now this is like stopping anyone who has “Mitchell” somewhere in their name from flying. When faced with such surprises I would normally be more confrontational but given the current affairs I gave in. I surrendered my passport to the officers who called in my ID numbers and we all waited at the terminal for their supervisors in FBI to tell them if I was a threat to homeland security or not.”
S.M.A.R





وان يكون قارئِ كارل ماركس كاتباً فهذا يعني ان ثمة آخرين سيكونون من قراء تروتسكي ولينين، لكن الرجلين لم يتنكرا يوماً لصفتيهما كقارئين. وعلى اساس من كونهما قارئين قادا الثورة التي تحكمت بنصف البشرية تقريباً رداً طويلاً. ذلك ان الكتاب لا يقودون ثورات ولا يتحولون زعماء وقادة. إذا استثنينا فاكلاف هافل ومادلين اولبرايت ربما. ونجوم السينما لا يقودون العالم، فرونالد ريغان اقلع عن كونه ممثلاً سينمائياً قبل ان يصبح رئيساً بزمَن طويل، وارنولد شوارزينغر لم يعد نجماً سينمائياً كذلك.

ربما يجدر بنا ان ننظر إلى مثال اكثر معاصرة لمستوضح الصورة على نحو اكثر جلاء. حكم جورج دبليو بوش الولايات المتحدة. وكان الفريق الذي عاونه يضم بين افراده من يمكن اعتبارهم كتاباً، من امثال بول وولفويتز وريتشارد بيرل، وهؤلاء، الذين يمكن اعتبارهم كتاباً هم بدورهم قراء امينون لكتاب اعلى كعباً منهم، برنار لويس وجون اركيا وصموئيل هنتنغتون ودايفد رانفيلد، على سبيل المثال لا الحصر. وما ان بدأت المصاعب تطاول إدارة جورج بوش في الميادين كافة حتى بدأ نجم الكتاب او اشباه الكتاب يخبو، استقال وولفويتز مرتين من منصبين مختلفين، وريتشارد بيرل ذهب إلى بيته، وحتى جون بولتون استقال من منصبه سفيراً للولايات المتحدة لدى الأمم المتحدة قبل ان يتم ما جاء من اجله. قد يحكم التاريخ على ادراة بوش الابن لها او عليها. وقد يثبت انه كان محقاً في بعض ما ذهب إليه وكان مخطئاً في جوانب اخرى، لكن الكتاب والمفكرين لم ينتظروا حكم التاريخ، لقد سقطوا في الحاضر، وغيروا وبرروا وحاولوا جاهدين فصل ما كتبوه عن مجريات السياسة وما آلت إليه، مثلما فعل فوكوياما في اكثر من مناسبة. لقد تم رجم الكتاب والمفكرين قبل ان يرجم السياسيين، مثلما تم رجم كارل ماركس قبل ان يرجم تروتسكي، ذلك ان المنطق يقول ان ستالين مولود من رحم تروتسكي ولينين اللذين بدروهما ولدا من رحم كارل ماركس وفريدريك انجلز.
وعلينا ان نحاكم الأصل ونرجمه ليتسنى لنا ان نهز ايمان الفرع.
علينا ان نقتل الكاتب ليتسنى للقارئ ان يستسلم.

مؤمنو الكتب

القراء يريدون وضع الكتب في موقع من اثنين: اما ان تكون الكتابة جرماً يستحق القتل والتحريق على ما كان يجري في القرون الوسطى وما سبقها، وإما ان تتحول الكتابة ضرباً من التنبؤ الرسولي. ورغم ان جاك اتالي ينشئ سرداً طويلاً في روايته "اخوة اليقظانيين" ليثبت ان حيازة الكتاب جريمة، وليس كتابته، إلا ان ذلك لا يغير في واقع ان الذي يحاكم حراس كتاب المعلم ارسطو هم ايضاً من القراء. فالمؤمنون قراء، لأن الأديان تتمظهر في كتب ومدونات. والحال ثمة دائماً كتب عوملت كما لو انها سبب للإدانة بالقتل لدى فئة معينة تقابلها فئة اخرى تعتبر هذه الكتب منزهة عن كل خطأ وعيب. ولا شك ان ايقاع الكتاب في واحد من هذين الموقعين يجعلهم يحملون اعباء تفوق طاقة البشر على الاحتمال. هكذا تم وسم هايدغر بميسم النازية، واستمر بلانشو طوال حياته متنسكاً تكفيراً عن ارائه السابقة اما ريجيس دوبريه فما زال يدفع ثمن كتاباته المبكرة عن حرب الغوار في ادغال اميركا اللاتينية، رغم انه حوكم وسجن بسبب هذا الكتاب.
كتاب ريجيس دوبريه كان في لحظة من لحظات الثورات في ستينات القرن الماضي مثابة انجيل الثوريين في العالم. لكن الهزائم التي منيت بها الحركات الثورية التي اعتمدت على حرب الغوار في اسيا وافريقيا واميركا جعلت من النبي السابق مداناً بتهمة الخداع المؤدي إلى الهزيمة والموت. طبعاً لم يكن دوبريه يعرف احداً من الذين اعتنقوا افكاره في تركيا او غواتيمالا او الجزائر، لكن هؤلاء لم يتورعوا عن تحميله مسؤولية هزائمهم على نحو مباشر.

ثبتت الديموقراطيات الحديثة معطينين اساسيين يمكن ملاحظة اثرهما الواضح في كل مكان من العالم. الأول تعلق تعلقاً مباشراً بشيوع عادات القراءة والكتابة، والثاني يتعلق تعلقاً غير مباشر، لكنه واضح المعالم وحاد الأثر، بسلطة الشعب وسيادته. تعليقاً على المعطى الأول يمكننا التأكيد بكل بساطة ان ليس ثمة ثورات في العالم من دون قراء، ومتذوقي فنون تالياً. وان التقسيمات الاجتماعية التي يجدر بنا ان نفكر فيها من الآن وصاعداً بعد ذوبان التقسيمات الطبقية، هي تقسيمات من هذا القبيل: قراء ومتلقين من جهة وكتاب وفنانين من جهة ثانية، مواطنون يملكون آراء من جهة اولى، وجماهير مؤمنة تحركها حماستها من جهة ثانية. والحق ان التفريق بين الشعب المؤمن والهائج، الذي يحسب انه يملك رأياً والمواطنين المتهملين والمتمعنين يردنا إلى مناقشات ما بعد الثورة الفرنسية بوصفها تمتلك حظاً من الواجهة القاطعة. يكتب ميشال فوكو في هذا الصدد: تظهر الثورة الفرنسية في

لم تكن الفنون والكتابة عموماً تستطيع ان تتخلص من تبعيتها للباط الامبراطوري والارستوقراطيات الكبرى من دون ان تحصل قبل ذلك قدرة ذاتية على الانتشار بين عموم الناس. وقد ساهم التطور التكنولوجي طبعاً، في تلك العصور كانت المطبعة هي المحرك الأول، والازدهار الاقتصادي والانفتاح الثقافي الذي ضرب اوروبا في تلك الفترة، فضلاً عن انتشار المدارس والجامعات وتمكن فئات واسعة من الشعوب من التعلم والتثقف وترجية اوقات الفراغ التي تزايدت بفعل الازدهار الاقتصادي في متابعة اعمال المسرح وبدايات السينما وقراءة الروايات ودواوين الشعر ومشاهدة المعارض الفنية اسباباً حاسمة في تغير وظائف الفنون والكتابة عموماً. ومع انتشار التعليم وكثرة اوقات الفراغ، اصبح في امكان كارل ماركس ان يكتب رأس المال من دون ان يهديه إلى ولي الأمر او الامير او الامبراطور، ويذيله بعبارة: "انا العبد الحقير الفقير" قبل ان يوقع اسمه، على ما كان رائجاً في تلك الآونة. ذلك ان من يتوجه له كارل ماركس لينصبه علماً على العصر الذي تلاه، لم يكن الامراء والنبلء، بل عموم الشعب وصفوف العامة التي باتت تستطيع ان تنصب ملوكاً وتترزع تيجاناً وتصنع نجوماً. بل ان مأساة كارل ماركس نفسه، ان كتابه رأس المال الذي طبع في فرنسا منه ما يقارب الالف نسخة فقط، لم ينفد من المكتبات طوال خمسة وعشرين عاماً. وكان ناشره قد ارسل نسخاً مجانية منه بواسطة البريد إلى بعض من ظن انهم قد يهتمون لقراءته، فعادت إليه جميعاً لأن احداً لم يقبل ان يتحمل كلفة الخدمة البريدية.

صولجان الورثة

مجد كارل ماركس لم يعط لكارل ماركس. وكذا كانت حال كثيرين غيره من الكتاب والفنانين الذين لم يملكوا امجادهم بأنفسهم، وورثها عنهم ورثة مختلفون. لقد حاز قراء كارل ماركس مجده كله. رغم ان المسافة التي كانت تفصل بين كارل ماركس والقارئ العادي لم تكن ببسيرة في اي حال من الأحوال. بل ان ستيفان زفايج يصف الفارق بين برودون وماركس على النحو التالي: لو ان حلقة تلفزيونية جمعت الرجلين لفاز فيها برودون من دون اي جدال، لكن مناظرة كتابية بين الرجلين ستؤدي لا محالة إلى تحطيم برودون وعقل لسانه. مما يعني ان برودون في وجه من الوجوه كان يدرك ان الصلة المباشرة مع العامة هي التي تستطيع تنصيبه ملكاً على اقرانه وسلطاناً طويل الباع وحاد الأنياب. هذا رغم ان برودون نفسه لا يتورع عن القول: "انا مدين لليأس بكل ما انا عليه". الأمر الذي يعني، بدهاة، ان برودون ايضاً كان ناسكاً متعبداً لأبحاثه، وان الكتب كانت تملك روحه وجسده في آن معاً. وهذه اكثر صفات الفنانين والعباقرة تبجيلاً ومدعاة للتقدير العميق.

كان برودون نجم زمانه، اما كارل ماركس فكان نبي زمانه الشريد. ذلك ان قراء برودون كانوا يقيمون صلة مباشرة معه. لم يكن برودون يكتب بالدقة والتعقيد الذي طبع كتابات كارل ماركس او ايمانويل كانط، وكان في وسع قارئه ان يباشره من دون وسيط. وفي وقت كان كانط يكتب لقارئ واحد، هو الأمير، فإن كارل ماركس كان يكتب لقراء مجهولين ومتعدين ولا حصر لهم. مما جعل حياة الأخير وموته من دون مجد على الإطلاق. حيث لم يمش في جنازته سوى ثمانية اشخاص بمن فيهم افراد العائلة. ذلك ان كارل ماركس، ككاتب اخطأ التوجه. فلم يكتب للأمير ولم يبسط ما كتبه ليدخل في افهام العامة من دون وسيط. وتكاد تكون قصة اسحق دويتشر تامة البيان عن محنة ماركس نفسه. ذلك ان المؤرخ الشيوعي في حزب لينين، وكاتب سير ابرز قادة البلاشفة، قرأ رأس المال، فلم يفهم منه شيئاً، فذهب إلى مسؤول المالية في الحزب يسأله المساعدة، فنصحه هذا الأخير بصرف النظر عن قراءة رأس المال، والاكتفاء ببضع وريقات مكتوبة تلخص اهم ما جاء فيه. وحين قرأ دويتشر الاوراق التي قدمها له مسؤول المالية في الحزب، وجدها مفيدة للغاية وواضحة تماماً، فسأله هل قرأت رأس المال؟ فما كان منه إلا ان اجابه: لم أقرأه لكن منظر الحزب اعطاني ملخصاً للكتاب. فسأله دويتشر ثانية: وهل قرأ منظر الحزب رأس المال؟ فأجابه مرة اخرى: لا لكنه قرأ ملخص كارل كاوتسكي.

كتّاب مثل كارل ماركس، نجحوا في صنع مراتب للقراء، فتروتسكي ولينين كانا من قراء كارل ماركس. هذا لا يمنع انهما كانا كاتبين مبرزين، لكنهما كانا من قرائه. وعلى هذه الصفة الأساسية انبنت علاقتهما بالشأن العام. كان لينين وتروتسكي خطبيان مفوهان ويستطيعان التأثير بالجماهير المحتشدة، وهذه كانت حال هتلر ايضاً، لكنهما من ناحية اخرى كانا كاتبين مبرزين ايضاً.

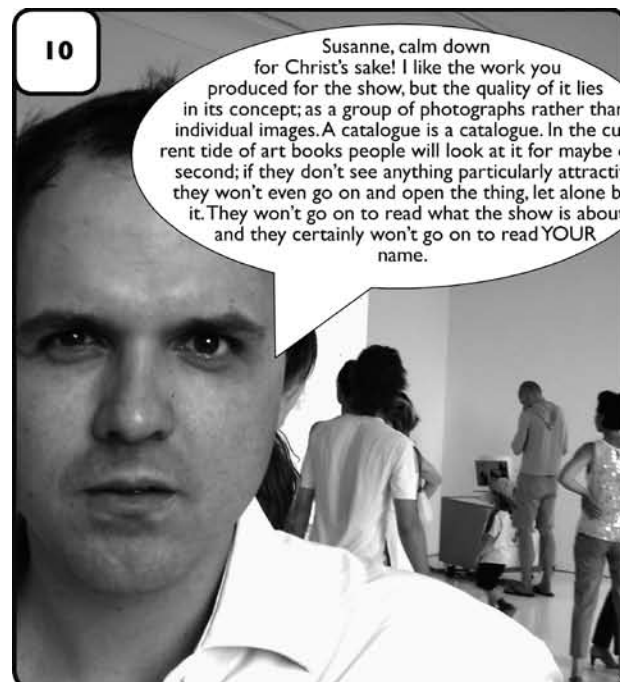
تحليلات مولودزييه، بوصفها الحلقة الأخيرة من عملية التحويل التي قامت بها الملكية المطلقة. وكانت الثورة هي الإنجاز الأخير لهذه السلطة. هل قامت الثورة بعملية انقلاب على الملك؟ أبدأ. الثورة انجزت وأكملت عمل الملك. يجب أن تُقرأ الثورة بوصفها إنجاز الملكية، إنجاز تراجيدي، ممكن، ولكنه إنجاز واكتمال سياسي حقيقي. وبذلك نكون قد قطعنا فعلاً رأس الملك في مشهد 21 كانون الثاني 1793، ولكننا توجنا عمل الملكية. وهكذا تم الكشف عن تلك الاتفاقية، عن حقيقة الملكية عارية والسيادة المنزوعة من النبالة بواسطة الملك وتحويلها من ثم إلى الشعب، الذي وجد نفسه، كما يقول مولودزييه، الوريث الشرعي للملك. يكتب: "الشعب السيد: لا داعي لأن نوبخه بمرارة كبيرة. إذ لم يبق إلا بإنجاز عمل أسياذه السابقين". هجاء الشعب في هذا المقال لا يقع في موقع الاعتراض على الديمقراطية التي تنادي بالشعب مصدرًا للسلطات. بل إن النظم الديمقراطية كما يوضح بول فيريليو تعني عناية شديدة في تقنين الرأي وحصره في قنوات محددة واختصاصات بعينها. إنما هذا كله لا يخفي واقع أن النظم الديمقراطية تتيح، بل وتشجع السعي العام (من العامة) إلى امتلاك الرأي - تعتقد حنة أرنت أن المواطن لا يستقيم مواطناً من دون حيابة الرأي - وفي خضم هذا السعي الذي تحض عليه الديمقراطيات تولد الجماهير.

صناعة الجماهير

تتيح النظم الديمقراطية للجماهير أن تتلبس بلبوس المواطنة. وحين تقع هذه النظم في شرك مماثل تغامر في أن تتحول عن جوهرها وروحها. وهذا ما تذكره معظم المناقشات الأولية التي تناولت وصول ادولف هتلر إلى منصب المستشار من خلال الاقتراع المباشر والحر. أي أن الفارق بين الجماهير المؤمنة والمواطنين اصحاب الآراء يكمن بالضبط في السبل التي يتم من خلالها إيقاف شيطان الرأي العام. هذا الشيطان الذي يصبح بالغ الخطورة حين يعتمد على انفعالاته المباشرة: عشق انجلينا جولي، التحزب لفنية بيكاسو العالية، تنزيه نعوم تشومسكي عن الزلل، عبادة طوني نغري، وسيادة موضة والتر بنجامين من دون رادع. كما لو أننا امام أي مشكلة من المشكلات التي تعترضنا في الفن أو السياسة أو الاقتصاد نلجأ إلى القراءة في كتاب بنجامين الذي يملك جواباً شافياً لكل اسئلتنا.

استناداً إلى ما سبق، يسهل علينا أن نلاحظ أن الفنون عموماً تنشأ صنع الجماهير على نحو لا فرار منه. فالفنانون على ما يوضح ميشال هرميس هم صانعو اصول. بل ويستطيع الفنان أن يلغي الاصل الذي نسخ عنه ويؤصل النسخة التي صنعها. الرجل الذي اختاره مايكل انجلو لينحت موسى لم يستطع أن يرقى إلى مرتبة الاصل، لكن التمثال أصبح اصلاً ويتم النسخ عنه. وإن يصنع الفنان من عمله الفني اصلاً من خلال ابادة الاصل الذي نسخ عنه، يعني أن نحذ دور آل باتشينو في العراب، لا أن نحذ آل باتشينو نفسه. مما يعني أننا نحذ من لا نملك أي سلطة على محاسبته، وأن نقبل بمزاجه وتقلباته وعنفه وساديته وتعطشه للدماء من دون أن يكون سبيلنا إلى الاعتراض متاحاً. ذلك أن افعال مايكل كورليوني في فيلم فرنسيس فورد كوبيولا لا تترك اثارها المباشرة على حياتنا اليومية. لذلك تبدو كما لو انها من افعال الآلهة. وحيث أننا نؤله نجومنا في الفن والكتابة من دون تردد أو شعور بالذنب، فإننا نغامر دوماً في أن نجعل روح الفن تناقض روح الديمقراطية كفكرة وجوهر.





10

Susanne, calm down for Christ's sake! I like the work you produced for the show, but the quality of it lies in its concept; as a group of photographs rather than individual images. A catalogue is a catalogue. In the current tide of art books people will look at it for maybe one second; if they don't see anything particularly attractive they won't even go on and open the thing, let alone buy it. They won't go on to read what the show is about and they certainly won't go on to read YOUR name.



11

How can you be so cheap? Oh yes, the audience wants this, so why not give them what they fucking want!! Is this your concept of contemporary art?

No it's not. It's my concept of a cover.



12

Hi Oliver!

Hey Christian!



13

Hi Susanne, everything fine? You look like you've been crying?

Of course I haven't. This disgusting salmon sandwich was just so loaded with onion rings that it made my eyes water...



15

Well just a minute ago he said my photographs were boring.

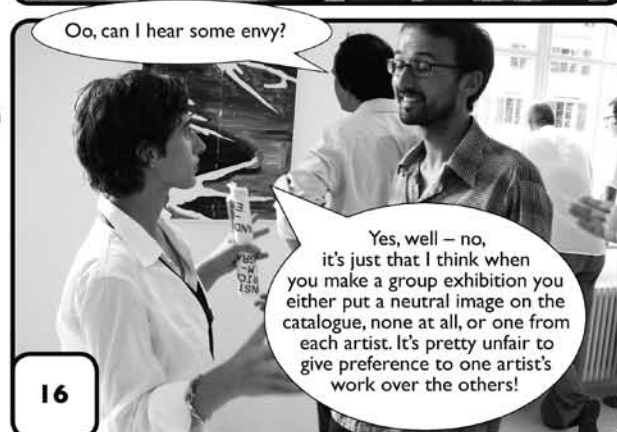
But you know Oliver, I'm sure he didn't mean it! Have you seen the catalogue? It's really cool

Yes, especially if your work is on the cover.



14

Oliver, be nice to Susanne! Oliver told me your piece in the show will be fantastic, I'm really looking forward to seeing it.



16

Oo, can I hear some envy?

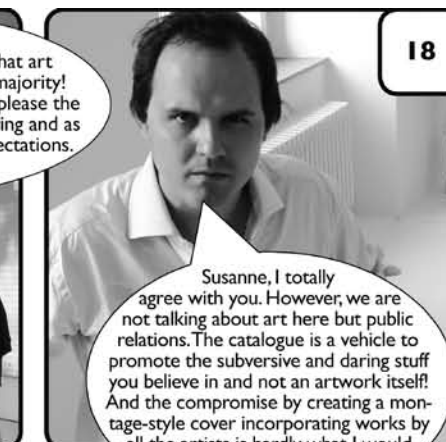
Yes, well - no, it's just that I think when you make a group exhibition you either put a neutral image on the catalogue, none at all, or one from each artist. It's pretty unfair to give preference to one artist's work over the others!



17

I don't know, I think you should think about what the readers want and what we want from them, and really the catalogue cover is just to raise some interest.

That's exactly what I told her, but she won't listen to me!



18

Susanne, I totally agree with you. However, we are not talking about art here but public relations. The catalogue is a vehicle to promote the subversive and daring stuff you believe in and not an artwork itself! And the compromise by creating a montage-style cover incorporating works by all the artists is hardly what I would call subversive or daring.



19

I still think this whole discussion is bollocks. Susanne, you are just angry that you're not on the cover. If one of your images had been chosen it wouldn't even occur to you to debate all this shit!

Oliver, this is George; George, this is Oliver. Oliver is the curator of a group show called 'Xenophobic knowledge production'.



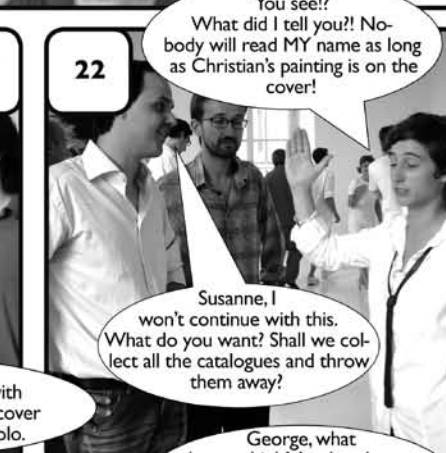
20

Hi folks!

Hi George!

Hi George!

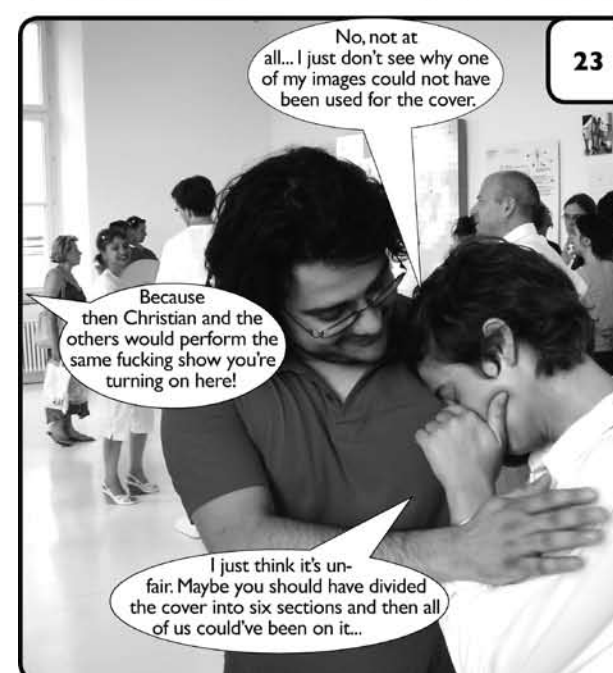
You see? What did I tell you!! No-body will read MY name as long as Christian's painting is on the cover!



22

Susanne, I won't continue with this. What do you want? Shall we collect all the catalogues and throw them away?

George, what do you think? Am I such an arsehole because I only put one of the six artists on the cover?



23

No, not at all... I just don't see why one of my images could not have been used for the cover.

Because then Christian and the others would perform the same fucking show you're turning on here!

I just think it's unfair. Maybe you should have divided the cover into six sections and then all of us could've been on it...



24

Well, you are an arsehole, but not because of this.



25

I'm out of here.

has art anything to do with democracy?

what is democracy? do we live in such or in what circumstances do we live in europe? we can vote for different parties and we find several niches where we can self-actualise ourselves. we can outtell our opinion - even dissent towards (from?) the government. but if democracy means participation in the power and in the social decisions... but the workers in the factories can't decide themselves what, how and why they produce, if the economic and the labour system is not determined by the operator but by the owner... can we call our society earnestly a democracy?

has art anything in particular to do with democracy?

how should it? how should art anything in particular to do with democracy? after all it emerges since centuries before the backdrop of most divers social premises.
art however is part and mirror of the social circumstances. it's always a social element. image-production as individual act in solitude without public dimension can't be art. but in connection and in exchange with (parts of) the society it can be art
obviously art is not directly bound to a model of society: at all times there were artists engaged with the court, the crown, the king, the church, the money, the ruling party or other authorities like vice versa / the opposite way round there were and always will be artists that critically reflect and question the ruling circumstances and that are practising the arts als contradiction or even resistance against them.

splinter by thomas kilpper, berlin

hat kunst etwas mit demokratie zu tun?

was ist demokratie? leben wir in einer solchen, bzw. in welchen verhältnissen leben wir heute in europa? wir können zwar parlamentarier verschiedener parteien wählen und es gibt zahlreiche nischen, wo wir uns verwirklichen können. unsere meinung - auch widerspruch zur regierung - können wir fast überall äußern. wenn demokratie aber teilhabe an der macht und an den gesellschaftlichen entscheidungen bedeutet..., die menschen in den fabriken jedoch gar nicht selbst entscheiden können, was, wie und wofür sie produzieren..., wenn das wirtschaft- und arbeitsleben also nicht von den arbeitenden sondern den besitzenden bestimmt wird, können wir unsere gesellschaft dann tatsächlich als demokratie bezeichnen?

hat kunst speziell etwas mit demokratie zu tun?

wie sollte sie? wie sollte kunst speziell etwas mit demokratie zu tun haben? schließlich entsteht sie seit jahrhunderten vor dem hintergrund unterschiedlichster gesellschaftlicher voraussetzungen.
kunst ist jedoch bestandteil und ein spiegel der jeweiligen gesellschaftlichen verhältnisse. und sie ist immer ein gesellschaftliches moment. bildproduktion ohne öffentliche dimension als rein individueller akt kann keine kunst sein. erst in verbindung und im austausch mit (teilen) der gesellschaft kann sie kunst sein. dh. bilder werden zwar oft in einsamkeit hergestellt, hinausgeschleudert in die gesellschaft, da gesehen, reflektiert und kritisiert können sie kunst sein. kunst ist offensichtlich nicht unmittelbar an ein herrschafts- oder gesellschaftsmodell gebunden: es gab zu allen zeiten künstler, die dem hof, dem könig, der kirche, dem geld, der herrschenden partei oder anderen obrigkeiten verpflichtet waren - wie es umgekehrt immer künstler gab und geben wird, die die herrschenden machterhältnisse kritisch reflektieren, die kunst als widerspruch und moment von widerstand praktizieren.

bruchstücke von thomas kilpper, berlin

Freiheit aushalten-Kunst aushalten-Demokratie aushalten
So schön und doch so schwierig.





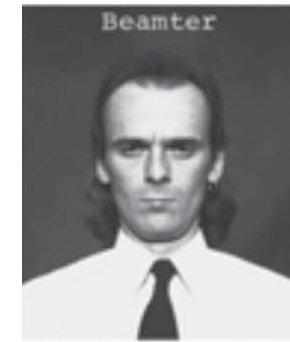




Richter



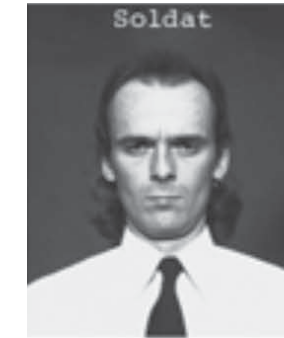
Artist



Beamter



Anarchist



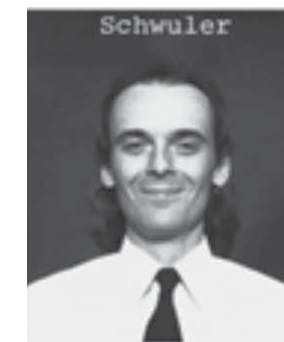
Soldat



Mörder



Bulle



Schwuler



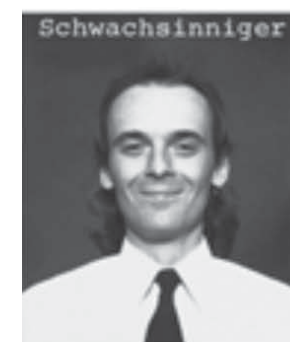
Heiliger



Süchtiger



Priester



Schwachsinniger



*Santiago Sierra**«245 Kubikmeter und The Punished (Die Gestraften)»**Installation in der Synagoge von Pulheim bei Köln, März 2006*

When the popular
is turned into
populist, the public
space and coercive
space merge





Den Kunstraum öffnen, das Denken dynamisieren

Edith Krebs

Der Begriff «Politische Kunst» beinhaltet einen Anspruch auf öffentliche Wirksamkeit. Gleichzeitig wird gerne argumentiert, politische Kunst werde durch ihren Kontext, das Betriebssystem Kunst, neutralisiert. Welcher Politikbegriff steht hinter diesen Argumentationen? Was ist das Politische an der politischen Kunst? Und wann und wo ereignet es sich?

Erstes Beispiel: Im März 2006 sorgte eine Aktion des spanischen Künstlers Santiago Sierra für Aufruhr. In einer ehemaligen Synagoge in der Stadt Pulheim bei Köln liess Sierra die Abgase von sechs Autos mit Schläuchen in das frühere jüdische Bethaus leiten. Mit Gasmasken ausgestattet sollten die BesucherInnen die mit tödlichem Kohlenmonoxyd gefüllte «Gaskammer» jeweils sonntags betreten können. Er wolle mit dieser Aktion auf die seiner Meinung nach herrschende «Banalisation der Erinnerung an den Holocaust» aufmerksam machen, umriss Sierra sein Anliegen. In jüdischen Kreisen kam die Aktion mit dem Titel «245 Kubikmeter und The Punished (Die Gestraften)» ganz anders an: Als eine «Niedertracht sondergleichen» kritisierte der Publizist und Holocaust-Überlebende Ralph Giordano die Aktion: Auch der Generalsekretär des Zentralrates der Juden in Deutschland, Stephan J. Kramer, übte heftige Kritik: «Das fiktive und geschmacklose Kunstspektakel verletzt nicht nur die Würde der Opfer des Holocaust, sondern auch der jüdischen Gemeinschaft». Die Präsidentin der Israelitischen Kulturgemeinde in München, Charlotte Knobloch, nannte die Kunstaktion eine «niveaulose Provokation» der Opfer. Am 20. März 2006, eine Woche nach Beginn, brach Santiago Sierra die Aktion ab.

Zweites Beispiel: Unter dem Titel «Swiss Swiss Democracy» eröffnete der Schweizer Künstler Thomas Hirschhorn im Dezember 2004 eine Ausstellung im Centre Culturel Suisse in Paris. Die Einladungskarte zur Ausstellung zeigte ein Bild des irakischen Foltergefängnisses Abu Ghraib, darunter die Wappen der Urkantone Uri, Schwyz und Unterwalden, versehen mit der Aufschrift «I love democracy». In die Räume des Centre Culturel Suisse hatte der Künstler in einer Rieseninstallation aus Pappkarton ein Labyrinth von Gängen und Räumen eingebaut. Auf die pastellfarbenen rot, blau und gelb bemalten Wände waren Zeitungsausschnitte zu den Themen Staat und Demokratie aufgeklebt, in einer Nische liefen auf verschiedenen Monitoren Schweizer Fernsehprogramme. Begleitet wurde die Ausstellung von täglichen Lesungen des deutschen

Philosophen Marcus Steinweg sowie der ebenfalls täglichen Aufführung eines «Tell»-Stücks, in dem ein Schauspieler über dem fotografischen Porträt von Bundesrat Christoph Blocher das Bein hebt und damit eine Pinkelsituation andeutet.

Die Folgen von Hirschhorns Pariser Demokratie-Stück sind bekannt: Nach einer von der Boulevardzeitung «Blick» initiierten Kampagne kürzte das Parlament das Budget der Kulturstiftung Pro Helvetia, welche die Ausstellung finanziert hatte, um eine Million. Die Schweizer Demokratie, der die Ausstellung gewidmet war, hatte sich provozieren lassen und sich über die in der Schweizer Verfassung garantierte «Freiheit der Kunst» hinweg gesetzt. Über Wochen wurde in der Schweizer Öffentlichkeit über die sogenannte «Hirschhorn-Affäre» gestritten und diskutiert. Die Meinungen blieben geteilt: Während eine Mehrheit der PolitikerInnen, vor allem rechts der Mitte, die Budgetkürzung guthiess, attackierten sowohl die liberalen und linken Medien als auch die Kulturschaffenden den Angriff auf die Kunstfreiheit als Akt der Zensur und der staatlichen Willkür.

Was heisst politisch?

Nicht die Frage, ob es sich bei diesen beiden Ausstellungen um gute oder schlechte Kunst handelt, interessiert uns hier in erster Linie. Es geht vor allem darum zu zeigen, wann und wie Kunst politisch wird oder werden kann. Doch was heisst überhaupt politisch? In demokratischen Gesellschaften wird Politik als ein Prozess definiert, der das Ziel verfolgt, zu allgemein verbindlichen Entscheidungen zu kommen, indem sich mehrere Interessengruppen, Parteien, Organisationen oder Personen gezielt daran beteiligen. Politisch wird eine Sache also erst dann, wenn sie öffentlich artikuliert und diskutiert wird. Zugespielter formuliert das Chantal Mouffe, Professorin für politische Theorie an der University of Westminster in London und Vertreterin einer radikalen und pluralen Demokratie: In der Politik gehe es um die Konstituierung der politischen Gemeinschaft, und diese Form von politischer Verräumlichung sei immer instabil und konfliktuös. In demokratischen Gesellschaften muss der gesellschaftliche Zusammenhalt also immer neu ausgehandelt werden. Würde dieser Prozess zum Stillstand kommen, dann nur um den Preis der Demokratie. Nur in dikatorisch oder feudal strukturierten Gesellschaften bildet sich eine stabile gesellschaftliche Ordnung aus. Eine demokratische Öffentlichkeit hingegen lebt vom Austausch, von der Argumentation, vom öffentlichen Disput. Auf die Kunst heruntergebrochen lässt sich dieses Politikverständnis folgendermassen umschreiben: «Kunst ist öffentlich, wenn sie im Medium des Antagonismus

auftaucht». So jedenfalls hat es der österreichische Philosoph Oliver Marchart einmal formuliert.

Erstarrte Rezeption

Die Aufgabe der (politischen) Kunst in einer demokratischen Gesellschaft wäre es demnach, Öffentlichkeit zu schaffen, gesellschaftliche Konflikte zu formulieren und zuzuspitzen, den Kampf um die Bedeutung (politics of signification, Stuart Hall) zu artikulieren. Tatsächlich wurde diese Forderung in etwas anderer Form bereits im ausgehenden 18. Jahrhundert an die Kunst gestellt - unter anderem von Friedrich Schiller in seiner Schrift «Über die ästhetische Erziehung des Menschen» (1795). Zur gleichen Zeit aber veränderte sich auch die Rezeption, die Art und Weise der Kunstbetrachtung, stellt der deutsche Kunsttheoretiker Wolfgang Ulrich fest: «Anstatt nämlich die Rezeption von Kunst verstärkt zu einer öffentlichen Angelegenheit zu machen, anstatt über Kunst also politisch zu disputieren, wurde es vielmehr üblich, in andächtigem Schweigen und allein – privat – vor dem Kunstwerk zu verweilen, sich in einen stummen Dialog mit ihm zu versetzen und seine Wirkung auf das Gemüt zu reflektieren.» Statt «frei» und «autonom» sei die Kunst in der bürgerlichen Gesellschaft zu einer Art Hoheit geworden, zu einer singulären Autorität, die sich mit ähnlich strengen Regeln und Ritualen umgeben habe, wie sie in der höfischen Gesellschaft üblich waren. Aus diesen Beobachtungen zieht Ulrich eine interessante Schlussfolgerung: Nur dadurch, dass die Rezeption von Kunst in Konventionen erstarrt sei, hätte sich die Kunst ihrerseits von Regeln befreien können und sich als Medium der Opposition und des Protestes etablieren können. Dieses geschlossene System, ein eigentlicher «double bind», komme auch in den beiden Schlüsselbegriffen der modernen Kunst, Avantgarde und Autonomie, zum Ausdruck: «Liegt dem einen Begriff die Auffassung zugrunde, Kunst könne zum Motor der Geschichte werden und ihre (revolutionären) Regeln letztlich als Massstab für die gesamte Gesellschaft durchsetzen, drückt der andere Begriff die Sehnsucht aus, sich von der Öffentlichkeit möglichst fernzuhalten, sich als Künstler zu vereinzeln und abzuschotten». Diese überspannten und vor allem auch widersprüchlichen Erwartungen in die Kunst habe schliesslich zu einer Utopisierung und sakralen Überforderung der Kunst geführt, wie sie etwa in der Kunstphilosophie von Martin Heidegger zum Ausdruck komme.

Kunst – so das Fazit Ulrichs – sei in der Moderne, anders als oft behauptet, ziemlich unfrei geworden, ihr Ort autonomer Abgeschiedenheit zu einer Art Gefängnis. «L'art pour l'art wäre die letzte paradoxe – die paradoxe letzte – Konsequenz des Anspruchs, Kunst möge die Welt revolutionieren», schliesst

Ulrich seine Überlegungen. Politisch wäre Kunst also dann, wenn sie – wie es Ulrich im Titel «Tiefer hängen» seines Aufsatzbandes leitmotivisch andeutet – etwas von ihrem autoritären und auratischen Charakter verlöre, sich statt in kunstinthener Esoterik zu ergehen etwas mehr aus dem Fenster hinaus lehnte.

Kunst, die wehtut

Kehren wir noch einmal zu den beiden eingangs erwähnten Beispielen zurück. Sind diese Arbeiten nun politisch im erörterten Sinn? Gelingt es ihnen, die herkömmliche Form der Rezeption aufzumischen und/oder im «Medium des Antagonismus» aufzutauchen, wie das Oliver Marchart von politischer Kunst fordert?

Kennzeichnend für beide Beispiele ist die öffentliche Auseinandersetzung, die sie provozierten. Diese Arbeiten wurden nicht nur im Kunstraum von einem Kunstpublikum rezipiert, sondern durch Medien wie Zeitung, Radio und Fernsehen an eine grössere, unspezifischere Öffentlichkeit getragen und dort kontrovers diskutiert. Und beide Beispiele greifen inhaltlich auf ein politisches Thema zurück: Hirschhorn auf das Thema Demokratie, Sierra auf das Thema Erinnerungskultur und des Holocaust. Das Thema Demokratie hat an sich keine besondere Brisanz – auf jeden Fall nicht in der Art der Darstellung, die Hirschhorn wählte. Wäre da nicht die ominöse Theaterszene gewesen, der Ausstellung wäre wohl kaum besondere Aufmerksamkeit zuteil geworden. Brisanter als die Ausstellung selbst war zweifellos das Einladungsplakat: Eine direkte Beziehung zwischen den Schweizer Urkantonen und dem Foltergefängnis Abu Ghraib herzustellen, darin liegt angesichts des fragwürdigen Demokratieverständnisses einiger Staaten respektive ihrer Präsidenten durchaus Zündstoff. Und wäre nicht zufällig die Budgetdebatte im Parlament mit der Ausstellungseröffnung zusammengefallen, hätte die Ausstellung wohl keine derartigen politischen Konsequenzen gehabt. Es waren also eine ganze Reihe von Zufällen notwendig, damit aus Hirschhorns im Grunde harmlosem Demokratieprojekt ein Beispiel politischer Kunst werden konnte.

Im Fall von Santiago Sierra liegen die Dinge etwas anders. Es ist ein Grundzug seiner Projekte, dass sie den Finger auf eine Wunde legen und ziemlich erbarungslos darin herum bohren. Sierras Kunst tut weh. Ob er nun – immer gegen Bezahlung – Männer masturbieren lässt, Immigranten in Venedig die Haare blond färbt, jungen Kubanern eine Linie auf den Rücken tätowiert oder auf der spanischen Seite der Strasse von Gibraltar afrikanische Einwanderer Erdlöcher ausheben lässt – immer geht es bei Sierra um das böse Spiel von

Macht und Machtmissbrauch. Sierras Aktionen illustrieren diese hierarchische, ausbeuterische Beziehung nicht, sondern inszenieren sie auf eine prekäre Art, die keine Distanz zulässt. Eine kontemplative Haltung ist vor Santiago Sierras Aktionen nicht möglich, selbst wenn wir ihnen in Form von fotografischen Dokumentationen im Kunstraum begegnen. Sierra spitzt nicht nur gesellschaftliche Missstände – Ausgrenzung, Ausbeutung, das Machtgefälle zwischen erster und dritter Welt – auf drastische Weise zu, er involviert die BetrachterInnen in seinen Aktionen auf eine Art und Weise, die im Prinzip jede ästhetische oder intellektuelle Distanzierung verunmöglicht und es zu einer (politischen) Stellungnahme herausfordert. Wer in diesem Moment über künstlerische Methoden zu rasonnieren beginnt, gehört ganz bestimmt zum gebildeten Kunstpublikum. Denn nur ihm bleibt die – eingermassen zwanghaft anmutende – Flucht in ästhetische Fragestellungen offen.

Gefahr der Implosion

Zwei unterschiedliche Bereiche sind also im Prozess der Politisierung der Kunst beteiligt: Der erste ist der Raum, das System der Kunst und seine Grenzen, der zweite Bereich ist die Rezeption, die Ansprache des Publikums respektive dessen Reaktion. Mindestens in einem der beiden Bereiche muss eine Öffnung, eine Dynamisierung stattfinden, oder aber ein Antagonismus auftreten, um das spezifische Kunstwerk zu einem politischen werden zu lassen.

Bei vielen Arbeiten von Santiago Sierra wird vor allem der zweite Bereich, die Rezeption, in Bewegung versetzt. Nur in seltenen Ausnahmen, etwa beim erwähnten Beispiel der Aktion in einer Synagoge, verlässt der spanische Künstler den traditionellen Kunstraum. Trotzdem gelingt es Sierra fast immer, die ästhetische Rezeption in eine politische zu verwandeln, das heisst eine Politisierung der Ästhetik in Gang zu setzen, wie sie bereits Walter Benjamin in seinem legendären Aufsatz «Das Kunstwerk im Zeitalter seiner technischen Reproduzierbarkeit» (1935) gefordert hatte. Ein eindrückliches Beispiel dafür ist Sierras Beitrag zur Biennale in Venedig im Jahr 2003: Damals liess er die Türen und Fenster des spanischen Pavillons – sinnbildlich für die Festung Europa – bis auf einen kleinen bewachten Eingang zumauern; nur wer einen spanischen Pass vorweisen konnte, durfte das leere Gebäude betreten. Nicht wenige Biennalebesucher reagierten auf diesen Akt der Ausgrenzung frustriert bis wütend. Selbst wenn eine solche Politisierung einzig den Kunstraum und das Kunstpublikum betrifft, bleibt der Prozess ein politischer. Denn das Kunstpublikum im Kunstraum politisch anzusprechen und herauszufordern, ist ohne Zweifel ein politischer Akt.

Bei Thomas Hirschhorn hingegen bleibt die Rezeption in aller Regel eine ästhetische. Ob «Swiss-Swiss-Democracy» im Centre Culturel Suisse in Paris oder «Wirtschaftslandschaft Davos» im Kunsthaus Zürich einige Jahre zuvor, Hirschhorns raumgreifende Basteleien bleiben illustrativ, wirken bisweilen niedlich oder gar erheiternd. Nur unzureichend gelingt es Thomas Hirschhorn, seine gesellschaftskritische Haltung, die er zweifellos hat (und die er immer wieder gerne zum besten gibt), in ein politisches Werk im hier umrissenen Sinn umzusetzen. Zwar greift er fast immer politische Themen auf, doch in der künstlerischen Umsetzung verlieren sie ihren politischen Gestus weitgehend und es findet jener Prozess statt, den Walter Benjamin als eine Ästhetisierung der Politik bezeichnet hatte (auch wenn Benjamin diesen Begriff nicht auf das einzelne künstlerische Werk anwandte, sondern auf die ästhetische Inszenierung politischer Massenveranstaltungen der Nazis in den dreissiger Jahren).

Die Schlussfolgerungen aus diesen Überlegungen sind zweierlei. Zum einen erscheint in dieser Betrachtungsweise die viel zitierte Repolitisierung der Kunst in den neunziger Jahren plötzlich als nicht mehr sehr politisch: Ihre projektbezogene, oft interdisziplinär angelegte Arbeitsweise in temporären Gruppierungen hat zwar nach wie vor (politischen) Modellcharakter, im Grunde aber haben sie nur selten den Kunstraum verlassen oder gar die Rezeptionsweise grundsätzlich verändert. Im Gegenteil mag ihre theoretisch fundierte Praxis sowie ihr Auftreten in dafür vorgesehenen alternativen Kunsträumen dazu geführt haben, dass der Kreis der Interessierten mehr oder weniger mit den an einem Projekt Beteiligten zusammenfiel. Diese Form der Selbstgenügsamkeit führte fast zwangsläufig zu einer Art Implosion. Zum zweiten scheint der Begriff «Politische Kunst» plötzlich fragwürdig geworden zu sein. Denn Kunst ist offenbar nie von Anfang an oder von sich aus politisch, sondern sie kann es unter gewissen Umständen werden – und auch die Dauerhaftigkeit ihres Politischen ist keineswegs garantiert, sondern wohl eher die Ausnahme. Denn Konflikte und Antagonismen haben die (gute) Eigenschaft, in der Regel nicht ewig zu dauern. Die Wirkung von Jacques Louis Davids «Der Tod des Marat» von 1793, in dem er den Jakobinerführer zu einem politischen Märtyrer stilisiert, ist heute eine andere als zur Zeit seiner Entstehung. Als Vergangene kann jede Form «politischer Kunst» ästhetisch rezipiert werden.

Photographs Tomas Hirschhorn

Thomas Hirschhorn
Ausstellung «Swiss Swiss Democracy»
im Centre Culturel Suisse, Paris, Dezember 2004



Representation and Entertainment

Lev Kreft

1.

Monarchy is a rule of one, aristocracy is a rule of few, democracy is a rule of many. When we use a word *democracy* today, what we have in mind is *representative* democracy. Under Aristotle's terms, representative democracy might not be a democracy.

Before any concept of representation was developed, or even the word itself was used to denote it, representational relation between reality and its mimetic appearance in art had a special status in philosophers' search for truth. Plato's proverbial criticism of art has to do with its pretentious representational ambitions. But all art is not representational, or at least not in the strict sense which includes »realism« and »*mimesis*« as easily detectable resemblance between art and its depicted or described object(s). For instance, »pure music« which became an independent kind of music at approximately the same time as representative democracy was invented, can hardly be apprehended as just another kind of representational art.

Nevertheless, representation is precisely what art has to do with democracy. Long before representation emerged as a concept in philosophy, and even before it had any status among political ideas and institutions, it was a word denoting strange human ability to represent any other being or even object, which had its artistic use in theatre. Greek word *prosopon* included in one both mask which represented theatrical character and was otherwise just a dead object (a mere *artefact*), and the actor who submitted his own body to invest mask with its theatrical life. Theatrical masks were one of the most popular everyday objects of Hellenistic and Roman epoch, one of the most familiar decorative objects throughout Mediterranean: reality represented as theatrical illusion.

During that period, this theatrical term became at first a philosophical metaphor and than a philosophical concept, especially in Stoa. *Prosopon* was here used as description of human being-in-the-world. We have a kind of self which is invisible to others, and (with exception of those philosophically educated) even to ourselves, and a mask offered to the others and managed to represent what we would like to be, or what the others would like us to be. »*Theatrum mundi*« where we play many different roles and characters, still representing our selves, is an inversion of the original situation where we deal with a stage which represents the world. There, theatre represents reality, here, reality itself is revealed as theatrical representation. Latin translation of Greek *prosopon* is *persona*, which later changed its generical location in a typical Roman manner from philosophical into legal concept, in its

final form included in codexes and commentaries of Roman law where a person already exists as an entity which is invested with and composed of different rights, duties, functions and obligations: human being represented in legal terms on the crossroads of legal relations. With this second step, amalgamation of theatrical mask with its bearer became a metaphorical and legal term for human existence in the world and among other humans within their community. The third step reached to introduction of representation as a concept. This could not be possible without Christianity and its need to conceptualise its canon, especially after it was recognised as imperial religion and got imperial power of its own. During Roman Latin use, verb *representare* and its derivations rarely appeared outside their direct and literal theatrical context. The first one to use it much more than all the other authors of Roman period together was Tertullian, a Carthaginian Christian from the third century. Opposed to all Roman spectacles with their theatricality and cruelty, he nevertheless embraced representation as a term, and, following some philosophical ideas of the Stoics, transferred it to Christian God as a personal God and God in person. With a help of Tertullian's casting, God features as a leading person in *theatrum mundi*, appearing as human, but still completely godly; resurrecting as one and only Father, but completely and perfectly human, all Son's pains and torments included; together with, until the Day of Judgement which is expected any moment, the guiding Spirit who inhabits the world as a sentinel and a guarantee of the Testament's fulfilment. This is Trinity: there is nothing else behind these representations. The one and only God is these representations, not a fourth person wearing these three masks as their invisible behind. In Tertullian's interpretation, later accepted as Christian, we are born in a theatre which far exceeds and excels all Roman spectacles, where we represent what we are as much as we are what we represent. In this dialectical interpretation of Stoic ideas, mask and what wears it became completely interchangeable: a person is a product of its representations, representations are what real person is made from. Here, representation becomes representative of the represented, not just a shadow or surrogate. Even more; only through representation the whole essence of the represented becomes present and developed.

Tertullian opposed the idea that bishop of Rome can be God's emanation on earth as a representation of God's will and power. Therefore, he was the first to propose universal representative body of the whole Christianity to fulfil this function. This might be the first political idea of representative democracy. But it remained at that. The concept of representation and the word itself were rarely used afterwards, until late mediaeval times, and their political potential remained undeveloped. It was suppressed already in Augustine, who otherwise liked to use Tertullian, but quite probably omitted his conceptual instruments for

build an archive:



5.00 how to support:

since all units have equal strength, one unit cannot attack and advance against another without help. That ‘help’ is called support.

5.01 a unit gives up the chance to move on a turn in order to support another unit’s order. The province to which a unit is providing support must be one to which the supporting unit could have legally moved during that turn.

5.02 write a support order:

- 5.021 write your type
- 5.022 follow this with your location
- 5.023 then, write an S for support
- 5.024 finally, write the type, location and destination of the unit recieving support (if the supported unit is moving).

5.03 support a unit¹

5.031 Rules to help you resolve orders:

5.0311 all units have the same strength

¹ cutting support
Support can be cut. This will cause the support order to fail and support will not be given.
The above rules should resolve most situations that arise in Diplomacy. There are, however, a few excpe-tions and rare situations that can occur.
from Diplomacy 1961.

their theatrical origin. Further history of representation, including fights over taxation between popes and kings, and kings and parliaments, already belongs to political history, and does not need repeating here. It is enough to conclude: representation is the first tie between art and democracy, Theatrical metaphor by its origin, representation presupposes theatrical pretension which, being representational, produces representative (and not just representational) surplus effect . Typical and eternal characters were products of their (theatrical) representations. Political communities represented in representative democracy, »people« and »nation« included, have their only reality in their representations.

2.

Argument that »direct« democracy might function in small communities, as Greek polis was, while modern mass societies need representative democracy, is much repeated sentence of modern political thought. One of common problems of modernity, already in the 17th century, was how to control multitude, by turning it into a self-regulated mass of people. Artistic means of *dulce et utile*, combining pleasure with useful and civilising effects, were important tool of control in all regimes. Democracy is no exception. Official democratic art exists as a special *genre*, including mass manifestations and festivals from French revolution on, or so-called democratic arts of later modernity, like photography and movies. Can art have a part in civilising process necessary for inclusion of emerging crowds of ordinary people into »people« and »nation« of democracy? Political science, borrowing arguments of political philosophers from Kant to Habermas, usually insists on rational dialogue in public space as a source of decision-making process, and of civilised acceptance of so obtained outcomes as the best possible. The emotional attractiveness of new bourgeois order, strengthened by artistic means of mass entertainment, are rarely mentioned as fundamental source of collective political values. But they were there from the very beginning, as in plans to create *opera in musica*, a novelty of a kind similar to Greek tragedy, which should, according to its first authors, emotionally engage ordinary people and open their souls to those moral values which are necessary for civilised and stable community. This idea was shared by French philosophers of Enlightenment, a group known as Encyclopedists. To establish new art, different from French court's frivolous pleasures, and to address this art to new mass audiences of the third estate, was their idea. To realise that idea, art has to give expression to morality of ordinary man's family and of their public values with the help of strong emotions. That thesaurus of all human knowledge collected into their Encyclopaedia, and their artistic projects were of the same value and importance for their overall ideology of enlightenment of

humanity, is proved by their heated and consequential ideological dialogue on that topic, including a debate on theatre and its impact on good political society. One of the outcomes of this quarrel was that Jean-Jacques Rousseau broke his ties with the group for good.

At the beginning, it was just an intrigue. Rousseau was well known for his high appreciation of Geneva as perfect model-state and republic of virtue. Voltaire, once again in exile, has therefore chosen to spend his time there. But what inspired Rousseau was boring for Voltaire, so he decided to organise himself some entertainment, inviting a theatrical company. He was immediately informed by authorities that theatre was not welcome in the best of all possible worlds, not even at his private premises and for his own private fun. He was furious, and wrote a letter to d'Alembert who was at that moment preparing a G-letter tome of Encyclopaedia, suggesting to include an article on Geneva in edition, with all Rousseau's praise, but with a little criticism: if Geneva wants to become a really perfect city, honourable burghers will have to allow theatrical performances. Done. Article was published in that manner, Geneva, of course, did not change its theatrical policies, but Rousseau was so mad that he left the group forever. While d'Alembert was responsible for the article, there were three main pillars of the argument: Voltaire, Diderot, and Rousseau. Voltaire wrote his literary and theatrical texts, believing that old mastery of epic and tragedy (Greeks, Racine and Corneille included) have to be used, to offer new pleasures to new audiences. He also believed that he himself surpassed all comparable authors from the past already. Diderot wrote his model-pieces just at the time of clash with Rousseau, which had some effect on his programmatic studies printed together with exemplary bourgeois dramas. His central idea was that new audiences do not need tragedy or comedy, but something in between, namely, bourgeois family drama of real, everyday life, with a lot of emotional attraction and spectacular performance. His ideas were fundamental for the appearance of later modern bourgeois drama, as well as for popular melodramatic theatre which is its next of kin. Lessing wrote his *Hamburg Dramaturgy* following Diderot's example, and his own personal grievance to Voltaire responsible for Lessing's emigration from Berlin's Royal Academy to Hamburg semi-amateur theatre. Rousseau, himself an artist, well known not only for his novels but also famous in opera circles, including his own sort of melodramatic theatre, opposed theatre in principle. He wrote a book to criticise and attack former friends and colleagues, and to develop arguments against instalment of theatre in »good society«. His argument is moral: no theatre can make people better, and in some occasions it can make people worse. The reason is, as every author and impresario know, that theatre has to appeal to its audiences, if it wants to attract them to come and to pay attention (and to pay a solid proof of their attention as well,

of course). To do so, it has to accept their point of view, or it would not become popular. Basically, theatre cannot educate people morally, it can only entertain, and, by doing that, even deteriorate people's moral condition. In the best of all possible states, theatre is an unnecessary institution, because with the best of all possible people already in place, theatre could only help destroying their perfect collective morality. The existence of theatre is a proof of imperfect society. There are other arts which are not as harmful, but theatre is definitely out of question. His criticism does not include all the other arts, and is not a universal claim that art and democracy cannot exist together. What it amounts to is that popular entertainment and democratic republic cannot exist together, because entertainment destroys political morality necessary for existence of democracy.

Refusal of Rousseau's argument might seem to be an easy case, but it is such only if we claim that democracy as we have it is the best possible political order, and that theatre (or art as such) is the most noble of all human abilities and needs. Otherwise, Rousseau's argument is oriented in the same direction as later *l'art-pour-l'art* argument is: art is not morally responsible, and it is not socially or politically useful. Against that, we could collect many good examples of fine civilisational, educational, social and/or political usefulness of art, and add the fact that all modern democracies are not only representative but also national, i.e. their »*demos*« is at least as much »people« consisting of individual citizens as »nation«, a ruling blood and soil collective. And for production and maintenance of national collectives, art is one of main sources of energy, especially with those nations which had to be created without pre-existing nation-states of their own. From this point of view, art is crucial for democracy because it is essential productive force which gives birth and care to democratic nation which is its necessary political collective body.

But, instead of attacking Rousseau for the sake of theatre's dignity and art's glory, which is just an ideologically conditioned reflex, it might be more useful to listen to his thesis that theatre has to entertain: seduction and attraction have to appeal to people as they already are, and therefore cannot make people better. Today, that would not be a definition of theatre but a definition of democracy: it has to entertain, or it has to perish. Representative democracy, considerably younger than art, is today in its *l'art-pour-l'art*-istic epoch; it is autonomous, independent of any moral or utilitarian obligations.

Post-modern response to representation and entertainment was cynical. It demonstrated that representation is a fake, but admitted that this fake is what we have to live with. It demonstrated that entertainment is a result of capitalist commodification machine which makes art, politics, communication, science and everything else, economy included, to function. If we want a different conclusion, we have to use imagination which transcends representative democracy and commodity production, and/or develop an ability to enjoy, and therefore accept popular entertainment as necessary support of a good society. I hope that this is still at least a possibility.





Landið þitt er ekki til (Your country doesn't exist), Hafnarfjörður, Iceland 2003
Announcement on city walls, billboard, national tv and radio.

2003-07

Your country doesn't exist started as a provocative assemblage sculpture in the experiential environment 20 minus minutes at Platform Garanti in Istanbul and developed into a campaign, which has appeared in different contexts, places, formats, countries, and languages. With the campaign we want to address notions of Nation-State and ownership of countries in an open and direct way by using a statement that approaches the individual on a psychological and emotional level. As well as taking people by surprise through its unexpected and often unexplained public appearance. Many questions can and have raised from the work. What does, or can, this statement mean? Who really owns countries and therefore decides what countries do? Do we need to own a country? Do you need to own a country to feel identified with a place or more places and take responsibility as an active part of a group or as individuals? And do all inhabitants/owners of a country own an equal share? And what if you live in a country that is not "yours", if you are displaced? And what if your country doesn't exist? Which alternatives are there to the approximately 230 years old model? And what effects have today's hyper capitalism (neo-liberalism), globalization and the growing power of multinational corporations on countries and their decision-making and on their inhabitants? The campaign has appeared on national and regional television and radio, in newspapers, as a magazine cover, as a prototype for a post-stamp, as photocopied flyers, as a design on cans of beer, soda, and water sold from an automat, as a coat of arms painted on two sand-stone lion-sculptures, on billboards, as large drawings on city/village walls and on facades of a museum and an alternative exhibition space – written with diverse materials as; acrylic paint, polyurethane foam and clay and now it appears as an announcement in this publication. The work has appeared in Turkey, Iceland, Hungary, The Netherlands, Friesland (a Dutch province with its own language), Belgium, The United States of America and now in Britain and wherever this publication may take it.



Come Paint the White House!!!



The Third National Gathering of Graffiti Artists (III NGGA) invites you to vote and express your opinion with a can of paint. The White House is a sad house; it has been too white for too long. On November 7th, 2000 our entangled names, tags, origins, demands, messages, and desires will embellish the monotony that has until now represented us.

Let the daily layers of our changing voices collapse, one on top of the other like a national calendar! Let's turn the White House into an Aztec temple, a wonder for historians and anthropologists, a jewel for archeologists, a bright and flowing mirror of our times!

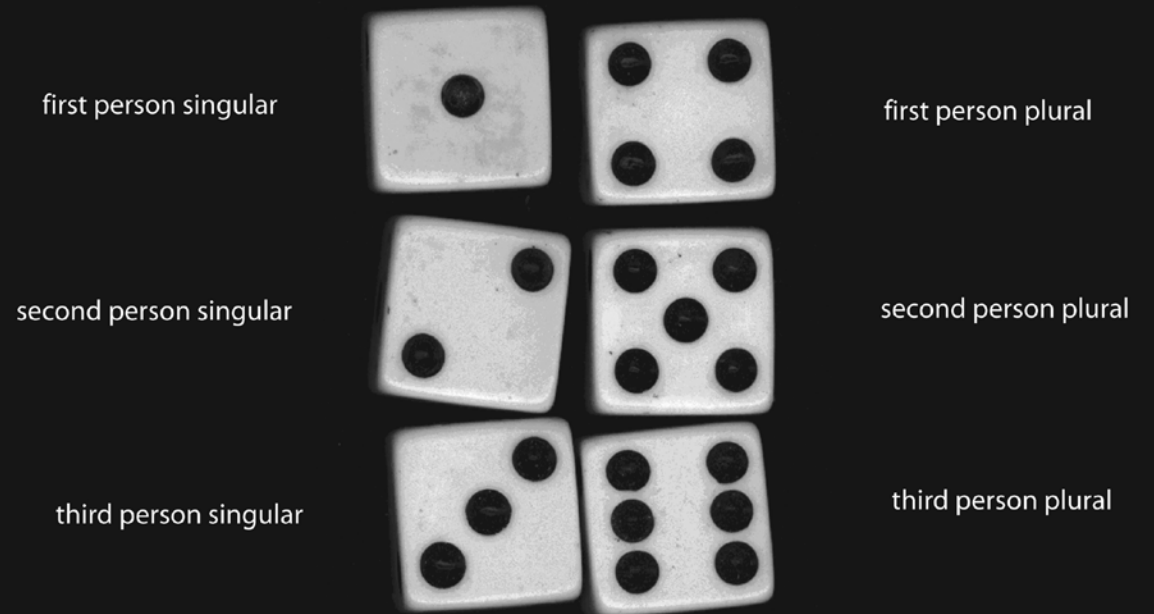
Bring Friends and Music!
We'll bring the food and the ladders.

Note: Throughout the week before the 2000 United States Presidential Elections five-hundred copies of this flier were posted and handed out by Pedro Lasch at various public sites in New York City. No further explanation was provided. This note has been added for subsequent copies and distribution.

FORMAL CONVERSATION AND CHANCE DEBATE

July, 2000.

Pedro Lasch



MATERIALS:

- one die per person
- an additional pair of dice (different in color)
- one hour-glass, egg-timer or any such measuring device

INSTRUCTIONS:

- each player throws a dice. Throughout the game he/she will only speak in the voice of the pronoun corresponding to the number of his/her dice. Example: the players whose dice fell on #6 will use the subject "they".
- at the beginning of each lapse marked by the hour-glass the additional pair of dice will be thrown. One stands for speech, the other for listening. The interlocutors will be determined by these two numbers until the next throw of dice. Example: If the dice of speech fell on #1 and that of listening on #4, the players with the voice of "I" will address those with the voice of "we" and these will answer accordingly.
- the topic of conversation may but need not be irrelevant.
- FCCD can be played in casual conversations, work meetings, conferences and symposia, discussions and political debates, class-rooms, cafeterias, bars, offices, homes, etc.
- the rules are adaptable to the players' taste.

"...it is believed that, in order to liberate listening it suffices to begin speaking oneself - whereas a free listening is essentially a listening that circulates, which permutes, which disaggregates, by its mobility, the fixed networks of the role of speech: it is not possible to imagine a free society, if we agree in advance to preserve within it the old modes of listening: those of the believer, the disciple and the patient." Roland Barthes. Listening. 1976

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The Scandalous Autonomy of Art

By Rasmus Ugilt and Carsten Bagge Laustse

“Ein Fragment muss gleich einem kleinen Kunstwerke von der umgebenden Welt ganz abgesondert und in sich selbst vollendet sein wie ein Igel.” (Schlegel, 1967, 206)

This classic fragment from the romantic journal “Athenaeum” presents a notion of a Work of Art that has been widely influential. According to it a Work of Art is - as a fragment - completely isolated from its surroundings and perfect in itself, like a hedgehog. A Work of Art does not depend upon its context. A Work of Art thus possesses a kind of autonomy. It contains its value in itself. In short: it is not made in order to accomplish anything that is not Art. Art which is an accomplishment of something that is not Art, be it some economic, political or other goal, simply does not count as Art.

This ideal as it is presented by the Schlegel-brothers and their companions (in the Athenaeum-fragments) seems both forgotten and naive today. The movement within Art and aesthetics in the twentieth century could very well be characterised as an increasing contextualisation of the Work of Art. Widely differing movements (Fascism, Communism, the Avantgarde etc.) insisted upon the essential political feature of Art, a development that was mimed by an increasing aesthetisation of politics. These relations have achieved a level of complexity which renders any contemporary belief in the straightforward idea of the autonomy of Art rather naive.

Still there may be some residual elements of the notion of autonomous Art, which could be of interest even today. To put the point bolder: these residual elements of an autonomous Artwork, are still in crucial ways constitutive of the relation between politics and aesthetics.

In order to get a proper grip of this dialectic, we need to consider a third element central to the relation of politics and aesthetics. This third element is technology. Walter Benjamin gives an analysis of these relations in his “Das Kunstwerk im Zeitalter seiner technischen Reproduzierbarkeit“ (Benjamin, 1977). He tells us that a Work of Art

through its own possible massproduction loses a certain Aura. The meaning of a Work of Art “weist über den Bereich der Kunst hinaus.” (Benjamin, 1977, 141). The loss of Aura is thus a loss of autonomy. Benjamin identifies the sphere upon which Art then becomes dependant as politics. Moreover, the technical reproducibility of Art makes whole new forms of Art possible. Benjamin points to film as the paradigm of such new forms of Art. Here we are no longer confronted with a technical *re*-producibility but a thoroughly technical production, meaning that the mass-propagation of these artforms are no longer secondary to the artistic creation. Instead the process of creation is intrinsically a preparation for mass-distribution. The achievement of such Works, so Benjamin, is not an autonomous presentation of Art, but rather setting the mass in motion. This is a complete and utter eradication that which Benjamin calls the Aura of an Artwork - that which is constitutive to its autonomous character.

The Aura of a Work of Art is namely strictly tied to its spatiotemporal character. Considered as a Work, Art is something that has specific spatiotemporal coordinates. It is something finished or final. In this way Art is its own creating process put to a fixating halt. As such Art can be exhibited: the painting on the wall is exhibited as a signifier that frames it by indicating that “*this* is a Work of Art”. The same signifier is fundamental to the sculpture, the play and the live concert. Whereas the technical repeatability of a taped recording or a movie makes the exhibitory character of the Work blurred and unclear. The exclusiveness of the exhibition disappears. In the original form the signifier saying “this is a Work of Art” also contained an excluding “everything else is not *this* Work of Art”. In the words of Slavoj Žižek (and Coca Cola) the Work signifies “this is *it*”. When Art is massproduced the single piece can no longer point to itself as that which is *it*. Still using Žižek’s terms it is instead forced to point its own idealisation: “The Sublime Object of Ideology” (Žižek, 1989). The *it* of the massproduced Work is the hidden substance, on behalf of which the actual produced Work is exhibited. Thereby the exclusiveness of the Work is lost, and instead the “exhibited” item refers to something else - something that is recognisable in every reproduction of the Work. The voice saying “this is it” thereby suddenly becomes a chorus; something to which we can all sing along. One could argue that the functioning of the ideological “petit object a” in Žižek depends upon a residue of this original ideal of Art. Confronted with the fact that every “petit object a” does not

possess an exclusive “this is it”; since it is not followed by the negative “that is not it”; one is forced to install some hidden sublime substance to every repeatable a; the true “it” which contains the residue of the original *exclusive* exhibitory character of the Work.

The functioning of such ideological objects in today's popular culture is an interesting topic, but the prime target of the investigation here is not the aesthetics of political ideology. Instead I will consider how this (now only roughly pictured) mixture of politics and aesthetics reflects back upon institutionalised Art. (This analysis could then perhaps cast some light back on the aesthetics of politics).

The idea that is being challenged by the technical reproducibility of Art is the ability of the Work to contain its own idealisation in its concrete formed self. Historically this resulted in an extreme emphasis upon that, which was thus denied: the Work-character of a Work of Art. Not, however, through simple re-affirmation of the classical forms of Art, but instead, with dialectical necessity, through the negation of any traditionally established legitimate form of a Work of Art. The focus on the Work-character of Art was enforced through a thorough questioning of this very character. Dadaism is here a perfect example.

Marcel Duchamp's “Fountain” is signed as if it was just another sculpture or painting. The exhibition of such objects is normally interpreted as a direct negation of the traditional forms of Art, or even Art as such. I argue here that it is to be seen as the very opposite, namely as an attempt to keep the classic autonomous character of the Work of Art alive in the face of the threat of technological reproduction. This is also challenging Benjamin, since he subscribes to the more common understanding of the matter. He points to Dadaism as a movement within Art that, while accepting the traditional spatiotemporal conditions for Works of Art, mimes the revolution that takes place in virtue of the possible technical reproduction of Art. The goal of Dadaism, so Benjamin, is not the presentation of a Work of Art as such, rather it lies in achieving public scandal by praising randomly collected colours, words or objects as (if it were) a Work of Art. As such it is setting the crowd in motion that is the real achievement of Dadaism, just as it is the case with film.

While Benjamin's focus upon the scandalous features of a Work of Art is of vital importance here, his analysis remains overly simplified. The straightforward

identification of the scandalous character of certain movements within Art with the tendency towards mass-hysteria seems to hasty. Basically some crucial steps in the dialectic gets lost. As I noted above, Dadaism needn't necessarily be seen as a movement that mimes the consequences of the new technology, and thus instantiate an *absolute* negation of the classical form of a Work of Art. Instead, it should be interpreted a negation of the massproducibility of Art through a heightened focus on the Work-character of Art. This focus is then achieved through a negation of what could traditionally be called a Work of Art, thus setting the stage for a *debate* of the Work-character of Art, but not through the statement that the Work, as we know it, is now obsolete. Rather, the statement is the very opposite: the Work as we know it is now more important than ever. The real outcry of Dadaism, and is thus not “this is *also* a Work of Art” or “this is what we think of a Work of Art” which is the provocative form in which it was understood by Benjamin, but rather “we are *still* making Works of Art”.

This becomes apparent when we look at the dadaistic poem. That such a poem is written with coincidentally chosen words removes the focus from the content of it. The lyrical element, rhyme and rhythm all end up being of very little importance when the words of are chosen at random. What is instead important is the brute fact that the poem is there, here and now. It is the spatiotemporal character that is put into focus. As such the dadaists are placing a heightened emphasis upon the Aura of the Work; they're not, as Benjamin would have it, trying to eradicate this aura.

Still, there is a definite shift in focus, from the original idea of an autonomous Work of Art that signifies itself as its own absolute (eg. exhibits itself by uttering “this is a Work of Art” or “this is the universal contained in a particular” with a definite emphasis on “this”), we now find that emphasis is placed on the last part of the sentence; it is the idea that “this” could be a “Work of Art” which is interesting. In the light of the all-important concept Benjamin mentions “the Scandal”, what is interesting about Dadaism is not its inherent scandalous Character, but rather the form of the Scandal. Or to be exact the topos of the Scandal. Following the ideal of an autonomous Work of Art the place where the scandalous element can be found is the Work itself. Where the exhibiting signifier emphasises *this* in the expression “this is a Work of Art”, it is the signified *this* that possesses the scandalous potential (I shall return to discuss this view of the matter

later). But where emphasis is placed on the very idea that “this” could count as a “Work of Art”, the scandal no longer concerns the exhibited *Work*. Instead it concerns the exhibition itself. It is the fact that a urinal is exhibited as Art that is provocative. So the consequence of the enforced focus on the genuine autonomous character of a Work of Art is that the very idea of the Work becomes central in Art, and not the particular Work.

From Dadaism to Concept Art, From the Work to the Artist

It is this topological change of the scandal of the Work that is the focal point of my analysis here. This change is amplified when we follow the development in the history of Art from Dadaism of the inter-war period to the Concept Art of the late 60’s and the 70’s. The “readymades” of Dadaism - such as Marcel Duchamps “Fountain” - contained an immediate rebellion against the bourgeoisie of institutionalised Art, simply by presenting objects, which in the light of bourgeois ethics would be considered the very opposite of Art, as genuine Works of Art. The signing of the “Fountain” validating the Work-character of the piece underlines this tendency. In the later Concept Art the immediacy of the Dadaism period is replaced by a heightened awareness of the content of the provocation. From the immediate rebellion in passing a urinal off as a Work of Art or randomly selecting the words that comprise a poem, we find elaborate consideration into how the Work-Charakter of Art itself is reflected in a particular piece. Piero Manzoni’s “Merda d’artista” provides the paradigmatic example here. In 1961 he conserved and numerated 90 cans of his own shit and gave them the label “Artists Shit”, thus reflecting at once the ability of artist to have just about every sort of junk celebrated as an act of genius, the celebrity status the artist in the cultural industry and the extremes of the institutional criterion of what Art is. Several other issues may very well be added to that list, however taken at face value it is not what is of interest here. What is intriguing here is again the topos of the scandal of the Work. In the Dadaistic movement we could still detect a certain clinging to the Work itself as the topos of the artistic scandal. Here the scandalous element was found in the idea that the Dadaists were *still* making Works of Art. In Concept Art we find that the entire scandalous potential lies in the concept that precedes the Work. Eg: it is not as much the idea that Manzoni is presenting something as Art that wouldn’t normally be presented as such. It is the very concept of an artist’s shit

considered as Art that is provocative. The signifier of the Work in dadaism is very much signifying the Work itself as a Work of Art, whereas the signifier of the piece in Concept Art is strictly signifying the preceding concept - hence the category Concept Art.

This move runs parallel to a change in the aesthetic ambition from Dadaism to Concept Art. In Dadaism we find a striving for beauty that would very well be termed aesthetics of coincidence. Such ambitions are more or less absent in Concept Art. These artists tend to work with materials that are visually uninteresting, in order to ensure that the exhibited object itself does not become a distraction that could lead the minds of the spectators away from the real issue: the Concept of the Work. The dialectic moment in this development is encountered where this de-aesthetisation turns into re-aesthetisation in the form of an idolisation of the artist. The concept of the Work is in the end embodied by the artist who conceived it. The true beautiful object is then the artist herself. This idolisation of the artist is of course taken to the extreme in contemporary cultural industry. Here the artist herself is again to be understood as an exhibited object that signifies its own concept. Something which is made comically clear by he changing of names of a certain american recording artist from “Prince” to “The artist formerly know as Prince” to “The Artist”.

The Flick-Exhibition at Hamburger Bahnhof

Still, this paper is focusing on the institutionalised forms of Art. As such it could seem that the real forefront of the cultural industry (ie. popular culture) is intentionally overlooked. However, we shall see that the institutionalised Arts are in a very specific way on the forefront of history. This will become evident when we follow the current lines of analysis and see how the topos of the aesthetic scandal is changing once again in the light of the Flick-Exhibition at Hamburger Bahnhof in Berlin.

Friedrich Christian Flick is a multi-billionaire artcollector with a special interest in modern Art. He is the owner of a very impressive collection of various modern Works of Sculpture, Installation, Painting, etc.. This collection was put together through the fortune he inherited from his grandfather Friedrich Flick, who made his money as Hitler’s prime weapons contractor. The family fortune was thus founded through the aid of enforced labour during the Second World War. Naturally an exhibition such as this gave

rise to a fair level of scandal in Berlin and in the rest of the country. The curator of the exhibition has explained the debate in the following way: “Wenn ich die Debatte richtig verstehe, geht es um die Angst, dass wir Deutsche den Holocaust zu relativieren beginnen.“ (Blume/Flick, 2004) If we (as Germans) allow the investment of a fortune that originates in Hitler’s regime to be exhibited in our public museums do we then not in a way give indulgence to the one part of our history which we should never indulge? An immediate attempt at a defence in favour of the collection would go along the lines of an argument such as “At least the fortune is now put to use in a way that is of general use and for the enjoyment of everyone.” Flick himself points out that the kind of Art, in which he finds interest, is one that seeks out a “gesellschaftliche Auseinandersetzung” (Kessen, 2004) one that isn’t satisfied through pure aesthetics. Thus the actualisation of the critical potential of the Works in the exhibition, and the relevance of such critique in our modern society, should give indulgence to the crimes in virtue of which, the collection was put together. Still the danger of covering past crimes with a veil of aesthetisation seems immanent.

What is interesting in the case of the Flick-Exhibition is the way this scandal has been put to use in the promotion of it. In the promotion of the exhibition it was nowhere mentioned that famous artists, such as Paul McCarthy or Jeff Koons, was being exhibited. But on every poster and banner the name Friedrich Christian Flick appeared in capital letters. Moreover the exhibition served as reason for re-establishing a journal entitled *Museum für Gegenwart*. The paper was first published in 1930, but it was stopped three years later by the National Socialists. The entire first issue of the new edition is dedicated to the discussion of the political context of the Flick-exhibition. In all the visitors are in no way allowed to forget the connection between Flick, the exhibition and the Nazi regime.

At the same time we can read the following statement from the curator of the Exhibition Eugen Blume the Editorial in the paper: “Die Übernahme der Friedrich Christian Flick Collection in ein Institut wie die Staatlichen Museen zu Berlin bedeutet nicht eine wie auch immer geartete Entlastung des Sammlers, sondern allein die unvoreingenommene Veröffentlichung von Kunst.” (Blume, 2004). Here we find an attempt at a return to the above mentioned classical ideal of autonomous Art. Art is Art. It

is exhibited as such and that is really all that should concern us. How does such a statement fit with a promotion that places an overly emphasis upon the name Friedrich Christian Flick?

An answer can be found by following the general line of analysis I have presented here. Where do we find the scandal of the Flick-Exhibition? Obviously it is no longer any singular piece of Art that is central. Nor is it to be found in a concept that precedes the particular pieces. It doesn’t even concern the Artist, who fostered the ideas and created the Works. It would be tempting to state that the scandal was to be found in the Art-collector. That it is the dubious origin of the fortune invested in the exhibition which is the scandalous kernel of the exhibition. And of course Flick himself was the central topic of the public scandal. But the dualism between the problematic of the ethical principles behind the exhibition, and the claim of the curator that all that is at stake in the exhibition is a presentation of Art freed from any prejudice points in another direction. The point is that this dualism is anything but coincidental. The invoked guilty consciousness (almost) any German would be forced to feel when confronted with the name Flick, is a necessary condition for the meaningfulness of the statement that the Art exhibited should be thought of just as Art, that is without regards for the political context of the exhibition itself. In this way going to see the exhibition is in itself a way of protesting. It is a way of doing protest in the name of autonomous Art. Thus it is here, with the visitors at the exhibition, we find the real topos of the scandal in connection with that Flick-Exhibition. Being confronted with the conflict between the ideal of autonomous Art and the context of the exhibition which contains very clear political aspects, the german visitor is forced to position himself in this conflict. Those who still insist upon visiting the exhibition are in a sense confronting the current of political correctness in Germany. It is such a scandal that is offered by the Flick-Exhibition. We are here dealing with the latest invention in interactive Art; we are offered the opportunity to be our very own artistic scandal.

This could be taken as a sign of a general tendency in Germany today, where the movie “Der Untergang” that has recently premiered portrays Hitler in the last days of the war, and does it in a way that gives a human face to the dictator. The premiere of the movie itself was a cultural event that gave rise to a fair level of scandal, and it will be my assumption that the scandal here could be interpreted along the same lines as I interpret

the scandal of the Flick-Exhibition. However, it seems evident that the argument to the autonomous character of the individual Works of the exhibition couldn't be applied to the case of the film. Because these individual Works were not produced with the intent of being exhibited at an exhibition that would turn out to be politically impregnated in the way the Flick-Exhibition is. Whereas the film "Der Untergang" was produced with every intent of putting forth a politically challenging Work.

This however brings us closer to a characteristic of the particular scandalous content of the Flick- Exhibition. It presents us with an opportunity to be our own scandal in such way that what we are scandalously fighting for is the very autonomous dignity of every single Work of the exhibition. Thus we in a way affirm the autonomous character of the Work of Art by going to the exhibition. In fact the statement of the autonomous character of an individual Work of Art could hardly be stated in a more forceful manner, than by presenting it at an exhibition under the name Friedrich Christian Flick in Berlin some fifty years after the second world war. Because if one were to do this without the added argument of the autonomy of Art, then one would be committed to moral/political implications that most people would distance themselves from at all costs.

Schlegel revisited

Still it is quite questionable whether the autonomy Art, stated in such an enforced manner, takes the same form, as it did, in the way it was conceived by the Schlegel brothers. Thus it is unclear what happens to the scandalous potential of the autonomous Work of Art.

At first it could be interesting to reevaluate the statement of Friedrich Schlegel that "Ein Fragment muss gleich einem kleinen Kunstwerke von der umgebenden Welt ganz abgesondert und in sich selbst vollendet sein wie ein Igel." (Schlegel, 1967, 206). Why a hedgehog? What are the special characteristics of a hedgehog? The spikes would certainly qualify. What is interesting about a hedgehog is that you hurt yourself if you get too close. Indeed it would seem that the idea that a Work of Art is wholly separated from the outside world, goes to say that the Work of Art should be resistant to examination. Which feature of the Work is it that warrants such resistance? The identity of fragment and Work of Art serves as an indicator here. The fragment is understood as a process that

is brought to a halt. Only as such it is a Work of Art. It is thus something that was once part of an organic whole, a unity from which it has been separated. As a fragment a Work of Art represents a tear in organic reality. It serves as a reminder of a lost unity.

In a way this suggests an inverted Heidegger. In "Das Ursprung des Kunstwerks" Heidegger emphasises the essential working features of the Work. Art is 'at work' in a Work of Art. He defines this working activity of the Work in the following way: "Das Werksein des Werkes besteht in der Bestreitung des Streites zwischen Welt und Erde." (Heidegger, 1950, p.38) Here *world* is basically to be understood as the self-opening openness of a given historical situation - a context, people or culture. Whereas *earth* is that in a historical situation which remains in the dark - closed in itself. Where the Work is that which can challenge the opposition between earth and world, it is striving to heal the tear in the organic unity of earth and world. In short the Work is that which works at overcoming the antimony of the openness in the creating process and the closed stalemate of the finished Work itself. The Work is thus that which attempts to break the isolation of the Work itself perceived as a Schlegelian Hedgehog. That Heidegger celebrates poetry as the peak of any form of Art makes good sense in this light. In reading a poem one is not just perceiving a finished Work, but rather one is reworking the Work. One is reinventing the Work - giving it a new beginning: "Immer wenn Kunst geschieht, d.h. wenn ein Anfang ist, kommt in die Geschichte ein Stoß, fängt die Geschichte erst oder wieder an." (Heidegger, 1950, p.64). It is exactly the opposite of such working that is presented here. The Work of Art provides us with a definite end, and not a beginning.

Thus, in the Schlegelian perspective offered here the Work is exactly that which never fully works. This also explains why we by referral to Benjamin found that the physical and temporal fixation of Art is of such importance. The Work of Art is helplessly bound to a certain time and place. Its finality is absolute. As such it is that which tries to incorporate its own ideal, but because of its absolute finality, it necessarily fails. The signifier of a true Work of Art should in this light be supplied with a rhetorical question mark "*This* is it?". The fundamental scandal of a Work of Art thus lies in the idea that "this" (piece of shit) could really be *it*. In this look of things there never were a more true Work of Art than Piero Manzoni's "Merda d'artista". As fragments Works of Art are just that "The Conserved Shit of the Artist"; something that was once part of an

organic whole (the creating process/the body), and now stands separated from this unity - the amputated remnants of a lost unity.

Here we find the real critical potential that lies in Schlegels original idea of autonomous Art, because what is shown by an autonomous Work of Art is the necessary malfunctioning core of any self-referring signifier. Thereby it displays the inherent contradiction in any ideological statement that claims that “this is it”.

Conclusion

Turning our gaze back to the Flick-Exhibition, we can now conclude on our analysis. It turns out that the ideal of Art presented in the insistence upon the autonomy of Art which surfaced in our investigation, is one that is in fact very far from the original idea. We remember that the scandal on the part of the visitor at the exhibition was to be found in insisting upon the autonomous dignity of the Work in spite of the political implications of the Exhibition. Thus the visitor commits himself to the view that there is some intrinsic positive content in a Work of Art that warrants such dignity. The ideal of autonomous Art that is defended in the Flick-Exhibition is therefore one of pure positivity, it is one that assumes that a Work of Art in some way or other is able act as a well-functioning signifier of the idea it represents. Thus it wholly overlooks the negative (scandalous) features of Art. In other words the political scandal that lies in going to the Flick-Exhibition conceals the true scandal of a Work of Art. It overpowers the uncanny question mark of the Work with an exclamation point: “*This* is it?” turns into “This *is* it!”. There is no room for the Schlegelian kind of fundamental uncanniness where the dignity of Art is being defended from the accusation of having political implications.

The enforced positivity however, does not resemble the Heideggarian positivity found in the idea that the Work is challenging the opposition between clarity and obfuscation (whether this in truth is to be understood as positivity, is the subject of another discussion than the present one), because it is no longer the Work itself that is filling this function. It is the very act of going to see the Work that bridges the gap. Therefore the enforced positivity of the Work that is defended by the Flick-Exhibition becomes the denial of any sort of negativity in the Work itself. Whereas we in Heidegger found that there indeed is a gap of negativity to be bridged. And as we have seen it is

negativity that lies at the heart of the autonomy of Art. Thus the enforced statement of the autonomy of a Work of Art is exactly what makes this autonomy impossible. As such the real atrocity of the Flick-Exhibition is neither that it mixes politics and Art, nor is it the scandal on the behalf of autonomous Art against the mixture of politics and Art. Instead it is the consequence of this rebellion that it denies the Work of Art of any real autonomy - which as we remember was the very thing it was supposed to defend.

Litteratur:

Benjamin, Walter (1977): "Das Kunstwerk im Zeitalter seiner technischen Reproduzierbarkeit"

in Illuminationen, Ausgewählte Schriften 1
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Schlegel, Friedrich (1967): Kritische Ausgabe seiner Werke, Zweiter Band
Published by Ernst Behler, J-J Anstett and H Eichner
Verlag Ferdinand Schöningh, Paderborn
(References to number of fragment)

Blume (2004): Editorial
in Museum für Gegenwart 1/2004
Herausgeber: Hamburger Bahnhof - Museum für Gegenwart - Berlin Staatliche Museen zu Berlin, Nationalgalerie,

Blume/Flick (2004): Ein Gespräch anlässlich der Eröffnung der Ausstellung Friedrich Christian Flick Collection im Hamburger Bahnhof
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Herausgeber: Hamburger Bahnhof - Museum für Gegenwart - Berlin Staatliche Museen zu Berlin, Nationalgalerie

Zizek, Slavoj (1989): The Sublime Object of Ideology
Verso, London and New York

Kessen, Peter (2004): Ein Behemien mit Rentengarantie
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Heidegger, Martin (1950): Holzwege
Vittorio Klostermann, Frankfurt am Main

Democratic practice
can be read as
turning against itself
when it takes on a
consensual operation

The Uncanny Work of Art

By Rasmus Ugilt and Carsten Bagge Laustsen

Like a small work of art a fragment should be completely isolated from the surrounding world and perfect in itself, just like a hedgehog. (Schlegel, 1967, 206)

This classic fragment from the romantic journal *Athenaeum* presents a notion of a work of art that has been widely influential. According to it, a work of art - as a fragment - is completely isolated from its surroundings and perfect in itself. A work of art does not depend upon its context; thus it possesses a kind of autonomy, a value in itself. In short: it is not made in order to accomplish anything that is not art. Art as an accomplishment of some economic, political or other goal simply does not count as art.

This ideal as it is presented by the Schlegel-brothers and their companions seems both forgotten and naive today. The movement within art and aesthetics in the twentieth century could very well be characterised as an increasing contextualisation of the work of art. Artworks are contextualised as belonging to an art field within a broader field of power. Furthermore, different movements (fascism, communism, the avant-garde etc.) have insisted on the essential political feature of art, a development that was mimed by an increasing aesthetisation of politics. Although the straightforward idea of the autonomy of art seems rather naive, there are still some residual elements of the notion of autonomous art that might be of interest today. To put the point bolder: these residual elements of an autonomous artwork are still in crucial ways constitutive of the relation between politics and aesthetics.

Autonomy

In order to get a proper grip of this dialectic, we need to consider a third element central to the relation of politics and aesthetics. This third element is technology. Walter Benjamin gives an analysis of these relations in his “Das Kunstwerk im Zeitalter seiner technischen Reproduzierbarkeit“ [The work of Art in the Age of its Technical Reproducibility] (1977). He claims that a work of art loses a certain aura through its own

possible mass production. The meaning of a work of art “points to something beyond the area of art” (ibid.: 141). This loss of aura is thus a loss of autonomy. Benjamin identifies the sphere upon which art then becomes dependant as politics. Moreover, the technical reproducibility of art makes whole new forms of art possible. Benjamin points to film as the paradigm of such new forms of art. Here, we are no longer confronted with a technical *re*-producibility but a thoroughly technical production, meaning that the mass-propagation of these art forms is no longer secondary to the artistic creation. The achievement of such works, Benjamin says, is not an autonomous presentation of art, but rather sets the masses in motion. This is a complete and utter eradication of that which Benjamin calls the aura of an artwork - that which is constitutive to its autonomous character.

Considered as a work, art is something that has specific spatiotemporal coordinates. It is a finished or final entity. In this way, art is its own creation process put to a fixating halt. As such art can be exhibited: the painting on the wall is exhibited as a signifier that frames it by indicating that “*this* is a work of art”. The same signifier is fundamental to the sculpture, the play and the live concert. The technical repeatability of a taped recording or a movie makes the exhibitory character of the work blurred and unclear. In its original form, the signifier saying “this is a work of art” also contains an excluding “everything else is not *this* work of art”. In the words of Slavoj Žižek (and Coca Cola) the work signifies a “this is *it*” (1989). When art is mass-produced the single piece can no longer point to itself as that which is *it*. The exclusiveness of the work is lost, making the “exhibited” item refer to something that is recognisable in every reproduction of the work.

The idea that is being challenged by the technical reproducibility of art is the ability of the work to contain its own idealisation in its concrete formed self. Historically, this resulted in an extreme emphasis of that which was thus denied: the work-character of a work of art. Not, however, through simple re-affirmation of the classical forms of art, but instead, with dialectical necessity, through the negation of any traditionally established legitimate form of a work of art. The focus on the work-character of art was enforced through a thorough questioning of this very character. Dadaism is here a perfect example.

Marcel Duchamp's "Fountain" is signed as if it was just another sculpture or painting. The exhibition of such objects is normally interpreted as a direct negation of the traditional forms of art, or even art as such. We argue here that it is to be seen as the very opposite, namely as an attempt to keep the classic autonomous character of the work of art alive in the face of the threat of technological reproduction. This is also challenging Benjamin, since he subscribes to the more common understanding of the matter. He points to Dadaism as a movement within art that, while accepting the traditional spatiotemporal conditions for works of art, mimes the revolution that takes place by virtue of the possible technical reproduction of art. The goal of Dadaism, according to Benjamin, is not the presentation of a work of art as such; but rather lies in achieving public scandal by praising randomly collected colours, words or objects as (if it were) a work of art. As such, setting the crowd in motion is the real achievement of Dadaism, just as it is the case with film.

While Benjamin's focus on the scandalous features of a work of art is of vital importance here, his analysis remains overly simplified. The straightforward identification of the scandalous character of certain movements within art with the tendency towards mass-hysteria seems too hasty. As we noted above, Dadaism does not have to be seen as a movement that mimes the consequences of the new technology, and thus instantiates (udgør? Constitutes?) an *absolute* negation of the classical form of a work of art. Instead, it should be interpreted a negation of the mass-producibility of art through a heightened focus on the work-character of art. This focus is then achieved through a negation of what could traditionally be called a work of art, thus setting the stage for a *debate* about the work-character of art, but not through the statement that the work, as we know it, has become obsolete. Rather, the statement is the very opposite: the work as we know it is now more important than ever. Thus, the real outcry of Dadaism, is not "this is *also* a work of art" or "this is what we think of a work of art", which is the provocative form in which it was understood by Benjamin, but rather "we are *still* making works of art".

It is the idea that "this" could be a "work of art" which is interesting. Dadaism is not interesting due to its inherent scandalous character, but rather to the form of the scandal, or to be exact the topos of the scandal. In line with the ideal of an autonomous

work of art, the place where the scandalous element can be found is the work itself. Where the exhibiting signifier emphasises *this* in the expression "this is a work of art", it is the signified *this* that possesses the scandalous potential. But where emphasis is put on the very idea that "this" could count as a "work of art", the scandal no longer concerns the exhibited *work*. Instead it concerns the exhibition itself.

Scandal

Still, this article focuses on the institutionalised forms of art. As such it may seem that the real forefront of the cultural industry (i.e. popular culture) is intentionally overlooked. However, we shall see that the institutionalised arts are at the forefront of history in a very specific way. This will become evident when we follow the current lines of analysis and see how the topos of the aesthetic scandal changes once again in the light of the Flick-Exhibition at Hamburger Bahnhof in Berlin.

Friedrich Christian Flick is a multi-billionaire art collector with a special interest in modern art. He is the owner of a very impressive collection of various modern works of sculpture, installation, painting, etc. This collection was put together through the fortune he inherited from his grandfather Friedrich Flick, who made his money as Hitler's prime weapons contractor. The family fortune was thus founded on the aid of forced labour during the Second World War. Naturally such an exhibition gave rise to a fair level of scandal in Berlin and in the rest of the country.

The curator of the exhibition has explained the debate in the following way: "If I understand the debate correctly, it is about the fear that we Germans are starting to relativize Holocaust" (Blume/Flick, 2004). If we (as Germans) allow the investment of a fortune that originates in Hitler's regime to be exhibited in our public museums, do we then not in a way indulge in the one part of our history in which we should never indulge? An immediate attempt to defend the collection would go along the lines of an argument such as "At least the fortune is now put to use in a way that is of general use and for the enjoyment of everyone." Flick himself points out that the kind of art in which he has an interest is one that seeks to foster "debate on social matters" (Kessen, 2004), one that cannot be reduced to a matter of pure aesthetics. Thus the actualisation of the critical potential of the works in the exhibition and the relevance of such critique in our

modern society should highlight the crimes in virtue of which the collection was put together. Still the danger of covering past crimes with a veil of aesthetisation seems immanent.

What is interesting in the case of the Flick exhibition is the way this scandal has been put to use in promoting the exhibition. In the promotion, it was nowhere mentioned that works portraying famous artists, such as Paul McCarthy or Jeff Koons, were being exhibited. But on every poster and banner the name Friedrich Christian Flick appeared in capital letters. Moreover the exhibition served as a reason for re-establishing a journal entitled *Museum für Gegenwart*. It was first published in 1930, but was stopped three years later by the National Socialists. The entire first issue of the new edition is dedicated to the discussion of the political context of the Flick-exhibition. The visitors are in no way allowed to forget the connection between Flick, the exhibition and the Nazi regime.

At the same time, the following statement from the curator of the Exhibition Eugen Blume is found in the editorial of the journal: “The acceptance of the Friedrich Christian Flick Collection in an institution such as the Staatlichen Museen zu Berlin does not in any way imply giving any kind of indulgence to the collector, but solely an unprejudiced exhibition of art” (Blume, 2004). Here we find an attempt at returning to the above-mentioned classical ideal of autonomous art. Art is art! It is exhibited as such, and that is really all that should concern us. How does such a statement fit with a promotion that places overly emphasis on the name Friedrich Christian Flick?

Where do we find the scandal of the Flick exhibition? Obviously it is no longer any singular piece of art that is central. Nor is it to be found in a concept that precedes the particular pieces. It does not even concern the artist who fostered the ideas and created the works. It would be tempting to state that the scandal was to be linked to the art-collector, that the dubious origin of the fortune invested in the exhibition is the scandalous kernel of the exhibition. And of course Flick himself was the central topic of the public scandal. But the dualism between the problematic of the ethical principles behind the exhibition and the claim of the curator that all that is at stake in the exhibition is a presentation of art freed from any prejudice points in another direction.

The point is that this dualism is anything but coincidental. The sense of guilt that (almost) any German would be likely feel when confronted with the name Flick is a

necessary condition for the meaningfulness of the statement that the art exhibited should be thought of as just art, thus leaving out the political context of the exhibition itself. In this way, going to see the exhibition is in itself a way of protesting. It is a way of protesting in the name of autonomous art. Thus it is here, with the visitors at the exhibition, we find the real topos of the scandal in connection with the Flick Exhibition. Being confronted with the conflict between the ideal of autonomous art and the context of the exhibition, which contains very clear political aspects, the German visitor is forced to take a stand in this conflict. Those who still insist on visiting the exhibition in a sense confront the current of political correctness in Germany. In sum, we are here dealing with the latest invention in interactive art; we are offered the opportunity to be our very own artistic scandal.

This brings us closer to a characteristic of the particular scandalous content of the Flick exhibition. It presents us with an opportunity to be our own scandal in such a way that what we are scandalously fighting for is the very autonomous dignity of every single work of the exhibition. Thus, in a way we affirm the autonomous character of the work of art by going to the exhibition. In fact the statement of the autonomous character of an individual work of art could hardly be stated in a more forceful manner than by presenting it at an exhibition under the name Friedrich Christian Flick in Berlin some fifty years after the Second World War. If one were to do so without the added argument of the autonomy of art, one would be committed to face moral/political implications that most people would distance themselves from at all costs.

Still, it is quite questionable whether autonomous art, stated in such an enforced manner, takes the same form as originally conceived by the Schlegel brothers. Thus it is unclear what happens to the scandalous potential of the autonomous work of art. At first it could be interesting to re-evaluate the statement of Friedrich Schlegel that “Like a small work of art a fragment should be completely isolated from the surrounding world and perfect in itself, just like a hedgehog” (Schlegel, 1967, 206). Why a hedgehog? What are the special characteristics of a hedgehog? The spikes would certainly qualify. What is interesting about a hedgehog is that you hurt yourself if you get too close. Indeed it would seem that the idea that a work of art is completely separated from the outside world means that the work of art should be resistant to examination. Which feature of the

work warrants such resistance? The identity of the fragment and work of art serves as an indicator here. The fragment is understood as a process that is brought to a halt. Only as such is it a work of art. It is thus something that was once part of an organic whole, a unity from which it has been separated.

Thus, from the Schlegelian perspective offered here the work is exactly that which never fully works. This also explains why, by referral to Benjamin, we found that the physical and temporal fixation of art is of such importance. The work of art is helplessly bound to a certain point in time and place. Its finality is absolute. As such it is that which tries to incorporate its own ideal, but because of its absolute finality, it necessarily fails. In this light, the signifier of a true work of art should be supplemented with a rhetorical question mark “*This* is it?” The fundamental scandal of a work of art thus lies in the idea that “this” Duchamp’s “Fountain” or Piero Manzoni’s “Merda d’artista” could really be *it*. From this perspective, there never was a more true work of art than this. As fragments, works of art are something that were once part of an organic whole. Here we find the real critical potential of Schlegel’s original idea of autonomous art. What is shown by an autonomous work of art is the necessarily malfunctioning core of any self-referring signifier. Thereby it displays the inherent contradiction in any ideological statement that claims that “this is it”.

Conclusion

Turning our gaze back to the Flick exhibition, we can now conclude on our analysis. It turns out that the ideal of art presented in the insistence on the autonomy of art, which surfaced in our investigation, is one that is in fact very far from the original idea. We recall that the scandal on the part of the visitor at the exhibition was to be found in insisting on the autonomous dignity of the work in spite of the political implications of the exhibition. Thus the visitor commits himself to the view that there is some intrinsic positive content in a work of art that warrants such dignity. The ideal of autonomous art that is defended in the Flick exhibition is therefore one of pure positivity. It is one that assumes that a work of art in some way or other is able to act as a well-functioning signifier of the idea it represents. Thus it completely overlooks the negative (scandalous) features of art. In other words, the political scandal that lies in going to the Flick

exhibition conceals the true scandal of a work of art. It overpowers the uncanny question mark of the work with an exclamation point: “*This* is it?” turns into “This *is* it!” There is no room for the Schlegelian kind of fundamental uncanniness, where the dignity of art is defended from the accusation of having political implications. Thus the enforced statement of the autonomy of a work of art is exactly what makes this autonomy impossible. As such the real atrocity of the Flick exhibition is neither that it mixes politics and art, nor is it the scandal on the behalf of autonomous art against the mixture of politics and art. Instead it is the consequence of this rebellion that it denies the work of art any real autonomy - which as we remember was the very characteristic it was supposed to defend.

Litteratur:

Benjamin, Walter (1977): “Das Kunstwerk im Zeitalter seiner technischen Reproduzierbarkeit” in *Illuminationen, Ausgewählte Schriften I*. Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp Verlag.

Schlegel, Friedrich (1967): *Kritische Ausgabe seiner Werke, Zweiter Band*. Paderborn: Ernst Behler, J-J Anstett and H Eichner Verlag Ferdinand Schöningh (references to number of fragment).

Blume (2004): “Editorial” in *Museum für Gegenwart 1/2004*. Berlin Staatliche Museen zu Berlin, Nationalgalerie: Hamburger Bahnhof - Museum für Gegenwart.

Blume/Flick (2004): “Ein Gespräch anlässlich der Eröffnung der Ausstellung Friedrich Christian Flick Collection im Hamburger Bahnhof” in *Museum für Gegenwart 1/2004*. Berlin Staatliche Museen zu Berlin, Nationalgalerie: Hamburger Bahnhof - Museum für Gegenwart -

Žižek, Slavoj (1989): *The Sublime Object of Ideology*. London: Verso.

Kessen, Peter (2004): “Ein Behemien mit Rentengarantie”, in *Jungle World*, 39-15. September 2004, <http://www.jungle-world.com/seiten/2004/38/3934.php>

A CHAIR FOR VAASA COURT OF APPEALS
DESIGN COMPETITION
A performance and installation in Vaasa
Finland, 2003
by Pia Lindman



Figure 1
Jury session at the Vaasa Court of Appeals,
14th of April 2003

Background
According to a local urban legend, there are two antique chairs in Vaasa Court of Appeals donated by two despotic rulers - one from the East and one from the West.

In the fall of 2002, Platform gallery and the Finnish non-profit art institution Pro Artibus commissioned me to do a site-specific art project in Vaasa, a small town in the North of Finland. The project was part of “iD”, an international art exhibition in Vaasa (June - August, 2003).

I made my first site visit to the town in the fall of 2002, guided by my own father, Ingmar Lindman, who had attended school there in his early youth. As we drove past the Court of Appeals he recounted the legend of the two chairs. A few hours later I had entered the courthouse and sat in the two chairs.

The West
In 1776, the Swedish King Gustav III founded Vaasa Court of Appeals in Finland¹. Finland was a buffer zone in the North between the Swedish Empire and its contender, the Russian Empire. Indeed, the Eastern border in Finland shifted every fifty years as a result of altercations between the two haggling Empires. Founding the Court of Appeals reinforced the Swedish judiciary tradition and political foothold in Finland². When Gustav III inaugurated the new court, he donated a chair to the president to sit in. It was an elegant rococo chair, with blue velvet cushioning and a delicate silver patina on the thin, streamlined wooden legs and frame. This chair represented the King's power bestowed upon the presidential judge in the absence of the King. Every time the judge rested his buttocks on the soft velvety cushioning, he must have been reminded of his duty towards the King.

The East
In 1809, with the end of “The Finnish War”³ Russia gained the entire province of Finland. The Russian Czar Alexander I wisely transformed Finland into an autonomous Grand Duchy of Russia that maintained its language,

religion, judiciary and educational systems. Finnish peasants, with the exception of the ethnic Karelians in the East, had lived for centuries as free men with a judicial system that provided them with legal arms against any crude transgressions by the aristocracy. Had Alexander I attempted to impose the Russian law of serfdom in Finland, the inevitable consequence would have been peasant revolts. Thus, on all practical levels, the Russians maintained the Swedish rule in Finland. The Swedish aristocrats were reinstituted in administrative positions and they kept their societal and political privileges. This development branded Swedish language as a mark of social privilege in Finland and tension still exists between the Finnish-speaking and Swedish-speaking population.



Figure 2 King's Chair



Figure 3 Czar's Chair

The Czar's Chair
While negotiations of control over Finland were in process, undoubtedly gifts and other tokens of appreciation must have changed hands - and Finland must have found itself on the giving end more often than Russia. The urban legend tells us that Alexander I, having learned that Gustav III had some four decades earlier donated a chair to the Vaasa Court of Appeals, deemed it appropriate to donate another chair - an imperial Russian chair - to the Court. Virpi Harju, a Finnish art historian specialized in the symbolism

of Finnish judicial system, reveals the falsity of this legend. Fact is, Vaasa Court of Appeals commissioned a carpenter in St Petersburg to build a chair for the court - at a fairly high price, too! This “Czar's Chair” or “The Russian Chair” (as it is commonly called today), in distinction to the “King's Chair” or “The Swedish Chair” - is a neoclassic, heavy, square-shaped chair, with red velvet cushioning and a gilded wooden frame. The wooden carvings of the legs represent paws of a lion while the arm rests take on the shapes of eagles' heads. The design reflected a popular style in the Russian imperial court in St Petersburg of that time.

These two chairs still inhabit the meeting rooms in Vaasa Court of Appeals - the King's Chair in Plenum Room One and the Czar's Chair in Plenum Room Two. Every three months, the judges of higher courts in Finland convene in Plenum Room One for a meeting and the president of the Vaasa Court of Appeals moderates the meeting seated at the end of the table - in the King's Chair. Plenum Room Two is used as an auditorium for educational events and Czar's Chair is placed in the corner in the far end of the room, right next to the video screen. It is rarely used as a chair.

Straddling Two Chairs
In 1917, with the turmoil of the Bolshevik revolution in Russia, Finland became an independent nation. It had managed to steer clear from the russification efforts by panslavism and via a painful detour of a Bolshevik revolution of its own, was finally consolidating its identity as “a nation among nations”. However, at no point in history did anyone think to build a new chair for the president of the Vaasa Court of Appeals, a chair that would reflect the new Finnish identity, rule, justice, and democracy. It is as if the two antique chairs were left to haggle alone in the court about Finnish loyalty to East or West. Perhaps there has been no need for a “Finnish chair”: the Russian rule, with its later-day panslavism made Finns perceive the East as evil and oppressive, while the Swedish rule was glorified as democratic, enlightened, and just. A clean representation of Finnish-ness and Finland as historically fixed within the socio-political tradition of Sweden and the Nordic countries ensured unquestionable license to independence, especially from a threatening and powerful Soviet-Union of the Cold War. Therefore, at the Vaasa Court of Appeals today, the president still prefers to sit in the King's Chair, while the Czar's Chair is tucked away in a corner. This is also why the urban legend ambulates in Vaasa. Finnish political history is saturated with compromises to Russia and the Soviet Union, precisely thus Finns find it hard to admit Finland ever ingratiated itself to Russia. Famed Fennoman⁴ Johan Wilhelm Snellman wrote in the early 1900's: “We are not Swedes, we will not become Russian, let us be Finns”. Defining Finland by negative relationships and wedging a place for it between its two more powerful neighboring nations, this

proverb has stuck with Finns to this day. Feeding Finns their own myth of stubbornness and perseverance, this proverb speaks of an idealized image of Finns by and for themselves. Finland joined the European Union in 1995. An increasing amount of immigrants will inevitably change the cultural landscape of Finland. Not only the identity of the newly entered immigrants transforms, but also Finns have to redefine themselves - and the identity of Finland. Could indeed this immigrant influx open the gates of the fortress we call Finnish identity, so it could be openly discussed and even questioned? In other words, is Vaasa Court of Appeals and Finland finally ready for a “Finnish chair”?

A Finnish Chair?
In February 2003, I initiated a nationwide competition for a new chair to the Vaasa Court of Appeals. With this competition, I wanted to foment discussions about “Finnish-ness”. In the process of selecting a chair for the president, a jury of laymen pondered over Finnish society, identity, democracy, and justice.

I distributed a Call for Proposals to libraries, town halls, and educational institutions nationwide. The competition was open to anyone residing in Finland or a group with at least one member residing in Finland.

In the Call for Proposals I wondered why no Finnish chairs had been donated to the Court yet: Perhaps this reflects the democratization of our society: to elevate one chair above others today could be a faux pas. However, Gustav III, inaugurating the new judges for the Vaasa Supreme Court, stated: “...may the poor and oppressed find a just refuge from the persecution of the stronger and wrong-minded...”. Our globalizing world in mind these words sound current. Maybe it is time to donate Vaasa Court of Appeals a new chair, a chair that would express living conditions in a contemporary Finland, with its various groups of citizens and these citizens' need to understand Finnish-ness and to be understood as part of the Finnish community.



Figure 4
Group portrait 1, from left: Igor Klemiato, Elisa Bastarrica, Toni Niemi, Sari Anttonen, Pirkko Kaukonen, and the Czar's chair in the middle. In the background, a portrait of Alexander I. Photo credit: Patricia Rhodas.



Figure 5
Group portrait 2, from left: Maj-Len Lindman, Virpi Harju, Ingvar Krook, Pia Lindman, Leena Uusi-Kyyny and the King's chair in the middle. In the background, a portrait of Gustav III. Photo credit: Patricia Rhodas.

The jury of laymen comprised representatives of various groups of inhabitants of Vaasa, such as: senior citizens, immigrants, businessmen, the unemployed, single mothers, Swedish-speaking and Finnish-speaking people. In a two-day session in April 2003, the jury selected five outstanding chairs that were built in real size for the “iD” exhibition in Vaasa. The three first awardees received monetary prizes and all five an honorary letter from the Vaasa Court of Appeals, complete with an original seal of King Gustav III and signed by the President of the Court, Ingvar Krook.

Chair Donations and Democracy
The antique chairs were either donated to the Vaasa Court of Appeals by a despot or commissioned by the court for the sake of showing appreciation of another despot. A chair that reflects a contemporary, democratic, Finland should enter the court by ways of democratic processes. Thus, finding a chair and donating it to the court should express the agency of “the Finnish people”. What exactly is “the Finnish people” is of course a key question here. Far from expecting to exhaust and explicate the question fully, I decided to address it by the parameters of the competition itself. The competition had to be open to anyone residing in Finland, notwithstanding legal status, age, race, class, or education. Further, the jury should represent a “cross-section” of the “Finnish people”, i.e., it should comprise laymen. Anyone residing in Finland is an expert on the experience of Finnish-ness from his or her own subjective point of view, and thus everyone may express a valid opinion about it. Many harbor the idea of a jury of laymen as key to democratic processes in a society. However, this is not always common practice. Developing this project some basic American ideas of how democracy should ideally be practiced were useful to consider. In a post-9/11, “War on Terror”, state of affairs, these ideas are mostly defunct by Americans themselves. Nevertheless, the constitutional ideal of US citizenry and equality is put into practice every day in hundreds of US courts by the use of juries of laymen. Every US citizen will

sooner or later be summonsed to jury duty and cannot be excused. Indeed, most Americans perceive jury duty as a terrible nuisance! However, the brilliance of this practice is that no matter if you are fresh off the boat or whatever your individual religion, race, or upbringing has been, if you are a citizen of the United States, you are regarded and expected to be able to make ethical decisions that concern the concrete lives of your fellow citizens. This is a clear message, that one is a full-fledged member of the society and that one has agency in regards to its ongoing formation and definition. As in many European countries, the judicial system in Finland does not include jury processes involving laymen. With my competition I attempted to create an idealized democratic space and process by bringing in a jury of laymen into one of the rooms of highest judiciary stature in Finland. Obviously, the jury sessions had to take place in Vaasa Court of Appeals, and no less in Plenum Room One, where the bigwigs met quarterly. Finns and non-Finnish residents in Finland who had never even thought of being allowed into a room of such authoritative prominence, were to invade and occupy this room for two days and no less be active transformers of the parameters and symbolic future of this room.



Figure 6
Plenum Room One, jury in session

The current president of the Vaasa Court of Appeals, Ingvar Krook, welcomed the idea of a competition and a Finnish chair with warm enthusiasm. Indeed, he seemed to understand the historic depth and impact of this project - better than myself. A new custom-made chair would complement the court's beautiful and rich collection of historical and symbolic objects dating back to the inauguration in 1776. A follow-up of the two legendary chairs would bring the court into public spotlight and assert its pre-eminent significance in the history of Finnish judicial courts. Ingvar Krook also seemed to sympathize with my ideological aspirations and welcomed the jury into Plenum Room One.

Professionals Versus Laymen
Culture plays a key role in constructing national identities. Since the struggle for independence, Finnish designers, writers, composers, artists, and architects, have been bestowed the power to define and represent Finnish-ness both to the outside - and to Finns themselves. Successful Finnish cultural producers were and still are

perceived to have a “natural” understanding of “Finnish sensibility”, which they have a unique capability to articulate “correctly”. Organizing a design competition carrying such high national import and interest, I was certainly expected to not rely on “mere” laymen to succeed in making a “correct” selection. I was expected to include architects and designers in the jury, and put them together with statesmen and judges. An administrator at one of the design schools in Finland responded to my call for proposals by accusing me of mocking the Finnish judicial system and Finnish design, because I had not included any “professionals” in the jury. But to think a successful outcome of the competition would be to have found a “correct” chair for Finnish-ness is contrary to my very convictions. The competition and the outcome are expressions of the discussion in which the concepts of Finnish-ness, democracy, and justice are hashed out by the jury. This discussion was to continue with a wider audience in the “iD” exhibition displaying the awarded chairs together with the antique chairs in the County Museum of Ostrobothnia⁵. It was clear to me that the jury should include individuals who had diverse experiences of living in Finland today and need not necessarily be professionals of any form of Finnish aesthetics. To narrow my selection of laymen, I decided that the jury should be residents of Vaasa. It is a small town of 80,000 residents, and despite its Northern location, it has had its full share of globalization, complete with satellite dishes, German wholesale supermarkets, and Chinese fast food. It has even welcomed refugees and immigrants. And yet, it seems some things never change. Vaasa having been a mainly Swedish-speaking town, with most local peasants and members of working class speaking Swedish (in addition to the aristocracy), new incoming people from other parts of Finland have prompted a change in the linguistic map of the town. It is now bilingual with as many people adhering to the Swedish as well as Finnish language. Any street smart Finn or Swedish-speaking Finn knows this numerical equilibrium is the worst for everyone. In Vaasa, the tendency to segregation and animosity between the two language groups is acutely expressed in an unwritten law regarding the use of the main market square: Finns stay on the North side while Swedish-speaking Finns stay on the South side of it. Composing a jury in Vaasa, language was no trivial issue.

Composing the Jury
I placed advertisements in local newspapers (in both languages) calling for volunteers to participate in the jury. These brought no results. I spent some months having meetings, interviewing, and giving lectures about the competition. It was a hopscotch of a process, where I learned about various lives in Vaasa as I went along. I lectured to senior citizens' groups, in re-education classes for long-term unemployed, I met with cousins, friends of friends, husbands of friends, or just people I ran into in the street.

Eventually, I found a varied group of

committed personalities that at the very beginning of the jury sessions proved to have a great social dynamic. The jury took over the selection process with utmost severity and enthusiasm. The members of this jury were as follows: Elisa Bastarrica, medical doctor, Virpi Harju, PhD (specialized in symbolism of the Finnish judiciary tradition), Pirkko Kaukonen, senior citizen, Igor Klemiäto, carpenter, Maj-Len Lindman, social services agent at Finnair, Toni Niemi, area manager at ABB, Leena Uusi-Kyyny, computer services agent. I also appointed the president of Vaasa Court of Appeals, Ingvar Krook, as Honorary Member of the Jury, and invited Sari Anttonen, an internationally acclaimed Finnish chair designer, to give the jury her “expert statement” about the proposals. I was the Chair of the Jury. Ingvar Krook, Sari Anttonen, and myself did not have the right to vote.

We began our first day of sessions having coffee with the President of the court, Ingvar Krook. The jury members wanted to know what kind of chair Ingvar would like. After all, he had to sit in it all day and his appointment was for life. Ingvar wanted to stay out of the selection process but admitted that - as some court sessions may last as long as sixteen hours - he really hoped for a comfortable chair. Coffee cups lowered to their plates, as a deep silence came over the jury. They saw their work cut out for them: to find a chair that is both functional (comfortable and ergonomic) and symbolically meaningful. It is not ineffectual that some weeks before, the Finnish national broadcasting company had aired on television a program about the competition. More media attention had followed - both local and nationwide. Jury members were interviewed. The media attention increased pressure among the jury to “do their job well”. The search for the perfect chair was on.

Jury Sessions
Jury sessions took place on the 14th and 15th of April, 2003. I expected the members to stay in session from 10AM to 4PM. After all, some of the jury members were single mothers and one of them a long-term unemployed. I could not expect them to afford a babysitter. However, everyone was determined to stay in session as long as necessary and indeed, we stayed until 10PM each night. My job was to present all the proposals and I strived to be fair and balanced. I ensured each jury member had an opportunity to express him- or herself freely and that all opinions were heard by all members. If at the end of the two-day sessions, there was no unified opinion about a chair, then that was to be the result of the competition.

The Proposals
I had prepared a presentation of the seventeen submitted proposals based on the received concept statements, drawings, diagrams, photographs, and models. The common ideas of Finnish-ness ran deep in almost all of them, and they seemed to have been taken for granted. This was often the case in regards to concepts of democracy and justice as well.

Democracy was seen as a direct result of Finnish independence. Almost all proposals mention nature (as metaphor) and especially birch (used as material in the design) as



Figure 7 Models of submitted chair designs

central to Finnish identity. The perseverance, steadfastness, and reliability, perceived to be at the core of the “Finnish soul”, were expressed by stable, durable, sometimes even cold and hard structures and materials. Perseverance was seen to be the very essence of Finnish-ness: to persevere between the two superpowers and maintain an identity of one’s own. Without perseverance, Finland would not exist as a nation - and thus it was perceived in a perfect circular reasoning that it must be a quality that has always been and continues to exist in Finns. Another very prominent feature promoted by most proposals was simplicity and purity: of the form, of the materials, as well as the of “Finnish soul”. Riitta Lempinen, who submitted a decorative “Swan chair” to the competition, describes the general mood of the “Finnish soul” in the quote below:
I have placed some cushioning on the backrest, so that life would not be only hardship and toil: Finland gives its citizens some relief in a life that is not easy. /.../ ...there are fewer moments of happiness in Finland than there are sorrows.⁶



Figure 8 Proposal number 6 by Jokke Jantunen

Some proposals were acute in their criticisms of authority, and some were directly political - even satirical - such as the “\$”-sign (euro) rendered three-dimensional and turned on its side⁷. According to the designer, in

contrast to the “social-security” Finland of the 70’s and 80’s, money had become the new ethos in EU-Finland. The seat between the two small vertical lines running across the curve in the “\$” was covered with fur. The designer proposed that hunting and trading in fur was a common, pre-historic base for human experience. In Osthrobotnia, the base of wealth has been, and still is, the mink-farms that provide the entire Europe with pelts for luxury furs. Indeed pelts were used as currency in many early hunting societies. The jury saw interesting concepts - even irony - in this combination of materials, but generally found it to be an ugly chair. The most prominent feature of the chair was the “\$”-sign, something the jury felt was too much tied to the present moment rather than a timeless idea.

Most irony was directed towards politicians and other figures of authority. This might be a reflection of the difficult relationship Finns have to authority, a legacy of centuries of conflicting, varying, and foreign rules. Only a few proposals presented globalization as a negative development, but all who brought it up seemed to see it as something coming from the outside and to which Finns had to adjust. Although a few were proponents of societal openness and the inclusion of other people and races to the Finnish ‘mix’, the general sense of all the proposals were that Finnish-ness is something onto itself, unique, and opaque. Almost as if the Finnish experience cannot be experienced by any other people in the world. To the core, this perception of Finnish-ness is thus - not as much xenophobic or aggressive towards other people - but exclusive in regards to this essential experience of Finnish-ness: no other people than Finns can know what being a Finn feels like. This idea of uniqueness, forged by the experience of common “sorrows” (as I am reminded by Riitta Lempinen⁸) reflects upon the perception of globalization and immigration. It is as if the right to say you are a Finn has to be earned and fought for through hardship equal to the Finnish-Soviet war of 1939-44. Finns are not quite yet prepared to give that right away to anyone else.

Other competitors had a more contemplative stance:
“We live in a time of changes, the beginning of a new century. There are reasons to look back. /.../I have attempted to make my chair look like a man who is waiting. As he is standing dignified with an erect back, he invites the viewer to sit down and rest - and while resting, pause to contemplate the past, present, and the future. /.../
There is also a funny side to it: he has such big shoes! Well, at least he stands with both feet on the ground! Perhaps Finns are thought to be small and stout. Square-angled at first, but nice, hospitable, and reliable - once you learn to know them.”⁹

From his statement we learn that dignified Finnish men (symbolized by the chair) are standing with erect backs, i.e., having

‘backbones’. Further, Finns are realists (stand with both feet on the ground), reserved (square-angled), but nice and reliable. Finnish personality traits continue to be defined in many other proposals:

It is time to choose a silent representative, a chair that speaks with its form-language. This chair should represent the Finnish people. /.../we are one people struggling to progress with new ideas and opening new ways. In this same spirit of progress we built our nation after the war. Finnish design is marked by its pure and clean form-language that reflects our cultural heritage and especially our love for nature. /.../ We are a nation that strives to progress and is proud of its nationality. We must only dare to show it.¹⁰

From this statement we learn that the Finnish people are a reticent bunch (if not entirely silent), who struggle, persevere, and progress, but are modest in their pride.

An anonymous submission proposed a design by Alvar Aalto from 1946. Interesting here is how design and Finnish-ness become intricately interwoven, so much so that they necessitate each other. Much like in the previous statement where the pure and clean forms of Finnish design are seen as essentially linked to Finnish love of nature, the simplicity of Alvar Aalto’s design is naturalized as human, and thus Finnish-ness becomes the essentially human.

“One may sit secure in Alvar Aalto’s chair number 46. It is stable, robust, in its utilitarian attitude esthetic and inventive /.../ Being an approachable chair it symbolizes our nation’s democratic structure, and its simplicity the human and natural attitudes towards design.”¹¹

To conclude:

“In this proposal chair 46 is draped with a blue/white wool fabric. These are the colors of our country, but as abstract elements, the colors are also a metaphor for timelessness.”¹²

Alvar Aalto, together with many other Finnish modernist designers, have been embraced by most Finns today and his designs are everyday objects in all Finnish homes. They are unquestioned as essentially - and timelessly - expressing the “Finnish soul”. The jury favored this proposal, but wanted something unique, rather than a serially produced chair. However, they were split in their opinion if it should be included among the five in the coming exhibition.

From the idealized and pure esthetics of the “Finnish soul”, we land into the following proposal and statement, which are permeated with delightful ambivalence and irony. The jury agreed that the concept was hilarious and the thoughts behind it were well conceived. In keeping with its concepts, the proposed chair was a quite deplorable looking little object, much like chairs in

elementary schools from the 1950’s. The jury was not willing to make it the president’s chair, but felt it certainly would make for an interesting contribution to the public discussion in the upcoming exhibition.

The chair that I have chosen to represent Finnish identity, in contrast to state authority, is smaller than a traditional chair. It will be merely 75 cm tall, that is, approximately %80 of the size of a normal chair.

In Finland, the law as authority does not represent a threat or oppression. We do not need tyranny to rule our people and our culture is such that we adjust to practical rules to a great extent, without being forced to comply. /.../ As we do not follow behavioral norms based on religion, we use Finnish law as our collective moral guideline. This accounts for both our societal as well as personal order. Literally, we pay our bills in time, even when we know nobody would notice if the payment came in late. /.../ [Finnish design] has helped present an image of Finland as [an innovative and modern] state /.../ the chair should neither be innovative nor fashionable. On the contrary, it should be a comment on the disparity of taste in the “designer nation” of Finland.

/.../
This chair should not give too rosy a picture of our democratic Finland, and thus should not be too pleasant. It reflects the reality in a country where we have real social and structural problems. As the income gap is widening and the unemployment rates continue to be high, the nation’s symbols should not be idealized. Thus this chair has no ergonomic qualities and its functionality is at best satisfactory. /.../

Material: Birch treated with a lightly pigmented varnish, steel. The object has to be simple to successfully fulfill its mission as a symbol of our nation. /.../
In reality, we lack unanimity. As the wood breathes warmth, humanity, and the steel represents something cold and hard, I am reminded of the current Finnish political field that has long been dominated by a coalition government with the left and the right. /.../
Finland is perceived as a clean country, and the chair should express awareness of environmental issues. /.../ The birch is varnished for a fine surface. In this process poisonous chemicals have to be used. /.../ ... varnish is an appropriate measure of our attitudes to ecological concerns.

Although the object does not need to fall for patriotic clichés or assume national romantic traits, the massive pieces of birch - Finnish wood that is durable and hard - is a strong national symbol, and may still be presented publicly as a reason for pride.¹³

This statement presents a more varied perception of what a Finn is like. The reticent and reliable has become the Kafkaesque person who “always pays his

bills in time". Still perceived as modest and simple, these traits are perhaps due to pragmatism, rather than the automatic actions of a "natural Finnish soul". Indeed, this statement paints a picture of the Finns as the prime example of a people completely imbued and perfectly adjusted to the Foucauldian structure of bio-power. It is interesting to observe, that birch, perseverance, and modesty still prevailed through the biting irony of this proposal as Finnish traits, materials, and symbols. Proposals 3 and 7 deserve some space as they will also be discussed later in the text:

Evelina Lindahl's design "Lean Back, But Not Too Much" (Proposal number 7) struck a balance between a practical joke and stylish design. If one sat in the chair and leaned too deep, the chair fell backwards almost a foot. For stability, Evelina suggested that one could place the Finnish Law books under the frame of the chair. The jury came up with more solutions: the president could support the chair with a pile of Technology Reviews, the Koran, or some other seminal literary guidelines for life in a contemporary world.



Figure 9
Proposal number 7, Evelina Lindahl's "Lean Back, But Not Too Much". Pia Lindman demonstrates the tipping.

"Mustela Erminea" (Proposal number 3) is the Latin name for the little weasel commonly known as the ermine. Its pelt is extremely precious, and in the past it was perceived to be suitable only for royalty. Indeed, the cape swung around the shoulders of the Swedish King Gustav III (in the portrait above the King's Chair¹⁴), is adorned with the fluffy white fur of the winter coats of ermines. Small black streaks repeated over the cape mark the tails of each ermine that had to give its life to form this piece of royal garment. The design "Mustela Erminea" seeks to dismantle this royal cape and transform the symbols of despotic power to democratic ones. Thus the chair becomes a bench. By definition, democratic processes mean plurality, and should include several people, sitting together and making a decision. Further, the width of the bench is 185,2 centimeters, i.e., a fathom, or a person with outstretched arms. The width of the bench expresses the "welcoming fathom of democracy". The bench also makes a reference to the ancient rectangular slabs of stone, used as benches in the meetings of a "Ting"¹⁵. The fabric covering the tall birch ply backrest as well as the black aspen seat is a thick hand woven wool carpet. Mimicking the King's cape of



Figure 10 Jury member Toni Niemi contemplating the intricacies of "Mustela Erminea"

winter ermines, it is white with a pattern of small black stripes of wooly threads. The King's exclusive fur is democratized and made available to everyone, without sacrificing a single ermine's life. It is indeed a beautiful bench and the concepts speak well for it. However, the jury had concerns of its practicality in court sessions. Further, it was suggested that the wool fabric was not soft enough for comfort during a long working day. The common opinion amongst the jury was that the bench should nevertheless be placed in some judicial institution.



Figure 11 Pirkko Kaukonen holding the model for proposal number 8. Pirkko cracked a joke no matter how late in the day: Hey, have you seen that old movie called King Kong?

Jury Discussions
Halfway through the jury sessions, a critical discussion of general criteria emerged. Igor Klemiäto questioned whether the materials in the chair had to necessarily be of Finnish origin. Elisa Bastarrica defended sticking to Finnish materials. It is interesting to note, that the two main discussants here are both recent immigrants.

Igor: "In my opinion, Finland is not anymore just an independent state. It is part of European Union, part of the world. [The chair] could be [made of] any wood, from all around the world, because it's another dimension of life. Internet, globalization, everything... it's not important anymore to be from Finland. It can be mahogany from Africa, or whatever. The law is already integrated, so is the police, medicine, economy,... German shops are here... In this way, I really don't think it's important what kind of material it is: Finnish is not Finnish - not anymore."

Elisa responds: "What Igor is saying is OK;

we're no longer 'of Finland', we're part of a bigger cake. But we have not lost our own qualities. And precisely now, when we have become part of the bigger cake, precisely now we have the need to assert ourselves as being here, that we are Finns, right here. That we're here and are Finnish is not simply a coincidence!"

Igor: "Of course; Finnish language, Finnish poems, they are Finnish. But the camera (points at the camera filming the sessions) is Japanese, expressing Finnish culture."

At this point, Maj-Len Lindman inserts: "[We] have a Swedish chair and we have a Russian chair. Now, we need a Finnish chair. It's true that the material is not essential, but I think the style should be Finnish. So that when one looks at those three chairs, the first thing that comes to mind is: Sweden - Russia - Finland, rather than, say: Sweden - Russia - Africa, even though we are international and that is good, too."

Elisa caps off the conversation with a joke: "Yes, but we also have to be wary that it will not become: Sweden - Russia - and Alvar Aukko!¹⁶"

Higher Stakes, Second Day
At the beginning of the second day of sessions, chair designer Sari Anttonen gave her expert opinion about the proposals. She began by stressing that a designer's opinion is merely a subjective opinion among many. Then the jury was ready to make its first casting of votes. After casting, seven proposals remained on the table. Lunch break and some more discussions ensued. These discussions were focusing on issues such as:



Figure 12 Jury casting a vote

comfort and function vs. symbolic meaning and concept; simplicity and abstractness vs. symbolic meaning and narrative; and what kind of materials represented Finnishness, dignity, in contrast to poverty and 'cheapness'. Some of the most heated debates circled around proposal number 15, "The Graffiti Court Chair" by Goran Jerman. The jury liked it very much. It was applauded for its ingenuity of design, its relationship to past architectural elements, and its very well conceived concept. Goran suggested that each president would fold his own chair from found and recycled corrugated cardboard at his inauguration. Thus there would not be a one hierarchically singular chair, but many, each of them representing one president's lifetime

appointment. Further, the chair being paper may be used as a posting board for messages, graffiti, or perhaps a personal notebook for the president. Goran Jerman writes about his concepts:

"To sit in this chair would actually be an insult to its symbolic value, because it symbolizes distributed power...

Goran further states that the local tradition of graffiti paintings influenced his proposal:

...opportunity to express one's opinion in public without paying for it, and thus avoid the expression becoming part of the commercial market, still [means] an extreme form of freedom of expression...

Goran repeated the shape of the circular window above the altar in the church in Old Vaasa, the window of the rose, in the backrest of his design. To him, it symbolized "the public eye" that supervises the exercise of institutional judicial power. He muses over the idea of the chair as a notebook:

... the chair becomes the recorder of a particular era /.../ a "do-it-yourself" structure would be the most appropriate... /.../ Even if the surface would remain untouched throughout the whole tenure, the goal has been reached. After all, even a clean surface may tell a lot.¹⁷"

Despite the unmistakable popularity of the chair, in the second casting of votes it was rejected. So was Evelina Lindahl's "Lean Back, But Not Too Far". The proposals that remained were: "Reform", "Mustela Erminea", Sami Numminen's chair (number 12), "The Executive Chair" (an office chair produced by the furniture manufacturer Martela in the 1940's), and Alvar Aalto's chair number 46. Albeit the jury had expressed appreciation of Alvar Aalto and Martela, they had not seemed even remotely as enthused about these very common chairs as they had been of the "Graffiti Court Chair" or "Lean Back, But Not Too Far". At this point I intervened and called for a revote. We later found out that two voters had cast three 'nay' votes, when only two were allowed for each. This accounted for the discrepancy in the result and a revote was indeed necessary. However, before the discrepancy had been established, some jury members were upset to see the result questioned and a heated debate evolved:

Igor: "Alvar Aalto's design has nothing to do with this competition."
Virpi: "In time, one's opinions mature; at first I was very positive towards the "Graffiti Court Chair". But today I realized: Oh my God, it is made of card board!"
Maj-Len: "But card board is also a material. /.../ If I would see this chair (points at the Alvar Aalto chair) in some exhibition, I would simply look, like: Ok, there's a chair... But if I saw this chair (points at the "Graffiti Court Chair") and I read the concept, I would certainly be more interested in it than [in the Aalto chair]."
Toni: "Yes, and the only argument this chair

has going for itself is that it's an Alvar Aalto. We would not select [the Graffiti Court Chair for the president], and it would not fit in the court, but it would work well among the five [in the exhibition]."

Pia: "I want us to be courageous, let our thoughts flow freely and beyond what is needed to find the optimal [chair for the president]!"

Toni: "we might be suffocating something... there could be some dude somewhere, living whatever kind of life, who might really dig this chair (refers to Graffiti Court Chair). Why should we then be stomping that out by rejecting it - just because it's made of cardboard, for chrissakes?"



Figure 13 Toni Niemi

Maj-Len: "...and the shape and the concept are both great..."

Pirkko: "There should definitely be something smashing in the exhibition, not just something ordinary."

Virpi: "What if we would display five chairs in the exhibition and the audience could vote for the best one?"

Elisa: "Will we then find the right chair?"

Leena: "Then the choice would not be on us."

Pia: "We cannot simply resign our responsibility."

Eventually we broke off to have coffee, and the jury members were able to air out their thoughts, lobby for their preferences, or just sit and ponder. We voted again after half an hour, and the result corresponded with the previous discussion. Aalto's and Martela's chairs were rejected and both "Lean Back, But Not Too Far" and the "Graffiti Court Chair" were back on the table. Everyone accepted the result and we moved on to discuss the selection of the one chair that should be donated to the court.

Elisa: " I ask you once again, should the chair be comfortable to sit in?"

Some heads nod and some answer: "Yes, yes."

Elisa: "I have had a favorite in my mind for ages! But one cannot sit in it, unless one doesn't mind having lumbago after an hour! Why does it have to be something to sit in? Is it not enough that it's just a symbol?"

Virpi: "It's like here in the court, too: The Swedish chair is still used for sitting, but nobody sits in the Russian chair anymore"

Igor: "A chair is designed for sitting. If you want something symbolic, then you can make some symbol on the wall or in the ceiling. /.../ What is the use of a chair that nobody can sit in? It's just: We create something nobody needs."

Elisa: "I cannot find a single chair here that one can sit in."

Igor: "So, you're right. There is no chair! That's why we have to play these games about symbols. It's like the story by Andersen, 'The Emperor With New Clothes'! /.../ so why should we do this stuff? There's no chair! Just say it: No chair!"



Figure 14 Igor Klemiäto and Pirkko Kaukonen (in the background)

The jury seemed destined to come out of the sessions empty handed and to disappoint Ingvar Krook, who would have no new chair. But we eventually found out that everyone except Igor preferred Proposal number 12. Everyone had held back on it because they thought the chair was going to be uncomfortable to sit in. Despite an almost unified acceptance of Proposal 12, it remained unclear whether the jury could recommend commissioning it to be built and donated to the Court. The jury was considering some alterations to its design and invited Ingvar to review the remaining proposals. They hoped to be able to read from his reactions and comments his preferences and finally make their decision.

Ingvar broke off a court session to meet with us. Having listened to the jury members and investigated the proposals, Ingvar cautiously proposed - in a manner characteristic to the considerate judge he is - that perhaps the chair does not have to be used in daily sessions but function more as a symbolic item in the court. A sigh of relief ran through the jury members. We discussed improvements, the addition of some padding, and proceeded to walk around the court house with the model trying to find the room, that fitted the chair best. It was eventually decided that the chair would be placed in court room 117, one of the main court rooms.



Figure 15 Ingvar Krook with model of Proposal number 12



Figure 16
"To be comfortable, or not to be?" Especially Elisa Bastarrica was deeply concerned about the issue. She had difficulty deciding for or against the value of comfort as it stood in conflict with her preference for an esthetic and symbolic chair: Where in the Finnish Law is it stated that a chair is only for sitting? she wonders.

Jury Statements of the Five Awarded Proposals

The proposals were submitted anonymously, and after the seals were opened, the jury had some interesting surprises. The first award for Proposal 12, went to a local carpenter, Sami Numminen. The second award for "Mustela Erminea", went to a Helsinki-based team of two designers, Yrjö Wiherheimo and Martin Relander, and a textile designer, Kristiina Wiherheimo. Yrjö Wiherheimo and Relander are critically acclaimed Finnish designers, and all three are professors at the University of Art and Design in Helsinki. Without intending to do so, the jury had brought the final selection to an edge, placing the local tradition of furniture-making on a par with the internationally ambitious Finnish 'haute' design. The jury had opted for local esthetics without knowing it.

The third award for "Reform", a traditional chair with an air of state authority, went to Caroline Alice Heikkinen, a young carpenter from Närke, a small town North of Vaasa. The "Graffiti Court Chair", brought in the fourth award. It was designed by Goran Jerman, a young design student from Ljubljana, Slovenia, who was at the time residing in Vaasa as an exchange student at the local satellite department of Helsinki University of Art and Design. The jury gave the fifth award to Evelina Lindahl, an art student at the Swedish vocational institute of Nykarleby, close to Vaasa.

The following statements of the winning proposals were issued by the jury and published by the Vaasa Court of Appeals in the local newspapers in Vaasa:

The jury was unified in its choice of the 1st Award, the design by Sami Numminen. At the same time as the chair is clearly moored in the long and rich Ostrobothnian carpenter tradition, it does not fall for excessive nostalgia but rather is of a contemporary stylishness. Promising a new and fresh direction for the tradition of carpentry, Numminen has combined different types of wood in a beautiful pattern and invented

new techniques of joinery. Numminen's chair is dignified and weighty, yet light and uplifting.

Resembling benches in ancient 'ting' meetings, "Mustela Erminea" was experienced as a beautiful contemporary design, in which the democratic ideas of equal distribution of rights and duties is expressed very elegantly. This bench does not enclose the sitting person in its own solitude, but offers room - also on a spiritual level. The elegant and warm felt and the bench in its overall feeling impressed the jury as lively and esthetic.

When it comes to sitting there may not be a more comfortable chair than "Reform" by Alice Caroline Heikkinen. In addition, it was perceived as both celebratory and dignified. It would fit well with the general formal and visual world of the Vaasa Court of Appeals. Its forms and overall expression were nevertheless a little too common and pragmatic in comparison to the symbolic task of the presidential chair in a court of this stature.

Goran Jerman was appraised for his skilled design and his concept. The jury found that the recycling of material and the do-it-yourself process of making a chair expressed wittily how exercise of power has transformed over the last century. The jury also commended the successful incorporation of the idea of freedom of speech into the design. The design was applauded for its innovative structural solutions and abstract references to classical forms.

Evelina Lindahl's chair will nudge if it senses that the person sitting in it is taking his job too lightly. The Jury found Evelina's idea fun and interesting and commended especially her capability of striking a balance between power and responsibility within the judicial system. Her concepts were esteemed for their complexity and imagination. The design is elegant and reverberates with the conceptual content. The jury liked the intriguing design, but was concerned that the chair would be restricting and uncomfortable to sit in



Figure 17
Installation shot of the "id" exhibition in the County Museum of Ostrobothnia. The awarded chairs are arranged in a circle in front of the antique chairs. The jury portraits are on the back wall. The audience

is invited to test the chairs. On display was also a video of the jury sessions as well as a photo album recounting the project and the jury process. The antique chairs are in the foreground.

The “iD” exhibition
The following summer, all five awarded and newly constructed chairs were displayed together with the two antique chairs in the “iD” exhibition at the Ostrobothnian County Museum. The audience was encouraged to sit in them and test them out. Goran Jerman's “Graffiti Court Chair” included text markers and the audience was asked to fill the surface of the chair with comments about the Finnish judicial system. The antique chairs were placed close to the back wall, and above them hung two group portraits of the jury, one with the King's Chair and the King's portrait, the other with the Czar's Chair and the Czar's portrait. These two portraits were donated to the court together with the winning chair. A two-hour video documentation of the entire jury process played in a monitor. Usually, after the results of a competition are published, the public focus tends to move to the winning proposals: to objects in a room, rather than ideas and process. I wanted to make sure the jury process and the members of the jury were understood as an essential part of the project. Indeed, to me, those were the project, while the chairs were simply a byproduct of the intellectual labor both the jury members and I performed. Thus I decided to make a series of portraits of each jury member. These portraits are not snap-shots of intimate and familial situations and people, something everyone has in their photo albums at home, but portraits of people performing their duty as Finnish citizens - their duty of forming an opinion and standing behind their expressed opinion. This is why I asked all the members of the jury to be photographed with their favorite chair - their choice - and to state in one sentence why they preferred that chair. This comment then became the title of the portrait. The jury portraits were shot in and around Vaasa Court of Appeals.



Figure 18
Jury Portrait 1: Elisa Bastarrica with “Chair for the President” (by Sami Numminen).
Comment/title: “First Impression was a Contra Base- It Could Be a Great Tango!”
Photo credit: Patricia Rhodas.



Figure 19
Jury Portrait 7: Leena Uusi-Kyyny, “Mustela Erminea”, by team Relander/Wiherheimo.
Comment/title: “Multifunctional Elegance by Simplicity”
Photo credit: Patricia Rhodas.



Figure 20
Jury Portrait 8: Igor Klemiato, “Reform”, by Caroline Alice Heikkinen.
Comment/title: “Ergonomics and Engravings for Finnish Bureaucracy”
Photo credit: Patricia Rhodas.



Figure 21
Jury Portrait 5: Toni Niemi, “Lean Back, But Not Too Much”, by Evelina Lindahl.
Comment/title: “A Stylish Chair In Which One Can Sit with Dignity Yet Relax.”
Photo credit: Patricia Rhodas.



Figure 22
Jury Portrait 9: Pia Lindman, “Graffiti Court Chair”, by Goran Jerman.
Comment/title: “A chair that recycles free public expression.”
Photo credit: Patricia Rhodas

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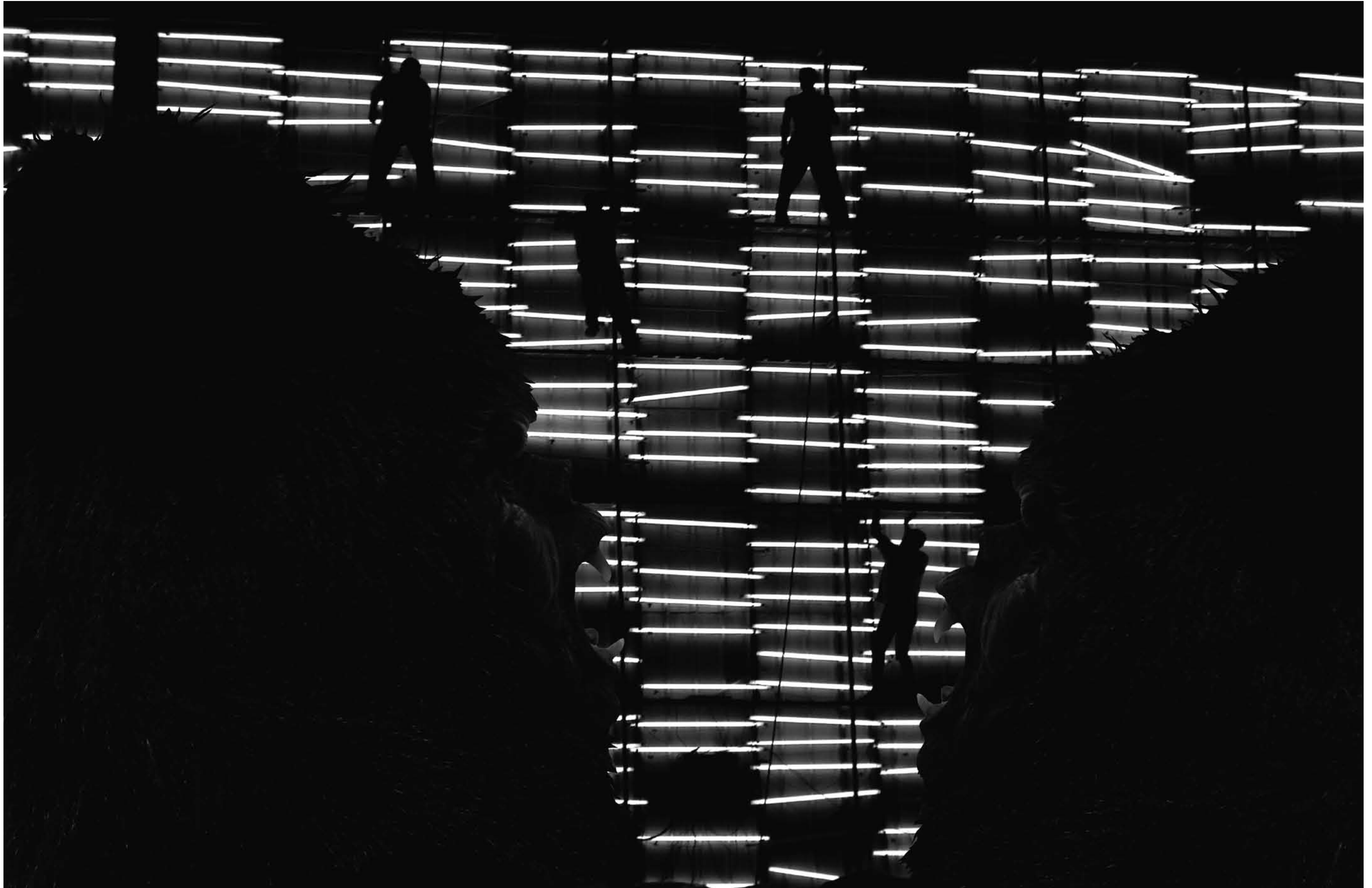
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- 1 Finland was at that time a province of the Swedish Empire
- 2 Already at this time, all men were equal in the Swedish judiciary system
- 3 A war fought from 1808 to 1809 over and across a burning and pillaged Finland between the Swedish and Russian Empires.
- 4 Fennoman: Late 1800's and early 1900's; political characters in Finland and Sweden who propagated Finnish independence from Russia.
- 5 Ostrobothnia is a Finnish county, of which Vaasa is the capital
- 6 Proposal number 10, “The Swan Chair”, by Riitta Lempinen, Kokkola.
- 7 Proposal number 6, by Jokke Jantunen, Kupio. It is not clear if Mr. Jantunen was intentionally satirical. Nevertheless, the jury perceived the work as such.
- 8 Proposal number 10 The Swan Chair”, by Riitta Lempinen, Kokkola.
- 9 Proposal number 5, title: “Looking back... waiting”, by Stefan Sjöholm Malax
- 10 Proposal number 7, title: “Go Ahead and Lean, but Not Too Far”, by Evelina Lindahl
- 11 Proposal 17, Alvar Aalto's Chair number 46, (1946) proposed by NN
- 12 Ibid.

- 13 Proposal number 9, by Tiina Pitkärvi, Pietarsaari
- 14 See figure 5
- 15 Since early Middle Ages and possibly Pre-Middle Ages, “ting” meetings were held in Nordic societies to jointly decide about all collective matters in a village. Legal disputes between villagers would be solved by the “ting”. Norwegians still call their parliament “Stortinget” (the big ting), and in Swedish the word “tingsrätten” denotes the second highest level of the judicial court system. “Ting” is usually perceived to be one of the earliest forms of democratic, collective decision making processes. Ancient ting meetings took place in the outdoors. Rectangular stones served as benches and several of them were arranged in a circle focusing on a central point where the disputing parties and the person moderating the debate, usually a village elder, were located.
- 16 Elisa refers to Alvar Aalto (“Aalto” is in English “wave”), but transforms the last name into “Aukko”, i.e., 'a hole'. Elisa suggests that the legacy of Alvar Aalto - as younger designers desperately try to repeat him - could become the pitfall of the future of Finnish design.
- 17 Proposal number 15, “The Graffiti Court Chair”, by Goran Jerman.



Arts of Doing / Politics in the Making

Christian Töpfner, Manoa Free University

From the idea that the self is not given to us, I think that there is only one practical consequence: we have to create ourselves as a work of art.¹

Setting one: performative cartographies

— A scenery that evokes the impression of a temporal in-between: new developments, sites of on-going renovations and the desolate, old building of the former university of veterinary medicine. A campus in transition. The film crew flocks around the perimeter, conducting interviews with invited guests and friends whilst in-/curiously, aimlessly strolling in and out of building sites and the overgrown, deserted backyards. The members of the crew fluctuate and change roles every now and then, an interviewee becomes camerawoman, a sound man continues by doing still photography of the venture and so on.



Manoa Free University: Performative cartographies. September 2005, Vienna.

What I am describing here is the staging of a heterotopic film set, the attempt of a *performative cartography* by the Manoa Free University, a self-institution based in Vienna.² Having just refurbished and moved into a studio on this site, we issued an invitation for three open days where people would participate in an endeavour of performative knowledge production on the grounds of the area and a prepared list of questions (a.k.a. walkable catalogue of questions). The vectors of departure were the finished studio, the *terrain vague* of the surrounding area, Michel Foucault's text on heterotopias³ and a scene from Jean-Luc Godard's movie *One plus One*.⁴ In that scene of the movie we see a film crew following an actress and her interviewer wandering aimlessly through the woods whilst she

hesitantly answers only yes or no to multifaceted political questions of the movie's time (1968). This scene was restaged with changing roles, a prepared set of questions⁵ and performed on the shared transitional territory of educational (self-)institutions. Framing the situation by re-enacting a scene from Godard's *One Plus One* opened up several lines of flight for us, several possible movements and navigations through the *terrain vague* of the real space and the spaces opened up by the body of questions. This way the setting came to be a performative event, some subject positions took on rather pre-scripted roles whilst others were offered to throw themselves into an empirical mode of becoming. This is probably where references to the concept of heterotopias comes into play, by constructing a temporary time-space configuration in which the participants/voyageurs are asked to work on and experience ways of doing and thinking in a different way. Opening up such a heterotopic space seems to us as an inherently political gesture as it connects performative subject constitution to potentials of political change.

— One of the subjective affects that many of us shared in the aftermath of *performative cartographies* was a certain discomfort with the interview situations, specifically about the binary way answers had to be given. The situation generated a certain tension by forcing one to only give yes/no answers to a set of complex questions. Nonetheless, it felt that there was a productive force behind this constraint of not being allowed to explain one's choice or to take another stance than a purely affirmative or oppositional one. Perhaps this came about by a transitory act of internalisation of the conflict, which urges less to be solved but rather to be acknowledged as such. This experienced uneasiness felt to translate into a point of departure for thought by rendering tangible the discontinuities in one's own reasoning, opening gaps between who we thought we are and who we came to be, between our self-assumed position and the *différance*⁶ introduced by the performative event of this specific situation. Tensions in this context can be thought to surface through experimental (re-)staging, when we empirically put constraints on – or more generally: alter – the modes of experience as forms of producing and relating to knowledge. At the same time, the navigation of the *terrain vague* in the sense of both, the scenic area and the narrative *dérive* through dozens of predefined questions, opens up lines of flight that work less by purely playing with constraints than with inconsistent repetitions, via possibilities of resignification and performative slippages. Slippages and discontinuities shift our perception of the world and our perspective on it, they are experiential modes of and starting points for relating to the world otherwise.

— When it comes to the question of discursive framing and conditions of our experiences of such discontinuities, *différance*, tensions, and so on, asking for their relation to power seems to be not only important but indeed very worthwhile. Turning to Michel Foucault's concept of discourse or Jacques Rancière's term of the distribution of the sensible, both comprehend power not as a monolithic bloc of oppression (e.g. the state apparatus) which forces itself upon its subjects (e.g. the people, citizens). Rather, it is more productive to think of power as a net of relations and as modalities of perception that are rooted and to be maintained deep in the social nexus.⁷ It is a form of power that “applies itself to immediate everyday life which categorizes the individual, ... a form of power which makes individuals subjects.”⁸ When we then conceive power as at the same time a set of actions upon other actions⁹ and as a relational structure which has to be reproduced by its subjects, it becomes clear that power is not at all external from the subject but rather that the subject is the very locus of reproduction of power. Therefore, when it comes to opposition to power it is not so much to be sought after in a direct confrontation with its institutions – the latter could be thought of as crystallisations of power relations over time –, than on the level of its technique, its form.

This is why slogans such as “Power to the people” are inherently misleading as they assume power to be something that can be owned, held and therefore also be taken by (revolutionary)

struggles and transformations, whereas it is always already embodied in ‘the people’, the subjects who are at once subjected by power (the condition for becoming subjects in the first place) and constantly reproduce it. Such existing configurations of power have to be incessantly re-produced, re-performed and re-enacted by its subjects along prevailing norms, in creating them afresh by the way things are ‘commonly’ done and made. As a productive structure of becoming, power depends on repetition, on citation of its established norms and modes of conduct. And it is precisely in the citational act that we find potentials for establishing relations of power in different ways than they were before, even in different ways than we could have intended them to become. By linking repetition with alterity in his notion of *iterability*,¹⁰ Derrida gestures towards ways of resignification, to the inherent mechanism of reconfiguration found in the workings of repetition and citation. This way, the potential for resignification of existing power structures can be seen to lie at the very heart of reproduction of power.

*The conclusion would be that the political, ethical, social, philosophical problem of our days is not to try to liberate the individual from the state, and from the state’s institutions, but to liberate us both from the state and from the type of individualization which is linked to the state. We have to promote new forms of subjectivity through the refusal of this kind of individuality which has been imposed on us for several centuries.*¹¹

Setting two: “Does art have anything in particular to do with democracy?”

— I would like to continue the exploration by taking up the above question that provides the framework of this book. Although I find this question challenging to think about, I would like to give it a different twist, to pose it anew in a different way. My interest is more to take it as starting point to think about aesthetic practices that relate to both (analytical) categories of art and democracy. When we ask about particular relationships between art and democracy, how do we think and relate the terms of ‘art’ to ‘democracy’? Is there not an at least implicit assumption of essential disparity introduced by asking for or constructing relations between these terms? What could be gained when we approach the subject matter less in terms of such an opposition but to think them as relational or as aspects of a more general notion, i.e. aesthetic practice? This is not to say that there are no such categories like ‘art’ and ‘democracy’ or that they would have no value at all. On the contrary they are extremely useful as analytic categories, whereas as practices such categories should necessarily be blurred, transgressed or sometimes even disregarded. To nonetheless begin by investigating these terms, I want to problematise first of all the notion of democracy and briefly sketch out its contextual use for the following paragraphs.

To consider democracy in its modern, formal implementation as parliamentary representation (or: the democratic state) would mean to focus mainly on its institutionalised forms, to discuss it as crystallised, frozen forms of power rather than as affective practises and forms of experiences. Such an approach would tell us much about how we are subjected by (disciplinary) institutions, which is indeed an important precondition for discussing political agency in general. What it tells us little about is how to escape precisely such configurations of subjection and ways of doing and making. It seems valuable at this point to consider the following lines by Foucault: “... the state, no more probably today than at any other time at its history, does not have this unity, this individuality, this rigorous functionality, nor, to speak frankly, this importance; maybe, after all, the state is no more than a composite reality and a mythicized abstraction, whose importance is a lot more limited than many of us think.”¹² Also, democratic practice can be read as turning against itself, when it takes on a consensual operation, which is what Rancière suggests by the term *postdemocracy*, denoting “the paradox that, in the name of democracy, emphasises the consensual practice of effacing the forms of democratic action.”¹³ Consensus, therefore, can be considered as yet another mode of politics

that foregrounds stasis instead of becoming. Democracy, read with Rancière, is “less a state of being than an act of contention that implements various forms of dissensus.”¹⁴ Here, dissensus and disagreement are driving forces of politics, and for Rancière it is democracy that embodies this political gesture of disruption of the common distribution of the bodies as a community,¹⁵ an opposition and disruption of the order that he called elsewhere the police.¹⁶

It is in the sense of this democratic impulse as rupture that I would knit together democratic politics and artistic operation into aesthetic practice. Art gains such a political momentum when it introduces discontinuities or tensions in the distribution of the sensible, when it produces fissures in our conceptions of political life and political agency or in modes of subjectivation more generally. Both, art and democratic politics – the distinction here is again understood as an analytic one – seem to enforce an *ethos*, a way of being that finds its empiric setting in aesthetic practise.

*(...) it turns out that critique is a practice that requires a certain amount of patience in the same way that reading, according to Nietzsche, required that we act a bit more like cows than humans and learn the art of slow rumination.*¹⁷

— In directing the emphasis away from the dead centres of institutionalised power and towards political practices which put the subject at their centre, I also like to propose a move away from our everyday and by no means less dead and institutionalised forms of practice in which we manifest our relations to the world and ourselves. By that I do not mean to merely suggest another set of rules, routines or behaviours that I consider as – in some dubious way – better than the ones we perceive as constituting the common ways of dealing with the world. Rather, we need at the same time to reject the common sense that governs our lives and to open up a field for investigations into the possibilities of new subjectivities and modes of subjectivation in general as well as uses and practices of democracy in particular. I draw here on Giorgio Agamben’s notion of *profanation* – referring to the act of returning what was sacred and religious into the realm of general use – which is not only a dissociation of use from its traditional context but far more an act of playing, of finding new ways of employments for the things and their usages.¹⁸ It is the playful, ludic approach of finding new usages which should be stressed here as one possible method of transforming the known ways of doing and making. It promotes an empirical approach to (re-)establish our relations to the world and ourselves. In another twist, we can think this also in the sense of a *perfunctory* stance,¹⁹ which aims at a somehow absent-minded attitude towards things and usages. This way, an attitude that promotes at once a critical distance to democracy’s institutionalised forms (a healthy ignorance towards how democracy is usually carried out) and an experimental approach of how to do politics would come close to a notion of democratic politics as an ethical means of becoming.

*As such, the kind of ethical work that he [Foucault] suggests we engage in is politics, for it is through this work that the largely invisible, silent discourses that form our subjectivity/subjection might be altered.*²⁰

— What could now constitute aesthetic practice, this term that I suggest to be a common vector for artistic and political practice? Again, and as the structure of this text so far might suggest, I will not postulate a schema for ‘proper’ practice but rather draw on a diverse and subjective set of approaches and concepts that refer to a certain *ethos* – in the sense of a way of being – that focus on experimental inventions of a *savoir faire* rather than to adhere to given rules or norms. Therefore my intention is not to conclude this text with an analysis or proposition of what artistic and democratic practices ‘are’ or should be and how these so defined entities relate to each another. Rather I want to take the impulse of that question as a line of flight to explore artistic-political practices that can be called aesthetic. The focus here shifts away from judgement, from subsuming particulars under

already constituted categories – e.g. what can be called art, which practices can be accepted as democratic ones – towards a mode of critique, a “perspective on established and ordering ways of knowing which is not immediately assimilated into that ordering function.”²¹ In this sense critique connects to a reflected non-compliance, it is at once a rejection of the common ways of doing and making as it is an empirical gesture, a “saying something (...) in the wondering.”²² The experiment as driven by a wondering manifests a political ethos that, as Foucault puts it, “could be described as a permanent critique of our historical era.”²³ As an aesthetics of existence, this effort aims at a stylisation of the self in the way that we constantly un- and re-work our relations to the world and to ourselves. Not to align them as closely as possible to whatever predefined schema of subjectivity or given identities but rather to develop a critical, ethical distance to the ways we are made subjects by existing norms, prevailing ways of doing and moral values. Such an ethical questioning necessarily comprises a risk, a risk that comes in the willingness to put one’s subject at stake over and over again, to open it to an aesthetics of existence. Or, as Foucault puts it, “... it has to be conceived as an attitude, an ethos, a philosophical life in which the critique of what we are is at one and the same time the historical analysis of the limits that are imposed on us and an experiment with the possibility of going beyond them.”²⁴

Notes

- 1 Michel Foucault: “On the Genealogy of Ethics” in *Ethics: Subjectivity and Truth. Essential Works of Foucault 1954 – 1984, Volume One*. Edited by Paul Rabinow (London: Penguin Books, 2000), p. 262.
- 2 For the notions of self-institution and Free Universities, see the MFU’s website: http://manoafreeuniversity.org/about_engl.html. The project on performative cartographies is documented online: http://manoafreeuniversity.org/oh_know!/index.php/PerformativeKartografie, http://manoafreeuniversity.org/oh_know!/index.php/WeRunThisxxxxx.
- 3 Michel Foucault: “Of Other Spaces. Heterotopias”, (Internet document: <http://foucault.info/documents/heteroTopia/foucault.heteroTopia.en.html>).
- 4 Jean-Luc Godard: *One Plus One* (UK, 1968).
- 5 The questions could be said to have started with enquiries into one’s positioning towards and entanglement with names, places, currents of thoughts, or more generally vectors around which subjects evolve or align themselves to (e.g. “And where were you born: Genua? – Manhattan? – Hollywood? – Neue Mitte? – Alphaville?”). Further on, the questionnaire continued to loosely interweave and (dis-)associate issues around subject positions and their formation, political agency, forms of (dis-)organisation, capitalism (e.g. “Do you have an easy-going love affair with capitalism?”), post-fordism, the body, sexuality (e.g. “Do you agree that every dick is a dildo?”), drugs, and so forth.
- 6 The notion of *différance* was coined by Jacques Derrida and circumscribes the gesture of at once a difference and deferral of meaning.
- 7 Michel Foucault: “The Subject and Power” in Hubert L. Dreyfus and Paul Rabinow: *Michel Foucault. Beyond Structuralism and Hermeneutics* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982), p. 222.
- 8 Ibid., p. 212.
- 9 Ibid., p. 220.
- 10 Derrida combines the Latin *iter* (once again) with its Sanskrit *itara* (other) into the concept of iterability. See “Signature Event Context”, in *Margins of Philosophy* (Brighton: Harvester Press, 1982), p. 315.
- 11 Foucault: “The Subject and Power”, p. 216.
- 12 Michel Foucault: „Governmentality“ in Graham Burchell, Colin Gordon and Peter Miller (eds.): *The Foucault Effect: Studies in Governmentality* (London: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1991), p. 103.
- 13 Jacques Rancière: *Disagreement* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1999), pp. 101-2.

- 14 Gabriel Rockhill’s formulation in the glossary of Jacques Rancière: *The Politics of Aesthetics* (London: Continuum, 2004), trans. Gabriel Rockhill, p. 84.
- 15 Rancière: *Disagreement*, pp. 99-101.
- 16 Ibid., p. 28.
- 17 Judith Butler: „What Is Critique? An Essay on Foucault’s Virtue“ in Sara Salih and Judith Butler: *The Judith Butler Reader* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2004), p. 307.
- 18 See Giorgio Agamben: “Lob der Profanierung” in *Profanierungen* (Frankfurt a. M.: Suhrkamp, 2005), p. 85.
- 19 Ibid., p. 72.
- 20 Lisa King: „Subjectivity as Identity: Gender Through the Lens of Foucault“ in Jack Z. Bratich, Jeremy Packer and Cameron McCarthy (eds.): *Foucault, Cultural Studies and Governmentality* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2003), p. 350.
- 21 Judith Butler: „What Is Critique?“ p. 308. Butler here summarises Foucault’s takes on critique in his lecture “What is Critique?” published in *The Politics of Truth*, ed. Sylvère Lotringer and Lysa Hochroth (New York: Semiotext(e), 1997).
- 22 Taken from Sara Salih’s introduction to Butler’s “What is Critique?”, p. 302.
- 23 Michel Foucault: “What is Enlightenment?” in Paul Rabinow (ed.): *The Foucault Reader. An Introduction to Foucault’s Thought* (London: Penguin, 1991), p. 42.
- 24 Ibid., p. 50.



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Columbine: Whose Fault Is It?

MARILYN MANSON

Posted Jun 24, 1999 12:00 AM

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It is sad to think that the first few people on earth needed no books, movies, games or music to inspire cold-blooded murder. The day that Cain bashed his brother Abel's brains in, the only motivation he needed was his own human disposition to violence. Whether you interpret the Bible as literature or as the final word of whatever God may be, Christianity has given us an image of death and sexuality that we have based our culture around. A half-naked dead man hangs in most homes and around our necks, and we have just taken that for granted all our lives. Is it a symbol of hope or hopelessness? The world's most famous murder-suicide was also the birth of the death icon — the blueprint for celebrity. Unfortunately, for all of their inspiring morality, nowhere in the Gospels is intelligence praised as a virtue.

A lot of people forget or never realize that I started my band as a criticism of these very issues of despair and hypocrisy. The name Marilyn Manson has never celebrated the sad fact that America puts killers on the cover of *Time* magazine, giving them as much notoriety as our favorite movie stars. From Jesse James to Charles Manson, the media, since their inception, have turned criminals into folk heroes. They just created two new ones when they plastered those dipshits Dylan Klebold and Eric Harris' pictures on the front of every newspaper. Don't be surprised if every kid who gets pushed around has two new idols.

We applaud the creation of a bomb whose sole purpose is to destroy all of mankind, and we grow up watching our president's brains splattered all over Texas. Times have not become more violent. They have just become more televised. Does anyone think the Civil War was the least bit civil? If television had existed, you could be sure they would have been there to cover it, or maybe even participate in it, like their violent car chase of Princess Di. Disgusting vultures looking for corpses, exploiting, fucking, filming and serving it up for our hungry appetites in a gluttonous display of endless human stupidity.

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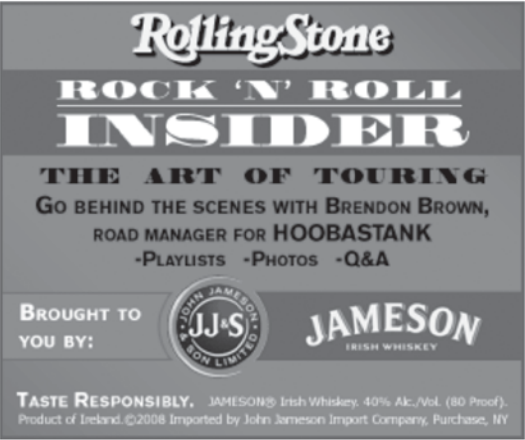
When it comes down to who's to blame for the high school murders in Littleton, Colorado, throw a rock and you'll hit someone who's guilty. We're the people who sit back and tolerate children owning guns, and we're the ones who tune in and watch the up-to-the-minute details of what they do with them. I think it's terrible when anyone dies, especially if it is someone you know and love. But what is

more offensive is that when these tragedies happen, most people don't really care any more than they would about the season finale of *Friends* or *The Real World*. I was dumbfounded as I watched the media snake right in, not missing a teardrop, interviewing the parents of dead children, televising the funerals. Then came the witch hunt.

Man's greatest fear is chaos. It was unthinkable that these kids did not have a simple black-and-white reason for their actions. And so a scapegoat was needed. I remember hearing the initial reports from Littleton, that Harris and Klebold were wearing makeup and were dressed like Marilyn Manson, whom they obviously must worship, since they were dressed in black. Of course, speculation snowballed into making me the poster boy for everything that is bad in the world. These two idiots weren't wearing makeup, and they weren't dressed like me or like goths. Since Middle America has not heard of the music they did listen to (KMFDM and Rammstein, among others), the media picked something they thought was similar.

Responsible journalists have reported with less publicity that Harris and Klebold were not Marilyn Manson fans — that they even disliked my music. Even if they were fans, that gives them no excuse, nor does it mean that music is to blame. Did we look for James Huberty's inspiration when he gunned down people at McDonald's? What did Timothy McVeigh like to watch? What about David Koresh, Jim Jones? Do you think entertainment inspired Kip Kinkel, or should we blame the fact that his father bought him the guns he used in the Springfield, Oregon, murders? What inspires Bill Clinton to blow people up in Kosovo? Was it something that Monica Lewinsky said to him? Isn't killing just killing, regardless if it's in Vietnam or Jonesboro, Arkansas? Why do we justify one, just because it seems to be for the right reasons? Should there ever be a right reason? If a kid is old enough to drive a car or buy a gun, isn't he old enough to be held personally responsible for what he does with his car or gun? Or if he's a teenager, should someone else be blamed because he isn't as enlightened as an eighteen-year-old?

America loves to find an icon to hang its guilt on. But, admittedly, I have assumed the role of Antichrist; I am the Nineties voice of individuality, and people tend to associate anyone who looks and behaves differently with illegal or immoral activity. Deep down, most adults hate people who go against the grain. It's comical that people are naive enough to have forgotten Elvis, Jim Morrison and Ozzy so quickly. All of them were subjected to the same age-old arguments, scrutiny and prejudice. I wrote a song called "Lunchbox," and some journalists have interpreted it as a song about guns. Ironically, the song is about being picked on and fighting back with my Kiss lunch box, which I used as a weapon on the playground. In 1979, metal lunch boxes were banned because they were considered dangerous weapons in the hands of delinquents. I also wrote a song called "Get Your Gunn." The title is spelled with two *n*'s because the song was a reaction to the murder of Dr. David Gunn, who was killed in Florida by pro-life activists while I was living there. That was the ultimate hypocrisy I witnessed growing up: that these people killed someone in the name of being "pro-life." The somewhat positive messages of these songs are usually the ones that sensationalists misinterpret as promoting the very things I am decrying.



Right now, everyone is thinking of how they can prevent things like Littleton. How do you prevent AIDS, world war, depression, car crashes? We live in a free country, but with that freedom there is a burden of personal responsibility. Rather than teaching a child what is moral and immoral, right and wrong, we first and foremost can establish what the laws that govern us are. You can always escape hell by not believing in it, but you cannot escape death and you cannot escape prison.

It is no wonder that kids are growing up more cynical; they have a lot of information in front of them. They can see that they are living in a world that's made of bullshit. In the past, there was always the idea that you could turn and run and start something better. But now America has become one big mall, and because of the Internet and all of the technology we have, there's nowhere to run. People are the same everywhere. Sometimes music, movies and books are the only things that let us feel like someone else feels like we do. I've always tried to let people know it's OK, or better, if you don't fit into the program. Use your imagination — if some geek from Ohio can become something, why can't anyone else with the willpower and creativity?

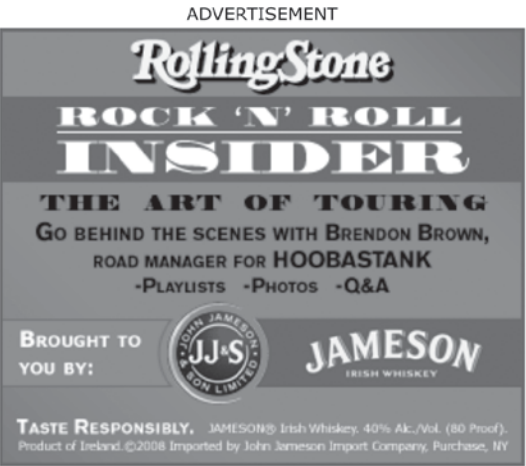
I chose not to jump into the media frenzy and defend myself, though I was begged to be on every single TV show in existence. I didn't want to contribute to these fame-seeking journalists and opportunists looking to fill their churches or to get elected because of their self-righteous finger-pointing. They want to blame entertainment? Isn't religion the first real entertainment? People dress up in costumes, sing songs and dedicate themselves in eternal fandom. Everyone will agree that nothing was more entertaining than Clinton shooting off his prick and then his bombs in true political form. And the news — that's obvious. So is entertainment to blame? I'd like media commentators to ask themselves, because their coverage of the event was some of the most gruesome entertainment any of us have seen.

I think that the National Rifle Association is far too powerful to take on, so most people choose Doom, *The Basketball Diaries* or yours truly. This kind of controversy does not help me sell records or tickets, and I wouldn't want it to. I'm a controversial artist, one who dares to have an opinion and bothers to create music and videos that challenge people's ideas in a world that is watered-down and hollow. In my work I examine the America we live in, and I've always tried to show people that the devil we blame our atrocities on is really just each one of us. So don't expect the end of the world to come one day out of the blue — it's been happening every day for a long time.

[From Issue 815 — June 24, 1999]

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« Interrompre Jacques Lacan »

Le 13 octobre 1972, Jacques Lacan était invité à parler à un auditoire à l'université catholique de Louvain. Françoise Wolff a filmé une partie de la conférence et un script en français est disponible sur internet. En voyant cette archive audio-visuelle j'ai été intéressé par l'intervention d'un jeune, qui semblait être vaguement situationniste. Après quelques recherches j'ai pu rencontré celui qui, 35 années plus tôt, avait « interrompu » Jacques Lacan.

« Interrompre Jacques Lacan » est devenu le titre d'un projet ouvert, donnant lieu à une performance, des vidéos et d'autres écrits. Dans la présente publication je donne seulement deux éléments de ce projet valant pour une sorte de bande-annonce. Le premier est une retranscription très partielle du dialogue entre Jacques Lacan et Anatole Atlas (pseudonyme d'écrivain du jeune, qui dans la retranscription du script sur internet est nommé « x »). Le deuxième est un court extrait d'un entretien réalisé avec Anatole Atlas en avril 2007 à Bruxelles. Les deux extraits sont très partiels, et sont montés par ma propre subjectivité, c'est-à-dire filtrés par ce qui m'intéresse et affirment une sorte de point de vue. Dans le premier, il m'intéresse de souligner la prise de parole d'Anatole Atlas face à Jacques Lacan. Dans le deuxième il m'intéresse de souligner ce qu'Anatole Atlas dit de l'opposition entre symbole et situation concrète, car cette opposition me semble significative d'un rapport possible à la performance. La prise de parole, ici face à Jacques Lacan, puis un regard rétrospectif sur celle-ci fait apparaître le thème de la révolution immanente, c'est-à-dire conçue lors d'un agissement relevant d'une micro-politique.

BM

1

Grande Rotonde, Université catholique de Louvain, le 13 octobre 1972
extraits

(...)

ANATOLE ATLAS.—

« Voulez-vous jouer avec moi ? »

JACQUES LACAN.—
« Oui, tout à l’heure, vous voulez ? »

ANATOLE ATLAS.—
« Mais n’avez-vous pas encore assez de ce monologue, non ? »

JACQUES LACAN.—
« Oui, ça c’est vrai ! »

ANATOLE ATLAS.—
« Est-ce que vous ne vous rendez pas compte que le public auquel vous vous adressez est par définition même le plus médiocre et le plus méprisable auquel on peut s’adresser, le public étudiant ? »

JACQUES LACAN.—
« Vous croyez ? »

(...)

LE PUBLIC.—
« Laissez-le parler. »

ANATOLE ATLAS.—
« Pardon. Qui m’invite ? Je m’invite au fond. La petite lubie de ce monsieur est de s’interroger sur le langage, et la mienne est de construire des petits châteaux avec de la pâtisserie. »

LE PUBLIC.— *Rires.*

ANATOLE ATLAS.—
« Alors je voudrais encore ajouter que j’interviens au moment où j’ai envie d’intervenir, et que, disons que l’ensemble, ce qui jusqu’il y a environ 50 ans pouvait être appelé culture, c’est-à-dire, expression de gens qui dans un canal parcellaire, exprimaient ce qu’ils pouvaient ressentir, ne peut plus et est maintenant un mensonge, et ne peut plus être appelé que spectacle, et est au fond la toile de fond qui relie au fond, et qui sert de liaison entre toutes les activités personnelles aliénées. »

(...)

JACQUES LACAN.—
« Oui, vous ne voulez pas que j’essaye d’expliquer la suite ? »

ANATOLE ATLAS.—
« Quelle suite ? Par rapport à ce que je viens de dire ? J’aimerais bien que vous me répondiez. »

JACQUES LACAN.—
« Mais oui, bien cher, mais je vais vous répondre. Mettez-vous là, je m’en vais vous répondre. Restez tranquille là où vous étiez. Peut-être que j’ai quelque chose à vous raconter pourquoi pas ? »

ANATOLE ATLAS.—
« Vous voulez que je m’assieds ? »

JACQUES LACAN.—
« Oui c’est ça c’est une très bonne idée... Bon alors, nous en étions arrivés au langage, si vous vous êtes là comme ça exprimé devant ce public, qui en effet est tout prêt à entendre des déclarations insurrectionnelles, mais qu’est-ce que vous voulez faire ? »

ANATOLE ATLAS.—
« Où je veux en venir ? »

JACQUES LACAN.—
« Oui voilà .»

ANATOLE ATLAS.—
« C’est la question au fond que les parents, les curés, les idéologues, les bureaucrates et les flics, posent généralement aux gens comme moi, qui se multiplient quoi !, je peux vous répondre, je peux faire une chose, c’est la révolution. »

JACQUES LACAN.—
« Oui. »

(...)

JACQUES LACAN.—
« Vous n’avez pas remarqué que les révolutions ont pour principe, comme le nom l’indique, de revenir au point de départ, c’est-à-dire de restaurer ce qui justement clochait. »

ANATOLE ATLAS.—
« Oui, mais ça c’est un mythe journalistico-sociologique, qu’au fond, il ne faut pas venir spécialement après les heures de cours, pour venir l’entendre dire, mais je suis sûr que tous les professeurs doivent le dire, et au fond, tous les journaux... Je vous dis que c’est une erreur, et que probablement que dans les années à venir, vous verrez l’erreur à vos dépens, probablement, comme aux dépens de tous les spécialistes, qui sont pour le moment comme vous, ici, en train de lécher les dernières miettes du spectacle et je vous en prie, profitez-en ! »

LE PUBLIC.—
Rires

JACQUES LACAN.—
« Ça m’étonnerait, ça m’étonnerait que ça soit comme vous dites, la fin du spectacle. »

ANATOLE ATLAS.—

« Mais écoutez, sur ce plan là je ne discute pas avec vous, on verra hein ! vous verrez ! »

JACQUES LACAN.—

« Oui on verra, mais c’est pas couru, vous savez ! »

ANATOLE ATLAS.—

« Enfin oui, à la base, c’est une sale discussion parce que à la base, vous n’avez pas les mêmes intérêts que moi. »

JACQUES LACAN.—

« Vous ne savez pas. Vous avoueriez vos véritables intérêts ? »

2

L’étang du miroir, Bruxelles, 6 avril 2007, 16h
extraits

(...)

ANATOLE ATLAS.—

L’artiste est celui qui n’a jamais trouvé nul place dans le miroir, ni sur aucune photo de famille.

(...)

Gueux, pèlerins, vagabonds, c’est vous qui fondez les civilisations, vos errances transportent les feux de vos 20 ans, qui allumeront les feux des jeunes gens de demain.

Bruxelles, 6 avril 2007, 19h
extraits

Benoît Maire : Est-ce que tu crois qu’il était possible de parler avec Lacan ?

Jean-Louis Lippert : La preuve, je crois que, oui, la preuve, je lui ai parlé et il a répondu. On peut même dire qu’il a répondu au-delà de toutes les espérances. Il a eu, lui, dans sa réponse, je dirais qu’il a fait preuve d’un génie visionnaire, il a dit des choses stupéfiantes dans sa réponse, je crois qu’il n’est pas nécessaire ici de se rappeler, je suppose que tu as l’enregistrement...

BM : Par exemple sur la question de la fin du spectacle ?

J-L L : Oui, alors là, on va dire que nous nous plaçons quasiment au deuxième degré, d’une certaine manière, à l’époque, grossièrement dans les années qui suivent Mai 68, il y a deux « idéologies », appelons les comme ça entre guillemets. Il y a deux idéologies, qui dominent, disons, le cerveau occidental. Sommairement je vais dire : l’idéologie structuraliste et l’idéologie situationniste. Et donc le fait est que, à l’époque, il n’existe aucune passerelle entre ces deux types d’idéologies, grosso modo, les jeunes gens qui s’orientent dans l’existence en empruntant les passages cloutés, disons, donc les étudiants, (bon je schématise très fort), mais à cette époque là les étudiants s’orientent dans l’existence selon les critères de l’idéologie structuraliste. Disons le au risque du schématisme, et il y a d’autre part une critique qui se veut radicale de la société, envisagée comme, selon l’expression de Guy Debord, une immense accumulation de spectacle. Il n’y a pas selon ma connaissance dans la théorie de Jacques Lacan, de référence explicite à ce spectacle, même si il est probable que si on creusait cette question, on établirait probablement des liens souterrains. Et cela même dans l’attitude de Debord, attitude qui prône ce que l’on pourrait appeler un ultra-révolutionnarisme jusqu’au-boutiste, prêchant la venue d’une révolution qui se voudrait universelle, immédiate, absolue, etc... sans la moindre concession. Donc si l’on creuse un peu, on observe aussi chez Debord une spécularité, une sorte de manière de se mettre lui-même dans son propre miroir qui n’est probablement pas sans lien avec certains aspects de la personnalité de Lacan. Mais là, ici, ce que je dis est très approximatif, car ça dépasse largement le cadre de cet entretien... c’est-à-dire que je trace ici, j’essaye de tracer, quelques pistes un peu schématiques mais bon ça demanderait probablement des études beaucoup plus approfondies.

BM : Ce serait quoi le miroir de Lacan ?

J-L L : Attends, alors oui, bon si je réponds de la manière la plus abrupte à une telle question, je dirais : Lacan à la fin de sa vie disant « j’ai échoué ». Je te répondrais ça, disant « j’ai échoué », et cet aveu d’échec sera probablement dans le futur une part non négligeable de la grandeur de Lacan. Il a tenté d’affronter des questions d’une manière extrêmement risquée et probablement en partie « délirante », en n’excluant évidemment pas, que chacun d’entre nous qui essayons d’organiser une réflexion sur le monde, une représentation du monde plus ou moins cohérente on n’échappe jamais au risque du délire, à une certaine part du délire.

(...)

J-L L : (...) je reste en désaccord avec la manière dont Lacan présente le symbole, comme relevant d’un hors le monde, comme d’une divinité, par rapport à l’imaginaire et par rapporta au réel. Donc ma démarche personnelle est exactement l’inverse, donc personnellement je pense que tout part du réel, de l’expérience concrète, matérielle, c’est pour ça que je me permets de présenter l’intervenant, la part de moi qui est intervenu ce jour-là, comme un gueux des rues. Quelqu’un qui jour après jour, nuit après nuit, est plongé dans une expérience, qui au fond se baptise lui-même dans l’épreuve même du réel. Et cela sans chercher un titre, un rôle, un grade universitaire, une armure, un cadre. C’est dans cette mesure-là, que j’avais au cours de ma dérive, ce jour-là, réussit à récupérer une brioche quelconque dans une boulangerie, sur mon chemin, et c’est cette brioche que j’ai fourré dans la cruche du conférencier, et que j’ai jeté, disons le comme ça, à « la gueule ». De telle manière que, il est clair que ce n’était pas un symbole qui a souillé sa cravate, ce n’était pas un symbole qui a éteint son cigare, mais bel et bien de l’eau, très matérielle, qui se trouvait au fond de sa cruche.

The Moon and Gnac **The life without a roof**

After Franco's death in 1975 and the approval of the constitution in 1978 Spain was facing a totally new political and social landscape not yet there but hopefully feasible. The Constitution at this very first stage was just a landmark: it separated those who believed in a constitutional reform of the country and those who still wanted to understand Spain as a big beach with a beautiful but poor backyard. In that sense Franco was the most prominent terrateniente of the 20th Century but not the only one: Primo de Rivera abolish the first Republic and was in the power from 1923 to 1931. And after a brief and convulse Second Republic the civil war started in 1936: almost a century of political carnival and cultural underdevelopment and isolation.

One cannot be surprised that after the faster and unexpected economical coming to age of the country the public opinion was longing for a wedding. Once only a debutant from a far province, charming the season if not with its class with its blossom, now the country was ready to marry Europe. But we needed a god dote, so they started to think about culture. The first sign of change was the political vocabulary: lots of beautiful metaphors started to pop up. The ground was prepared for the architects to come in. No wonder that in the 25th anniversary of the Constitution the Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofía organized an exhibition called "Museum of Museums: 25 Museums of Contemporay Art in the 25 years of a democratic Spain". I confess, it provoked in my little soul a strange feeling of uneasiness: all of a sudden the future of democracy seemed hand in hand with these cultural forest... All of a sudden I felt of the horse, like St. Paul, well to be honest in my case it was a bar stool in a taverna in front of our ever growing National Museum. I felt like Marcovaldo, the prolet hero created by Italo Calvino. Living in what we called a dove house in the roof of building in Milan, Marcovaldo only saw the GNAC every night. Twenty seconds of GNAC and then darkness: GNAC....GNAC.....GNAC. The big letters were a real presence, illuminating the roofs, and also creating an horizon where to look. GNAC though, was only part of a bigger neon sign announcing SPAAK-COGNAC.

The art institutions we have been so long waiting for appeared now to me like the GNAC: part of something bigger, important of course and on top of a roof. The problem was that nobody lived under that roof anymore. No neighbors, no quarrels, no common yard, no undesired noises of others making love, no fun: the only thing left was the furniture and a couple of interior decorators. This line is far from institutional critique. Since in order to develop a counter-discourse you need to have the hegemonic narrative working full gas, developing ways of writing, reading talking and presenting art and its possibilities. My critique goes again some real state development that I fail to acknowledge as art institution. We actually do not need a roof, every group of interest with some ideas to present and develop can constitute itself as an institution, does not need to wait for a decision being made since every one of us is capable of making them. But idealism is not the answer since the question of art was never to oppose realism, but reality which is a highly different thing. A return to activism now also appears as affected as installing a show in the ruins of a girl's school. If we accept to define "institution" as a highly hybrid and complicated public domain we want to operate into, than we need to introduce there a principle of analysis, no

matter how boring that may sound for those still looking for "art". As Mika Hannula put it in a very good text he wrote for the catalogue of the 9th Istanbul Biennial, we can also take into consideration the politics of small gestures.

Oh, no! Not "social art" again! – but, what is art if not part of the social interplay? Part of the feeling of tiredness towards anything that aspires to surpass art for art's sake, as well as the relief some feel in a "well installed" exhibition, is the extension of our inability to articulate ourselves politically any more. Art is situated in the social context, no need to prove that any more. The art practice again and again produces possible ways of interaction, the artists -as Habermas already wrote long ago- do not take the public sphere for granted. Art that matters tries to point to the fact that the public arena is always in the state of becoming, therefore we need to maintain what is already there, expand it and exercise criticism.

The question is how? Having established that, it is clear that what we lack is a meaningful way of articulating knowledge in order to encourage anticipatory thinking. Art is there to propose a qualitative social encounter, to multiply the possibilities of finding and losing arguments instead of just bypassing the works, the artists and the other members of the audience. Unlike democracy the goal of art and its practices is not consensus. This is an important point to take into account when we analyze the role that many art institutions have taken upon themselves since "universal agreement" is not necessary and mere opposition has also become highly problematic. If consensus inside the art world is like a window facing a wall, lacking vision, opposition is the safe inlet for those who are no longer satisfied with the inner sanctuary: a parallel dimension where the likeminded can share the same thoughts and ideas. The problem is how to find a third way in order to stimulate real participatory thinking, disagreement and a plausible rhythm of interaction. Art contains the ingredients for it - we just need a million opportunities to get over all we already know in order to be able to discover it from anew and enact it.

Chus Martínez (1972, Spain)
Director of the Frankfurter Kunstverein





MEMORY WALK

Gillian McIver

“I believe art has to take responsibility, but it should not give up being art.” Anselm Kiefer

Memory Walk is a project about the world changing around you, about not having a great deal to say about it, about the privatisation of public space and about the loss of a sense of identity connected to locality. It is simply a meandering walk through the neighbourhood of Poble Nou, along the Diagonal del Mar and the side streets that feed into and out of it.

Memory Walk is set in Barcelona, a city I don't have a close connection to. I started the project - without realising it - on my first visit there. The first walk took place 22 February 2004; I was wandering through the district of Poble Nou. Once known as the “Catalan Manchester” Poble Nou was purpose-built as an industrial town outside the city, and like cities such as Nottingham, the workers lived in clusters around the factories.

As I walked, I took a variety of photographs of the area, The images of old industrial buildings, many of which which were being torn down, were especially pleasing in the late afternoon early-spring sunshine. Strong, elongated shadows, rough layered textures, sharp juxtaposition of colours.

Stopping for a drink at a small kiosk, I got into a discussion with some locals, who described themselves as part of a “Contra-Forum” that would stage a series of carnivalesque protests during the coming “Universal Forum of Cultures,” which was hastily being built in the district. While the aims of the forum were laudable enough (“Cultural diversity, sustainable development and conditions for peace”) there remained some air of disquiet in Poble Nou that the Forum was in fact a facade for a total redevelopment of this working class district. They believed that the “regeneration” of Poble Nou was being undertaken without any consideration for the residents and their own cultural perspectives and needs, and they felt excluded on many grounds. They also pointed out the ethical stance of many of the Forum's sponsors, which were opposed by the traditionally leftist and anarchist local community.

The most contentious of the sites slated for demolition was the massive old textile factory of Can Ricart. Can Ricart was inhabited by artists studios, small arts and crafts industries, and neighbourhood and various other local associations, employing hundreds of people and serving hundreds more. Although I knew that I was an ignorant outsider to the civic issues of Poble Nou itself, clearly it was part of a larger picture that involved very real problems of local autonomy and global interests, private and public space, and social class, to name a few.

At that point, my position as a flaneur photographer shifted from that of an observer of the textures and fabric of the city, to that of an engaged participant. My photographs ceased to be solely “artistic objects”, but had become recordings of a political issue, a social process. Whatever I might choose to do with the images, they would always have this dual meaning.

The situation was very familiar to me, as one of the founder members the artist collective, Luna Nera. Since the group’s inception we have been pondering this question of the environmental and architectural heritage of localities. Luna Nera’s projects address a series of issues around ideas of society, community, history, memory and public space. One of the things we have noticed - through site-responsive projects from Belfast to St Petersburg - is that making art actions in disused spaces and opening them up to the public as sites of art, releases a torrent of public opinion about what is going on with local development issues. And people, in all cases, say that they are disempowered and disregarded, and have no control over what happens in their locality. They feel dislocated, their surroundings in flux.

Somehow, in these cases, art opens up a whole set of questions about our contemporary democratic culture, in which elected civic bodies make decisions, and exercise power, to shape our environment. If we are living in a postmodern society, are we also living in a post-democratic society, or more precisely, an era of crisis of confidence in democratic society? Power appears corrupted, and we perceive a manifest decline in respect for the public interest. In turn, Pierre Bourdieu has observed, “one has the sense now that citizens, feeling themselves ejected from the state (which, in the end, asks of them no more than obligatory material contributions, and certainly no commitment, no enthusiasm), reject the state ...” [3] And if people reject the state and presumably its “democratic” institutions such as elections, then where and how can they express their views and articulate their needs?

The frightening responsibility of art is that it actually has the potential to allow us (including the artist who makes it) to see and articulate difficult issues, in a way that is freed from authority and mediated by creativity and imagination. That is, a way into a discourse that holds within it the seeds of democratic challenge to the status quo.

Art does not have to be “political” to do this, but it has to be engaged, has to reach beyond markets, beyond pleasing a narrow coterie of style-makers and curators. This process cannot be prescribed by institutions of the state: artists need to find their own ways of presenting concerns about, and experiences of, local and global discontents. Art in this way does have a “social responsibility” but it must do this while at the same time being art. As art, it can become a key to open up a space for a discourse that our “democratic” institutions have diverted - through doublespeak such as “public consultancies” where the outcome is already ensured, or the options are not options at all.

I returned to Barcelona in 2007. My second walk, the “Memory Walk”, was made on 23 October 2007. This walk was made with the aid of the photographs taken on the first walk, three and a half years earlier. An attempt was made to locate and photograph the same places photographed in 2004. It was very difficult. Almost nothing is left of the Poble Nou area around Diagonal del Mar. One thing I did find among the building sites and shiny new blocks, was a squatted ruin in front of a newly built block of flats, an example of human tenacity hanging on the edge of the huge hole which was left by the demolition of part of the Can Ricart site. The record remains, in my photographs and elsewhere - in people's blogs and testimonials - of the shape and culture of old Poble Nou just before it disappeared.

Memory Walk was exhibited in the Farinera del Clot, Poble Nou, for the *Luna Nera:In Situ* exhibition. While I was attending the exhibition, I found in the newspaper an article detailing the ongoing illegal demolition of the Can Ricart site.

Notes.

[1] 2004 Universal Forum of Cultures, <http://www.barcelona2004.org/eng>. Ana Betancour's perspective <http://www.re-public.gr/en/?p=59>

[2] Luna Nera <http://www.luna-nera.com>

[3] Pierre Bourdieu, interviewed by R. P. Droit & T. Ferenczi. “The Left Hand and the Right Hand of the State”, *Le Monde* 1992, reprinted *Variant*, issue 32, Summer 2008

Christoph Menke

Die Depotenzierung des Souveräns im Gesang

Claudio Monteverdis *Die Krönung der Poppea* und die Demokratie¹

1. Demokratie und Theatrokratie

Zwei Probleme haben die Diskussion um die Wirkung der Medien in den letzten Jahren bestimmt: die Wirkung der Medien als Anstachelung und Aufreizung und die Wirkung der Medien als Unterhaltung und Ablenkung. Anstachelung und Aufreizung wird den Medien als Wirkung zugeschrieben, sofern sie Sexualität und Gewalt darstellen. Die Medien, so erscheint es hier, bringen hervor, was sie darstellen: Indem sie Sexualität und Gewalt darstellen, erregen sie ihre Zuschauer zu deren unkontrollierter und ungehemmter Ausübung. Das ist der moralische, das heißt: der negative moralische Einfluss, der den Medien vor allem auf die Jugend zugeschrieben wird. Unterhaltung und Ablenkung hingegen sind Stichworte zur Bestimmung der negativen politischen Wirkung, die die Medien auf die Bürger demokratischer Staaten haben sollen. Indem zuerst die modernen, dann die neuen Massenmedien zu den primären Repräsentationsformen der Politik geworden sind, haben sie diese ihrem Gesetz unterworfen – dem Gesetz der Oberfläche, des Entertainment. Diese Diagnose meint nicht nur, dass sich die Politik, wie in Barry Levinsons *Wag the Dog*, des Showbusiness bedient, und sie erschöpft sich ebenfalls nicht darin, eine neue Verteilung in der Ökonomie der Aufmerksamkeit festzustellen, die die Medien zwischen den Bereichen des Politischen und der Unterhaltung hervorgebracht haben. Es geht mithin bei der beklagten politischen Wirkung der Medien nicht nur darum, dass die Frage, ob der Kanzler seine Haare schwarz färbt, wichtiger wird als die, ob er die Lage schön färbt. Sondern dass beide Fragen in der gleichen Art und Weise diskutiert werden: als solche der Darstellungskünste des Kanzlers, die man, je nach Geschmack, bewundern oder gering schätzen kann. Die Medialisierung der Politik bedeutet deshalb eine Entpolitisierung, eine Selbstabschaffung des Politischen als desjenigen Orts, an dem die Konflikte einer Gesellschaft zum Ausdruck und zur Entscheidung gelangen.

¹ Der Text ist die überarbeitete (und neu betitelte) Fassung meines Beitrags zu dem Katalog, den Harm Lux zu der von ihm kuratierten Ausstellung *Ich lautlos irren, ways of worldmaking, too* (Berlin 2003)

Beschreibungen wie diese nehmen einen Topos auf, den wohl zum ersten Mal die kritischen Diagnosen ausgebildet haben, mit denen politische Geschichtsschreibung und Philosophie auf den Niedergang Athens im späten fünften und vierten Jahrhundert reagiert haben. Ihr Stichwort ist das der Theatrokratie, der Theaterherrschaft. So lässt Platon in seinem Dialog über die Gesetze einen Athener sagen, das Problem seiner Gegenwart bestehe darin, dass, in Schleiermachers Übersetzung, aus der Herrschaft der Besten (*aristokratia*) eine Massenherrschaft des Publikums (*theatrokratia*) geworden sei.² Durch sie, so lautet nach Thukydides Kleons Vorwurf an die Athener, findet eine Theatralisierung der Politik statt, die in vielem dem ähnelt, was heutzutage als ihre Medialisierung beschrieben wird. So beklagt sich Kleon nach Thukydides Bericht über die Tendenz der Athener, Entscheidungen endlos in unprägnanten Reden zu besprechen, anstatt sie, mit aller Konsequenz, zu fällen. Die Stadt, sagt er, muss bei solchen Kampfspielen die Preise an andere verleihen, nur die Gefahren trägt sie selber. Schuld daran seid ihr selbst, schlechte Spielordner, mit eurer Gewohnheit, Zuschauer der Worte zu sein und Herr der Taten; was geschehen soll, beurteilt ihr nach einer guten Rede als möglich, was schon vollbracht ist, nicht nach dem sichtbaren Tatbestand, sondern verlaßt euch auf eure Ohren, wenn ihr eine schöne Scheltrede dagegen hört. [...] so sucht ihr nach einer anderen Welt gleichsam, als in der wir leben, und besinnt euch dafür nicht einmal auf das Nächstste zur Genüge; kurz, der Herrlust preisgegeben tut ihr, als wäret ihr im Theater, um Redekünstler zu genießen, und haltet nicht das Heil des Staates zu bedenken.³ Die andere Welt, die die Athener nach Kleons Vorwurf errichten, ist die der schönen, unterhaltenden Reden im Theater; in diese Welt verwandeln sie die der Politik. Und zwar zeigt sich diese Theatralisierung der Politik an der Form des Urteils, der sie sie unterwerfen: Sie beurteilen die politische wie eine Theaterrede – nicht hinsichtlich ihres Gehalts, sondern ihrer schönen, ansprechenden Form. Die Herrschaft des Publikums ist, so nimmt sehr viel später in *Hamlet* König Claudius diesen Topos auf, die einer *distracted multitude* / *Who like not in their judgment but their eyes*.⁴ Die *Massenherrschaft*, so heißt es ganz entsprechend bei Walter Benjamin unter Hinweis darauf, was bei den Alten Theatrokratie geheißt hat, ist auf Reflexe und Sensationen begründet und steht damit im

herausgegeben hat.

² Platon, *Nomoi* 701a, in: *Staatliche Werke*, übers. Friedrich Schleiermacher, Frankfurt am Main 1991. Diese Entgegensetzung von Besten- und Massenherrschaft bezieht sich bei Platon jedoch auf die Beurteilung der Musik selbst, nicht die des Politischen. Siehe dafür aber auch *Politeia* 492b-c.

³ Thukydides, *Die Geschichte des Peloponnesischen Krieges*, 3.38; übers. Georg Peter Landmann, Reinbek bei Hamburg 1962, 123. Vgl. Simon Goldhill, *The Audience of Athenian Tragedy*, in: P. E. Easterling (Hrsg.), *The Cambridge Companion to Greek Tragedy*, Cambridge, UK 1997, 54-68.

strikten Gegensatz zur *Stellungnahme verantwortlicher Kollektiva*.⁵ Das zur Herrschaft gelangte Publikum urteilt durchs Auge, nicht den Verstand; denn es urteilt „über Darstellungs_knste, nicht „über den dargestellten Gehalt.

Mit dem Ausdruck Theatrokratie beschreibt die antike politische Reflexion, wie die (*„demokratische*) Herrschaft des Volkes sich von innen heraus auflöst, in die beiden Elemente Spektakel und Publikum zerfällt. Damit hat die antike politische Reflexion ein Modell der Kritik an den politischen Wirkungen der Medien formuliert, das bis heute, bis und „über Benjamin hinaus, deren kulturkritischen Diagnosen bestimmt. Die Erinnerung an dieses Modell aus den Anfängen der Demokratie soll nicht die eingangs erwählten Phänomene der gegenwärtigen Mediendemokratie in Zeitlose entrücken. Wenn man jedoch diese Phänomene der Medialisierung, und mehr noch ihre selbst wieder medialen Besprechungen, vor den Hintergrund dieser Geschichte hält, so erweisen sich viele ihrer Erklärungen, und erst recht viele der vorgetragenen Lösungsvorschläge, als allzu hastig. Daher möchte ich hier keinen von ihnen direkt diskutieren. Mich interessiert stattdessen eine Frage, die sich am schnellsten im Blick auf Rousseau stellen lässt. Dabei ist der Sprung von Thukydides und Platon zu Rousseau nicht ganz so groß, wie es angesichts des ungeheuren zeitlichen Abstands scheinen mag. Denn Rousseaus berühmter Einspruch gegen d'Alemberts Vorschlag, in Genf ein Theater zu errichten, geschieht in ausdrücklicher Erinnerung an Verfall und Niederlage Athens, „über die Thukydides und Platon nachdenken und die auch nach Rousseaus Ansicht dadurch eingetreten seien, dass seine Bürgerschaft zum Publikum und seine Politiker zu Schauspielern im Theater der Politik verkommen sind. *„An der Theatermanie ging Athen zugrunde*.⁶ Wichtiger ist aber, wie Rousseau darauf reagiert. Denn um dieser auch

⁴ William Shakespeare, *Hamlet*, Arden-Edition, hrsg. Harold Jenkins, Walton-on-Thames 1997, IV.iii, 4 f.

⁵ Walter Benjamin, *„Was ist das epische Theater?* (1)“, in: *Gesammelte Schriften*, Bd. II.2, Frankfurt am Main 1977, XXX-XXX, hier 528.

⁶ Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Brief an Herrn d'Alembert. <ber seinen Artikel „Genf“ im VII. Band der Enzyklopädie und insbesondere „ber den Plan, ein Schauspielhaus in dieser Stadt zu errichten*, Schriften, hrsg. Henning Ritter, München-Wien 1987, I, XX-XX, hier 458. „Eine wichtige Differenz im Verständnis der Theatralisierung des Politischen bei Rousseau gegen „über Platon besteht darin, dass Rousseau sie als eine Form entfremdender Verdoppelung kritisiert, während sie bei Platon die Unfähigkeit der Menge zum einsichtigen, vernünftigen Urteil bezeichnet. Es ist diese griechische Bedeutung, an die die (bereits in Schleiermachers <bersetzung anklingende) elitäre Theorie der Masse im 19. Jahrhundert wieder anschließt. In diesem Sinn wird Nietzsche gegen Wagner sagen, Theatrokratie heiße *„Massen-Aufstand*. (*Der Fall Wagner, Kritische Studienausgabe*, hrsg. Giorgio Colli, Mazzino Montinari, München, Berlin-New York 1988, VI, 9-53, hier 42.) (In einer Nachlassnotiz aus dem Jahr 1874 dagegen hatte Nietzsche dieses Phänomens der auf Massenwirkung kalkulierten Kunst noch ambivalent beurteilt: *„Wagner versucht die Erneuerung der Kunst von der einzigen vorhandenen Basis aus, vom Theater aus: hier wird doch wirklich noch eine Masse aufgeregt und macht sich nichts vor wie in Museen und Concerten. Freilich ist es eine sehr rohe Masse, und die Theatrokratie wieder zu beherrschen hat sich bis jetzt noch als unmöglich erwiesen*.“ (Anfang 1874-Febr. 74, 32 [61], *Kritische*

gegenwärtig wieder (nicht nur Genf) drohenden Gefahr der Theatralisierung zu begegnen, entwirft Rousseau in Erinnerung an Sparta mit seinen *„bescheidenen Festen und Spielen* (470) das Gegenmodell einer Republik oder Demokratie, die durch die Weise ihrer politischen Vergemeinschaftung vor jeder Theatralisierung gefeit ist. Die Demokratie ist in Rousseaus Perspektive nicht, wie es Autoren von Platon bis Nietzsche erscheint, die Wurzel der Theatrokratie und die Theatrokratie nicht das Schicksal der Demokratie. Ihrer eigentlichen Bestimmung nach, so Rousseaus Grundthese, ist die Demokratie sogar das Gegenteil der Theatrokratie. Denn das Theater, so Rousseau (348), bedeutet *„Trennung*: zwischen einem bloß zuschauenden Publikum vor der Bühne und den Politik-Darstellern auf der Bühne, die um seinen Applaus buhlen. Die Idee der Demokratie hingegen ist, so Rousseau, die der *„Versammlung*: die eines Miteinanders von Gleichen, die einander nichts vorspielen und einander nicht zuschauen, sondern gemeinsam handeln. Deshalb wird zwar die Demokratie unablässig durch die Gefahr der Theatralisierung bedroht, aber diese Drohung kommt von außen; das Theater, so Rousseau, ist nicht die Wahrheit, sondern das Andere der Demokratie.

Es ist auffällig, in welchem hohem Maße bedeutende Demokratietheorien des zwanzigsten Jahrhunderts von dieser Rousseauschen Perspektive auf das Theater bestimmt sind. Autoren so unterschiedlicher Herkunft und Orientierung wie Hannah Arendt und Jürgen Habermas, Guy Debord und Stanley Cavell stimmen in ihr überein. Sie teilen nicht nur die Diagnose, dass die Theatralisierung des Politischen eine zentrale Bedrohung der modernen Demokratien ist. Sie teilen auch Rousseaus Erklärung, dass die Theatralisierung die Politik von außen bedroht „von daher, was sie, mit sehr verschiedener Bedeutung, die *„Gesellschaft*“ nennen. (Bei diesen Autoren ist es stets die *„Sozialisierung*“, gelegentlich auch die *„ökonomisierung* der Politik, die für ihre Theatralisierung, für ihre Auslieferung an die Medien verantwortlich gemacht wird.) Und sie stimmen daher weiterhin auch mit Rousseaus These überein, dass die Demokratie ihrer eigentlichen Bestimmung und Verfassung nach antitheatral ist „dass die

Studienausgabe, VII, 775)) Die Menge oder Masse *kann* nicht anders herrschen denn als Publikum, indem sie durch Augen und Ohren urteilt. Platon macht diese Verbindung ganz klar: Die theatrale Urteilsform, die sich allein auf den schünen Schein bezieht, ist die direkte Folge des (Freiheits-) Anspruchs darauf, *selbst* zu urteilen „des Anspruchs, *„Nein* Jeder verstehe sich auf Alles!“, anstatt die Freiheit und Macht des Urteilens auf diejenigen zu begrenzen, die „über vernünftige Einsicht verfügen. Theatralisierung der Politik und Herrschaft der Menge oder Masse, so die These von Platon bis Nietzsche (und darüber hinaus), sind zwei Seiten desselben. Damit ist jedoch auch bei Platon, der nicht viel Sympathie für sie hatte, nicht die These verbunden, die Demokratie *als solche* sei Theatrokratie. Platon unterscheidet beide vielmehr ausdrücklich, wenn er sagt, es wäre *„noch gar so schlimm nicht gewesen*, wenn sich eine Volksherrschaft gebildet hätte „falls diese nur aus (wahrhaft) freien und eines freien Mannes würdig denkenden Männern bestanden hätte (Platon, *Nomoi*, 701a). Mit dieser Bedingung freilich ist das entscheidende Problem bezeichnet: das Problem, wie sich die Herrschaft des theatralen Publikums und die demokratische des Volkes voneinander abgrenzen lassen; wie, und ob „berhaupt, sich sicherstellen lässt, dass Volksherrschaft nicht Massenherrschaft und das Politische nicht theatral wird.

wahre Gestalt der Demokratie eine Form der Politik ist, die die theatrale Trennung zwischen der Passivität des Publikums und der Hypokrisie der Schauspieler in der Gemeinsamkeit des Handelns überwunden hat.

Ich möchte im Folgenden meinen Zweifel an dieser Ansicht eines einfachen logischen wie normativen Gegensatzes zwischen Demokratie und Theater und damit an der Aussicht ihrer klaren (kritischen) Scheidung begründen. Nicht jedoch, weil die Gefahren der Theatralisierung und Medialisierung der Politik nicht bestünden. Sondern weil falsche begriffliche Oppositionen und in ihnen begründete illusionäre Erwartungen – wie sie mit der Rousseauschen Perspektive verbunden sind – die Theatralisierung der Politik nicht angemessen zu verstehen und ihr daher auch nicht angemessen zu begegnen vermögen. Stellt man Demokratie und Theatralisierung so wie Rousseau einander gegenüber und entgegen, dann missversteht man beide, die Demokratie wie das Theater. Eine Demokratie, die gegen ihre Theatralisierung tatsächlich gefeit wäre, wäre keine mehr; umgekehrt gibt es zwar Theater und Medien, die ihre Zuschauer in den Schlaf passiven Glotzens versetzen, aber das ist nicht ihr Strukturgesetz. Die Verhältnisse, die Beziehungen zwischen Demokratie und Theatralisierung wie zwischen Theater und Demokratisierung, sind komplizierter.

Eine Weise, sich darüber klar zu werden, weshalb die Theatralisierung der Politik nicht bloß das Andere und Ende der Demokratie ist, ist die Erinnerung daran, dass sie am *Beginn* der Demokratie stand. Zumindest am Beginn ihrer neuzeitlichen Geschichte: Die neuzeitliche Demokratie entsteht aus einer Infragestellung der traditionellen Souveränität des Königs, und diese demokratische Infragestellung der königlichen Souveränität setzt damit ein, dass das Problem ihrer Repräsentation neu gesehen und gestellt wird. Das geschieht zunächst weder theoretisch noch praktisch, sondern ästhetisch: indem ein neues Medium der Repräsentation entsteht – das Medium des bürgerlichen Theaters (seit Shakespeare) und das der städtischen Oper (seit Monteverdi). Was man im Blick auf Beaumarchais' *Figaro* für die französische Revolution gesagt hat – dass sie auf dem Theater vorbereitet wurde –, das gilt für die demokratische Revolution überhaupt. Durch ihre Inszenierung des Souveräns auf der Bühne führen Theater und Oper zur Abdankung des Souveräns in der Politik. Nachdem sie die Abdankung des Souveräns erzwungen hat, wird die Bühne aber nicht abgebrochen. Die Demokratie kann ihren Ursprung im Theater nicht hinter sich lassen; die Szene des Theaters bleibt der Demokratie unauf löslich eingegraben.

2. Claudio Monteverdi, *L'Incoronazione di Poppea*

Warum das so ist und woraus Theater und Oper diese umstürzende Kraft gegenüber der traditionell-monarchischen Souveränität erwachsen, lässt sich einem der frühen Stücke der um die Wende zum siebzehnten Jahrhundert entstehenden Gattung der Oper entnehmen, das mit dem römischen Kaiser Nero den Inbegriff der barocken Deutung des Souveräns im Bilde des Tyrannen auf die Bühne bringt: Claudio Monteverdis *L'Incoronazione di Poppea* von 1642 nach einem Libretto des venetianischen Rechtsgelehrten Giovanni Francesco Busenello.⁷ Die Oper erzählt von Neros Verstöflung seiner Frau Ottavia und der Einsetzung seiner Geliebten Poppea als neuer Kaiserin von Rom. Mit verwickelt in diese Geschichte sind Ottone, der früher, aus neuer Liebe und brennender Machtgier verstöflene Geliebte der Poppea, und Drusilla, die ehemalige, aber aus neuer Liebe und Rache kalkül zurückgenommene Geliebte eben des Ottone. Mit verwickelt (aber das ist, wie sich gleich zeigen wird, hier nicht ganz das richtige Wort) ist überdies Seneca, der Erzieher und Berater des Nero (Nero nennt ihn seinen „maestro“; I.ix, 107), der diesem, Nero, dessen Vorhaben, „Ottavia als Gattin zu verstöflen und Poppea zu heiraten“ (106), auszureden versucht. Daraufhin kommt es zu einer Auseinandersetzung zwischen Nero und Seneca, dem Kaiser und dem Philosophen, in deren Verlauf Nero seine Souveränität auf ebenso simple wie eindringliche Weise zum Ausdruck bringt.

Seneca, der Philosoph, fordert von Nero eine Willensbildung nach objektiven Gesichtspunkten, für die er eine Reihe höchst unterschiedlicher Kandidaten zum Vortrag bringt: die Regeln der Vernunft, die Normen der Gerechtigkeit, das Ansehen bei Volk und Senat, die Rücksicht auf den guten Namen, das Kalkül von Erfolgsaussichten und Nebenfolgen. Nero verbittet sich diese Belehrungen mit dem klassischen Ausspruch des Souveräns: „Lascia i discorsi“ (I.ix, 107) – lass die Belehrungen, Schluss mit den Diskursen! Souverän ist, wer auf all dies keine Rücksicht zu nehmen braucht: „Vernunft gebietet ein strenges Maß für den Untergebenen, aber nicht für den der Befehle gibt.“ (I.ix, 106) Denn die Macht des Souveräns ist die immer größere Macht (soverano ist „il più potente“; I.ix, 109) als die einer jeden dieser Normen, Gesichtspunkte, Hindernisse, die Seneca als bedenkenswert anführt. Was dieser Machtvorsprung dem Souverän erlaubt, drückt Nero sodann in einer Formel aus, die deutlich macht, warum er, Nero, nicht nur zum Urbild unumschränkter Macht und Willkür, sondern zugleich auch zum Inbegriff eines ungehemmten Narzissmus geworden

⁷ Ich zitiere das Libretto nach dem Programmheft zu Claudio Monteverdi, *L'Incoronazione di Poppea*, Festival

ist: *“Vuoí che da me li arbitrio mio dependa, / Non da concetti et da sofismi altrui!”* (Nch will, dass meine Entscheidung allein von mir abhängt, nicht von den Begriffen und Sophismen der anderen; I.x, 117). Oder kürzer noch: *“No voglio a modo mio.”* (I.ix, 107) Souveräne Macht, als diejenige Macht, die immer größer ist als die aller und alles anderen ñ souveräne Macht zeichnet sich nach Monteverdis Nero dadurch aus, ihrem Träger auch dort eine Sichselbstgleichheit aller unmittelbarster Art zu erlauben, wo für alle anderen Hindernisse auftreten und Entzweigungen aufbrechen müssen. Durch seine Macht ist der Souveräne ñ im wörtlichen wie übertragenen Sinne ñ ungehemmte und daher unentzweite.

In der genannten Debatte mit Seneca geht es dabei vor allem um die Innere Identität von Leidenschaften (*sentimenti*) und Handlungsabsichten. Seneca versucht Nero nicht so sehr zur Anerkennung eines bestimmten normativen Gesichtspunkts zu bringen, als vielmehr überhaupt zu einer Position der Vernunft. Vernunft versteht Seneca dabei in dieser Szene ganz im Sinne seiner neuzeitlichen Philosophenkollegen: als distanzierte Betrachtung und Prüfung des Gegebenen, hier: unserer Leidenschaften, im Hinblick auf ihre normative Gültigkeit, aber auch ihre praktische Tauglichkeit. Der Souveräne dagegen, so macht Nero Seneca klar, braucht nicht vernünftig zu sein, er braucht sich nicht von sich zu entzweien, um seine Leidenschaften prüfend zu ebenso gültigen wie realitätsstauglichen Handlungsabsichten erst zu formen. Dass er sich dieser inneren Entzweigung von sich, von seinen *sentimenti* nicht aussetzen muss, liegt aber nicht zuletzt daran, dass der Souveräne nicht der Differenz Entzweigung ausgesetzt ist, die menschliches Handeln vielleicht am grundlegendsten bestimmt: die Entzweigung zwischen Absicht und Vollzug (und daher Ergebnis) der Handlung. Etwas zu wollen, heißt bei ihm schon, dass es getan wird, ja, getan worden ist. In dieser wahrhaft gespenstischen Identität vollzieht sich, wie Nero Senecas Tod bewirkt: Nero befiehlt einem Offizier, zu Seneca zu gehen und ihm zu sagen (*“che imponga a lui!”*), dass er noch an diesem selben Tag sterbe (*“che in questo giorno ei morai!”*; I.x, 117). Nero befiehlt also seinem Offizier nicht, Seneca zu töten, er befiehlt ihm, Seneca aufzuerlegen, noch heute abend gestorben zu sein. In Neros Befehl tritt zwischen Wunsch und Resultat keine Handlung als Mittel. Sein Wunsch ist seinen Untergebenen nicht nur Befehl, er ist schon ñ auch das verbürgt die immer größere Macht des Souveränen ñ der Eintritt des erwünschten Resultats. Leidenschaften, Absichten, Ergebnisse ñ diese drei Elemente des Handelns, die bei gewöhnlichen Akteuren von beständiger Entzweigung bedroht sind, fallen im souveränen Vollzug differenzlos in eins. Der Souveräne handelt im strengen Sinn nicht. Das umschreibt

die Transzendenz des Souveränen: Seine Position ist eine jenseits des Handelns; der Souveräne steht außerhalb der Handlungswelt. Das ist das Bild, genauer: das *Phantasma* des Souveränen, das Monteverdis Oper präsentiert.

Es ist nun kein Zufall, dass Nero diese phantasmatische Identität des Souveränen im Verhältnis zu Seneca formuliert. Denn mit Seneca tritt ihm jemand gegenüber, der auf seine Weise ebenfalls eine Position der Transzendenz gegenüber der Handlungswelt beansprucht ñ und eben dadurch Nero die handlungslose Durchsetzung seines Willens gerade ermöglicht. Was Nero durch souveräne Macht erreicht, will Seneca durch philosophische Kontemplation erlangen: frei zu werden von den Entzweigungen, den Umwegen, der Endlichkeit des Handelns.⁸ Deshalb begriff er in monströser Unmenschlichkeit (die Ottavias Page schon vorher an Seneca gespürt und verflucht hatte: I.vi, 102) die Ankündigung von Neros Beschluss seines Todes mit dem jubelnden Ausruf *“O me felice, felice me!”* (II.i, 131; vgl. II.ii, 132). Senecas Stoizismus will den Weisen als Gegensoveränen etablieren, der durch Aufgabe aller Wünsche und Absichten ñ bis zu dem einfachsten und grundlegendsten, dem Wunsch zu leben ñ eine Position über der Welt des menschlichen Handelns erlangt. Eben deshalb wird er zum willigen, weil willenlosen Werkzeug der buchstäblich zeitlosen (sofortigen) Vollstreckung von Neros Befehl. Wie für Nero, so ist auch für Seneca, ja, eigentlich erst durch Seneca, das, was Nero will, bereits geschehen. Geh jetzt!, sagt Seneca zu dem Offizier, der ihm Neros Sterbebefehl überbracht hat, Und solltest du Nero vor dem Abend sehen, so sag ihm, ich sei bereits tot und begraben. (II.ii, 134) Das, so Seneca, bedeute *“di praticar infatti / Quella virtù che tanto celebrai!”* (Eine Tugend tatsächlich zu praktizieren, die ich immer so sehr gepriesen habe; II.ii, 137): die philosophische Tugend der Todesverachtung, die sich hier in ihrer Wahrheit zeigt ñ nämlich Handlungs- und damit Lebensverachtung zu sein.

Dass die philosophische Tugend seines Gegenübers die Bedingung für die souveräne Macht des Kaisers ist, das aber macht diese Macht, entgegen ihrem Selbstverständnis und Programm, selbst zu etwas Bedingtem. Es zeigt den Souveränen abhängig: von der Unterwerfung (euphemistisch: der Anerkennung) durch die anderen. Das Besondere, das besonders Niedere an der Unterwerfung unter den Souveränen durch den Philosophen ist, dass

⁸ Hier ist Seneca nicht mehr neuzeitlicher, sondern klassischer Philosoph: nicht beschäftigt mit zweifelndem Prüfen, sondern versunken in selbigem Anschauen. Gegenüber einer der Vorlagen der Oper, der Seneca selbst zugeschriebenen Tragödie *Octavia*, in der Seneca im Disput mit und mutigen Widerstand gegen Nero erscheint, ist diese kritische Zusammenstellung von Kaiser und Philosoph eine Innovation des Librettos.

er dem Souverän diese Einsicht erspart. Gerade der Philosoph, der dem Souverän die Unterwerfung unter die Macht der Vernunft und der Verhältnisse predigt, praktiziert seine eigene Unterwerfung unter den Souverän so, nämlich: so total, dass verborgen bleibt, wie sehr diese Unterwerfung Bedingung der Souveränität ist. Damit wird der Philosoph zum Urbild des Ideologen. Denn der Philosoph ist das ist *seine* Eitelkeit nicht deutet die Unterwerfung unter den Befehl des Souveräns in einen Akt höchster eigener Entscheidung um: Sterben wollte er ja immer schon! Alle anderen aber wollen das nicht, wie Senecas *Famigliari* in ergreifender Schlichtheit immer wieder singen: *Non per me moriri non vult, / Non, per me moriri non vult.* (Nicht meinerseits möchte nicht sterben, nein, sterben will ich nicht; II.iii, 137.) Gegenüber solchen aber, die anders als der göttliche Philosoph (I.vi, 102) nicht sterben, sondern leben wollen nicht die also überhaupt *etwas* wollen, kann Nero auch das Phantasma seiner durch souveräne Macht verborgenen reinen Selbstgleichheit nicht aufrechterhalten. Das ist die souveränitätskritische Pointe dieser, der Oper: Sie zeigt, wie der Kaiser den Platz des Souveräns verlassen, wie er Handelnder unter Handelnden werden muss, um als Souverän erscheinen zu können.

Und zwar zeigt diese Oper das durch die Form ihrer Darstellung nicht durch die Weise, in der sie den Souverän sich repräsentieren lässt: im Gesang. Am deutlichsten wird das vielleicht in dem doppelten Liebesduett zwischen Nero und Poppea, mit dem der dritte Akt zweifach schließt (III.v und III.viii). Dieses Duett hat Klaus Michael Gruber in seiner Inszenierung für Aix-en-Provence (Juli 2000) als ein Duell inszeniert: Nero und Poppea umkreisen sich lauernd aus sicherem Abstand, als würden sie den besten Platz für den finalen Shootout suchen. Das ist das eine: Im Verhältnis zu Poppea ist Nero ebenso sehr Liebender wie Stratege; er ist Liebender als Stratege, der nicht durch bloßen Wunsch und Befehl, sondern, wie jeder von uns, nur durch Ränke, Schmeicheleien und Listen zum Erfolg kommt. Zugleich nicht und dieses Zugleich ist entscheidend nicht sind diese Liebesduette Momente höchster stimmlicher und gesanglicher Virtuosität. Das ist, über Handlungsführung und Personenkonstellation hinaus, die eigentliche, im Medium selbst begründete Depotenzierung des Souveräns in der Oper: Um in ihr, um auf der Bühne zu reüssieren, muss der Souverän zum Virtuosen werden. Genauer gesagt, liefert die Oper den Souverän, der durch seine Quäntchen größerer Macht sich um die Ansichten der anderen nicht scheren zu müssen behauptet, an den Sänger, heute: die Sängerin, aus, der oder die ihn, den Souverän, auf der Bühne repräsentiert und dabei um die Anerkennung des Publikums buhlt. Diese Konsequenz lässt sich durch keine Unterscheidung von Hinsichten nicht des Souveräns als des Dargestellten

und des Sängers als des Darstellers nicht abwehren. Im Gegenteil: Es ist gerade die einfache Trennbarkeit dieser beiden Hinsichten, des dargestellten Souveräns und des darstellenden Sängers, die die Medienrevolution in den neu entstehenden Gattungen (und Institutionen) von Oper wie Theater in Frage stellt. Durch sie entsteht ein neues Verständnis von Repräsentation und ihres Verhältnisses zum Repräsentierten, der Souveränität. Wenn der Souverän einmal den Platz des (privilegierten, einzigen) Zuschauers verlassen hat und selbst zur Person auf der Bühne, vor Zuschauern, geworden ist⁹, dann wird sein Repräsentieren, sein *Sich*repräsentieren zu einer inneren, konstitutiven Bestimmung der Souveränität. Er wird zum Sänger und Spieler seiner selbst.

Diesen ontologischen Wandel, in der Seinsweise des Souveräns, hat Ernst Kantorowicz im Shakespeare-Kapitel seiner Studie zur politischen Theologie des Mittelalters, *Die zwei Körper des Königs*¹⁰, in die Formulierung gefasst, durch die Repräsentation des Königs auf der Bühne trete eine bemerkenswerte Änderung ein, man möchte sagen, eine Metamorphose vom Realismus zum Nominalismus (52). *Realistisch* ist eine Auffassung, in der dem Souverän transzendente Realität, objektive Wahrheit und göttliche Existenz zukommt. Ihr gegenüber ist jede Repräsentation des Souveräns sekundär oder wiederholend: die Repräsentation verdoppelt eine Realität (die der Souveränität), die unabhängig von ihr schon da und gegeben ist. Dagegen konfrontiert die von Kantorowicz *nominalistisch* genannte Perspektive diese *realistische* mit der ungeheuren Zumutung, dass die transzendente Realität des souveränen Königs statt vorausgesetzt zu werden, aus der empirischen Realität hervorgehen, dass sie aus und in dieser *gemacht* werden soll. Die Repräsentation des Souveräns kann nicht mehr nur etwas verdoppeln oder wiederholen, dessen transzendente Realität verborgen erscheint; die Repräsentation des Souveräns schafft erst, was sie repräsentiert. Das ist die zugleich mediale wie politische Revolution, die mit der Herauslösung von Oper und Theater aus historischen Zusammenhängen einhergeht: Der König muss sich zum Souverän erst machen, indem er sich vor den kritischen Augen des neu entstehenden Publikums als Souverän präsentiert nicht indem er, in der doppelten Bedeutung

⁹ Das ist nicht zu verwechseln mit dem Platz auf der Bühne, die der König in der Vorstellung des *theatrum mundi* einnimmt. Denn hier ist er Spieler vor einem einzigen Zuschauer nicht vor Gott. In den bürgerlichen Institutionen von Theater und Oper hingegen muss er nicht jeden Tag Gott, sondern jeden Abend einem zahlenden Publikum gefallen.

¹⁰ Ernst Kantorowicz, *Die zwei Körper des Königs. Eine Studie zur politischen Theologie des Mittelalters*, München 1990, 47 ff. Dazu Christoph Menke, *Heros ex machina: Souveränität, Repräsentation und Botho Strauß* *Ithaka*, in: Norbert Bolz, Willem van Reijen (Hrsg.), *Heilsversprechen*, München 1998, 71-86.

dieses Ausdrucks, vor dem Publikum nicht produziert

Eben deshalb ist das Sichselbstmachen des Souveräns, wie Kantorowicz betont hat, zugleich seine Abdankung. Der Augenblick, in dem die souveräne Macht nicht vorweg schon da ist, sondern sich durch ihre Repräsentation erst hervorbringen muss – dieser Augenblick nominalistischen Sich-Machens des Souveräns ist eben der, in dem er sein Königtum niederlegen (57) muss. Deshalb kommt die mediale Innovation der bürgerlichen Theater- und Opernformen einer wahren politischen Revolution gleich, die viel weiter reicht als der Aufbruch der Bürger (Nivium motus), der sich am Schluss der Seneca zugeschriebenen *Octavia*-Tragedie, die Monteverdis Librettisten zur Vorlage diente, gegen Nero entzündet.¹¹ Bei (Pseudo-) Seneca entzündet sich die Raserei des Volkes (Furor populii : v. 781) darin, mit den Händen der Menge (Vulgi manibus) das Bild der Poppea umzuwerfen und mit grimmigem Eisen zu zertrümmern (v. 796 f.). Diese Raserei wird umstandslos unterdrückt: Durch die Hinrichtung weniger, auch wenn diese lange verwegenen Widerstand leisteten (v. 846 f.). Das alles, das Volk und seinen Aufbruch hat Monteverdis Oper gestrichen. Sie zeigt in ihren Schlusspartien Nero von einer ganz anderen Seite: nicht nur, wie in der Tragödienvorlage, als gegenüber Octavia und dem römischen Volk grausamen Herrscher, sondern gegenüber Poppea als innig Liebenden. Das ist aber das Gegenteil der Exkulpierung, als die es erscheinen mag. Vielmehr erscheint der Souverän hier, im Verhältnis zu Poppea, wie jeder andere als einer, der Anerkennung gewinnen muss, um seine Absichten durchsetzen zu können. Er wird zu dem, was in der Welt, und keineswegs nur der des Hofes, alle sind: Intriganten und Spieler, die durch Urbanität di complimento umile, / Modestia di parole costumate (Etikette und Zungenfertigkeit, unterwürfige Komplimente, glatte Floskeln: II.viii, 150 f.) ihr Inneres (Fondoi) und Herze (I.v, 96) verdecken müssen, wenn sie handelnd Erfolg haben wollen. Darin kündigt sich in Monteverdis Oper eine Revolution an, die weit weniger rasch niederschlagen ist als der Aufbruch, der in (Pseudo-) Senecas Tragödie ausbricht. Monteverdis ästhetische Revolution stürzt nicht die Bilder der Herrschenden um, sondern lässt die Herrschenden – nach eine Formulierung Kierkegaards – ins Bild stürzen: Sie sind nur das Bild, das sie von sich vor uns machen. Und daher haben sie Macht nur, sofern ihnen das, dieses Sich-Machen im Bild, gelingt. Das aber hängt von uns, dem Publikum ab, vor dem Monteverdi den Souverän zum Gesangsvirtuosen werden lässt.

¹¹ Seneca, *Octavia*, v. 804; in: *Sämtliche Tragödien*, übers. Theodor Thomann, Zürich, Stuttgart 1961, I, 458.

3. Die Politik des Theaters gegen das Theater der Politik

Das Argument, auf das die skizzierte Lektüre von Monteverdis *Poppea*- bzw. *Nero*-Oper hinausläuft, lässt sich in drei Schritten darstellen. Es besagt erstens, dass die ästhetische Inszenierung der Souveränität zugleich eine Vorführung der *ästhetischen Inszeniertheit* der Souveränität ist: Der Souverän muss seine Macht, die er sich als eine unmittelbaren Erwirkens vorstellt, im Gesang gewinnen und bewahren. In der Vorführung ihrer ästhetischen Inszeniertheit ist zweitens enthalten, dass die Macht des Souveräns einen *ontologischen Wandel* erfährt: Souveränität wird in Monteverdis Oper so erfahren, dass sie nicht (realistisch) gegeben ist, sondern (nominalistisch) verfertigt werden muss. Dieser ästhetisch vor- oder herbeigeführte ontologische Wandel in der Seinsweise der Souveränität bedeutet drittens die Vorwegnahme einer, genauer: der *politischen Revolution* – die Ersetzung der Souveränität der Könige durch die des Volkes. Deshalb, so lautete die Interpretationshypothese für Monteverdis (oder Busenellos) Abwandlung der *Octavia*-Tragedie, kann, ja muss er den Aufbruch des Volkes streichen. Denn dieser Aufbruch bekräftigt eher das Konzept königlicher Souveränität, gegen dessen Pervertierung er sich richtet, als dass er bereit und in der Lage wäre, es in Frage zu stellen. Dagegen bedeutet der ästhetisch inszenierte Sturz der königlichen Souveränität den Beginn einer anderen, der demokratischen Souveränität des Volkes. Der Souverän, der sich vor dem Publikum dazu erst machen muss, hat damit – ob er es weiß oder nicht – schon anerkannt, dass er seine Macht der Anerkennung durch ein Publikum verdankt, das eben dadurch, durch seiner Macht der An- oder Aberkennung von Macht, zum eigentlichen Machthaber geworden ist. Damit hat die Souveränität die Seite gewechselt; sie ist von der Bühne dorthin zurückgekehrt, wo sie vorher schon einmal war: in den Zuschauerraum. Nur dass dort jetzt nicht mehr, wie in den Tözen und Spielen der Hofe, am ausgezeichneten Platz der eine, privilegierte Zuschauer, sondern alle sitzen (das heißt natürlich: alle Bürger, die den Eintritt bezahlen können). Das ist die Demokratisierung der Souveränität, die im oder durch das Theater geschieht. Sie beginnt, wenn die traditionelle Souveränität unter den ästhetischen Druck der Selbstdarstellung gerät: einer Darstellung der Machthaber vor uns, die uns zu gefallen und zu überzeugen sucht, die von unserer Anerkennung abhängig ist.

Dass die demokratische Revolution der politischen Macht ihren Ursprung im Theater hat, ist eine These, die nicht allein einen geschichtlichen Sinn hat. Das zeigt bereits der Zusammenhang der drei Argumentationsschritte – zur Ästhetik, zur Ontologie und zur Politik: Die politische Revolution, die die Macht der Regierung von der ihrer Anerkennung abhängig

macht, geht einher mit einer Umstärkung der Ontologie transzendenter Realität, die ihrerseits im ästhetischen, genauer: theatralen Darstellungshandeln ihre Grundlage hat. Jene Ontologie und diese Ästhetik (oder Theatralik) ist daher der revolutionären Demokratie von ihrem Ursprung her eingeschrieben. Die Einsicht in den Ursprung der Demokratie im Theater ist damit erst dann richtig verstanden, wenn sie zu einem Verständnis ebenso des Theaters wie der Demokratie führt, die eben jener schlichten Entgegensetzung widerspricht, die das Rousseausche Erbe des modernen Diskurses über die Demokratie (und das Theater, die Medien der Repräsentation) bildet. Dieses Rousseausche Erbe, oder besser: diese Rousseausche Schicht des modernen Demokratiediskurses besteht darin, die erfolgreiche Bekämpfung der Theatralisierung der Repräsentation zur Bedingung für eine gelingende Demokratisierung der Souveränität zu erklären. In dieser Perspektive wird daher auch der Ursprung der Demokratie im Theater anders verstanden: als ein geschichtlich vergangenes Ereignis, ohne strukturelle Folgen. Theatralisierung der Repräsentation, so die Rousseausche Schicht des modernen Demokratiediskurses, ist gut und schön, wenn sie sich auf die der monarchischen Souveränität bezieht; hier kann sie kritische Kraft entfalten. Sie ist dagegen zerstörerisch und daher abzulehnen, wenn sie sich auf die demokratische Souveränität des Volkes bezieht. Zwei Scheidungen also, die unmittelbar zusammenhängen: zwischen der monarchischen und der demokratischen Souveränität und zwischen dieser und ästhetischen Strategien der Theatralisierung. Beide Scheidungen aber, von denen das Gelingen der Demokratie abhängen soll, sind nicht rein durchführbar; die Demokratie kommt von ihrem Beginn in der Theatralisierung der monarchischen Souveränität nicht los, weil sie von dieser nicht loskommt, weil sie in die Auseinandersetzung mit dieser, als ihr inhärente Drohung, verstrickt bleibt.

Rousseaus Kritik an d'Alemberts Vorschlag zielt auf eine Form der Demokratie, die von jeder Theatralisierung, wie sie Athen in den Untergang getrieben habe, frei sein soll. Das Modell, und zugleich der Mechanismus, einer solcher Demokratie ist die politische Versammlung: Wir versammeln uns und bilden dadurch eine Gemeinsamkeit, einen Zusammenhang unseres Handelns, in dem politische Macht entsteht. Unabhängig von unserer Versammlung gibt es keine politische Macht. Deshalb ist das Theater das Gegenteil, ja, der Untergang der Demokratie, denn statt uns zu versammeln, trennt es uns voneinander: 'Man glaubt, sich zum Schauspiel zu versammeln, dort aber trennt sich jeder von jedem.'¹² Vor allem ist es die

theatrale Trennung zwischen den sich darstellenden Machthabern auf der einen Seite und einem sie anerkennenden Publikum auf der anderen Seite, die in der Demokratie nach Rousseaus Vorstellung überwunden werden muss; an die Stelle der theatralen Relation des Zuschauens (die die Trennung von Zuschauern und Darstellern voraussetzt) muss die demokratische der Teilhabe treten.¹³ Es ist leicht zu sehen, wann diese Idee einer theaterfreien Demokratie zusammenbricht: schon im ersten Moment, wenn jemand in unserer demokratischen Versammlung zu reden beginnt. Denn jeder, der hier redet, muss beanspruchen, für alle zu reden. Das können wir zurückweisen, wir können seinem Anspruch die Anerkennung verweigern. Aber sobald er diesen Anspruch erhebt, tritt der Redner aus der Versammlung heraus, er tritt vor uns auf eine Tribüne oder eine Bühne, er macht sich zum Darsteller und uns zum Publikum. Die Differenz von Einzelem und Allen bringt die von Darstellung und Dargestelltem hervor. (Schlichter gesagt: Die Demokratie bringt die Rhetorik hervor.) Der Anspruch des demokratischen Politikers ist es, *uns* zu repräsentieren. Da er aber diesen Anspruch *vor* uns erhebt, muss er dafür immer auch *sich* repräsentieren. Die demokratische Versammlung verwandelt sich, und sei es für einen Moment, ins Theater. Das ließe sich nur vermeiden, wenn die demokratische Versammlung, das Subjekt der demokratischen Politik, über eben die vermittlungslose Souveränität verfügte, die Monteverdis Oper in der Figur des Nero vorführt und in der Vorführung des Nero zugleich zerfallen lässt. Wenn Rousseau und die Seinen von einer Demokratie jenseits aller Theatralisierung träumen, hängen sie mithin immer noch dem (narzisstischen) Phantasma einer absoluten Souveränität an. Sie ist jedoch nur unter eben den Bedingungen einer realistischen Ontologie denkbar, deren ästhetische Unwahrheit die neuen, bürgerlichen Medien der Repräsentation zugleich mit der revolutionären Umkehrung der Machtverhältnisse erweisen. Die demokratische Souveränität des Volkes kann daher aufgrund ihres theatralen Ursprungs gar nicht von der Art der absoluten des Monarchen sein *wollen*. Demokratische Souveränität, also die Macht des Volkes, ist anders als die traditionelle

¹³ Rousseaus Argument zur demokratischen Überwindung der theatralen Trennung besteht recht gesehen aus zwei Schritten, von denen erst der zweite problematisch ist. Den ersten Schritt bildet Rousseaus Analyse dessen, worin die Anerkennung der Machthaber besteht, die zu gewinnen oder zu verweigern das Publikum durch das Theater die Macht gewinnt. Wenn dies der Beginn demokratischer Souveränität sein soll, so kann Anerkennung darin nicht mehr ein distanziertes Urteilen über ein vorgeführtes Schauspiel meinen. Anerkennung von Macht heißt, demokratisch verstanden, vielmehr Teilhabe an Macht. Aus einer Anerkennungsbeziehung, die, im Medium des Theaters, als Urteilen aus der Distanz der Betrachtung, des Zuschauens, verstanden wurde, ist in der demokratischen Politik ein Urteilen im Vollzug praktischer Teilhabe geworden. Durch diese strukturelle Umformung der Anerkennungsrelation vom Zuschauen zur Teilhabe unterscheidet sich die Demokratie vom Theater, in dem sie beginnt. Der Fehler rousseauistischer Demokratietheorien besteht darin zu glauben, diese Unterscheidung könne eine klare und eindeutige Trennung

¹² Rousseau, *Brief an Herrn d'Alembert*, 348.

Souveränität des Königs, den sie enthauptet und beerbt, eine begrenzte Macht nicht depotenzierte Souveränität.¹⁴ Als so begrenzte aber ist sie ihrer Repräsentation nicht vorgeordnet, sondern ausgeliefert. Zu einem richtigen Verständnis demokratischer Souveränität gehört das Bewusstsein, keine Macht über die Repräsentation der Macht zu haben. Die demokratische Macht kann die theatrale Verselbständigung ihrer Repräsentation nicht verhindern – sie kann sie nicht verhindern wollen, wenn sie nicht in vordemokratische Souveränitätsphantasmen zurückfallen will. Die theatrale Gefährdung demokratischer Souveränität ist eine unhintergehbare Bedingung demokratischer Souveränität.

Der Rousseausche Demokratiediskurs bindet den Kampf für die Demokratie an einen Kampf gegen die Theatralisierung. Dabei versteht er diese strategische Verbindung beider Kampfe so, dass sie die begriffliche Scheidung ihrer Gegenstände zur Geltung bringt. Wenn jedoch Theatralisierung eine Logik der Verselbständigung der Repräsentation der Macht gegenüber ihrer Quelle, der Machtdarsteller gegenüber ihrem Publikum bezeichnet, die der Demokratie immanent ist, nimmt auch der Kampf der Demokratie gegen ihre Theatralisierung eine andere Form an: Er wird zu einer konstitutiven, damit permanenten Bestimmung des demokratischen Prozesses selbst. Sind es mithin nicht allein äußere Motive – die Sucht nach Unterhaltung oder das Interesse der Kapitalverwertung –, die die Demokratie mit Theatralisierung bedrohen, sondern ist es die Eigenmacht der Repräsentation der Macht selbst, dann kann der Kampf der Demokratie gegen die Theatralisierung nicht mit ihrer endgültigen Scheidung enden, sondern wird endlos.

Dass der Kampf der Demokratie gegen die Theatralisierung nicht beendet werden kann, kann aber nicht umgekehrt bedeuten, dass er nicht begonnen werden muss. Er muss nur anders geführt werden. Die Rousseausche Kritik der Theatralisierung zurückzuweisen, das heißt: die Strategie einer (kritischen) Scheidung zwischen Demokratie und Theatralisierung zurückzuweisen, hat nicht eine Affirmation der Theatrokratie zur Konsequenz; dass alle Repräsentation auch demokratischer Macht theatral ist, bedeutet nicht ihre Preisgabe an ein Spektakel der Reflexe und Sensationen (Benjamin). Vielmehr muss an die Stelle einer Kritik am Theater der Politik eine Kritik der Politik durch das Theater treten. Das ist eine

gewährleisten.

¹⁴ Vgl. Ulrich Rüdell, Günter Frankenberg, Helmut Dubiel, *Die demokratische Frage*, Frankfurt am Main 1989. – Eine andere, aber komplementäre Weise, die konstitutive Selbstbegrenzung demokratischer Macht auszudrücken, ist, von der demokratischen als einer ironischen, also: sich selbst verkleinernden Form der Politik zu sprechen; vgl. Christoph Menke, *Von der Ironie der Politik zur Politik der Ironie. Eine Notiz zum*

Kritik, die nicht dem Theater der Politik gilt, sondern im Feld des Theaters der Politik operiert und die Scheidung zwischen Demokratie und Theater durch die Unterscheidung verschiedener Strategien politisch-theatraler Repräsentation ersetzt. Diese Kritik will nicht mehr die Theatralisierung der Politik überhaupt überwinden, sondern die jeweilige Form politischer Theatralität exponieren. Die Kritik der Politik durch das Theater zeigt, wie, mit welchen Mitteln und Verfahren politische Repräsentationen operieren. Die Kritik der Politik durch das Theater ist daher nicht eine Bewertung von Zielen und Absichten, erst recht nicht ein Aufspüren verborgener Motive und Antriebe, sondern eine Analyse der Formen und Stile, in denen politische Repräsentation inszeniert wird. Die Kritik der Politik durch das Theater legt dadurch offen, was latent bleiben muss, um wirken zu können.¹⁵ Sie ersetzt Latenz durch Transparenz. Wie jedoch diese Transparenz selber wirkt; welche Wirkungen es also hat, dass die latenten Formen, Stile und Strategien politischer Inszenierung sichtbar werden, bleibt der Kontrolle entzogen; die politische Wirkung einer kritischen Analyse der latenten Inszenierungsweisen politischer Macht ist ihrerseits latent. Ob sie die Gestalt politischer Macht, auf die sie sich richtet, irritiert, gar erschüttert oder im Gegenteil durch den Gewinn von Selbstdistanz befestigt, ist ebenso eine offene, also empirische Frage wie die, worin die Wirkung von Medien auf ihre Zuschauer besteht.

Wie eine solche Theater-Kritik der Politik verfahren kann, hat bereits Monteverdis Oper gezeigt. Denn zwar inszeniert Monteverdis Oper eine Theatralisierung der Politik, indem sie den Souverän und seine Selbstdarstellungen an die Schaulust der Theaterzuschauer ausliefert. Das ist aber gerade nicht eine bloßbegründende Wiederholung der im Politischen wirksamen Theatralisierung. Im Gegenteil: Indem Monteverdis Oper den Souverän auf die Bühne stellt, zu einem Theaterkönig macht, zeigt sie die theatrale Konstitution seiner politischen Macht – und in eins deren Abhängigkeit von denjenigen, die ihr unterworfen sind; eben damit wird die Theatralisierung der Souveränität zur Urszene ihrer Demokratisierung. Und zwar gelingt dies, weil die Theatralität des Politischen durch ihre Wiederholung auf der Bühne zugleich vorgeführt wird. Darin besteht hier die Politik des Theaters gegenüber dem Theater der Politik: Bei Monteverdi arbeitet das Theater gegen das Theater. Oder genauer: Indem sie selbst theatrale Inszenierung ist, zeigt Monteverdis Oper die theatrale Inszenierung, die in der Politik geschieht, und arbeitet damit gegen eine Theatralisierung der Politik, die auf

Prozess liberaler Demokratie, in: Thorsten Bonacker, André Brodacz, Thomas Noetzel (Hrsg.), *Die Ironie der Politik. Über die Konstruktion politischer Wirklichkeiten*, Frankfurt am Main 2003, 19–33.

¹⁵ Vgl. Anselm Haverkamp, *Figura cryptica. Theorie der literarischen Latenz*, Frankfurt am Main 2002.

berwertung ihrer Zuschauer, durch Latenthaltung ihrer Formen und Verfahren, zielt. Was für Monteverdi gilt, gilt anders, aber nicht weniger für die Kritik des Theaters der Politik mit den Mitteln der Politik des Theaters noch heute. „Die Inszenierung transparent zu machen“, so hat Diedrich Diederichsen im Blick auf einen ihrer größten Virtuosen geschrieben, „kann nur heißen, sie nachzuspielen – als Stück.“¹⁶

Seine politische Zweideutigkeit wird das Theater aber auch dadurch nicht los. Man kann zwischen der kritischen Kraft der theatralen (Re-) Inszenierungen politischer Repräsentation und der theatralen Unterhaltung einer *distracted multitude* unterscheiden, voneinander scheiden kann man diese beiden Effekte des Theaters, als Apparat wie als Modell, nicht: Eben indem das Theater die Inszenierung hervortreten lässt, wird es auch zum Ort genieflender Unterhaltung. Denn was das Theater hervortreten und dadurch erkennbar werden lässt, sind die Strategien und Formen der Darstellung, der Repräsentation, durch die sich politische Macht konstituiert. Genau dem, den zweckfrei erfahrenen Darstellungskünstern, gilt aber auch die genieflende Unterhaltung im Theater; in *Die Krönung der Poppea* ist es die Gesangsvirtuosität des Nero, die wir als Medium seiner Macht erkennen und zugleich bewundern und genießen. Wenn, entgegen dem Rousseauschen Demokratiekonzept, auch der demokratischen Macht des Volkes, aufgrund der Logik politischer Repräsentation, ein irreduzibel theatrales Moment eignet, dann bedarf es – so lautete die zuvor formulierte These – um willen der Demokratie einer theatralen Kritik des politischen Theaters, des Theaters, das alle, auch und gerade eine demokratische Politik ist. Diese Kritik arbeitet selbst mit den Mitteln des Theaters: der Sichtbarmachung latenter Formen und Strategien der Inszenierung; das Theater ist hier nicht, wie in der Rousseauschen Tradition, der Gegenstand, sondern die Instanz der Kritik. Darin aber bleibt das Theater politisch unauflosbar zweideutig: Wodurch es kritisch ist, ist es zugleich Gegenstand genieflender Unterhaltung. Eben wodurch das Theater politische Kritik leisten kann, das Transparentmachen latenter Formen und Strategien der Inszenierung, ist es auch unpolitisch, ja entpolitisierend. Was für die Politik des Theaters gilt, dass sie unauflosbar zweideutig zwischen Kritik und Unterhaltung steht, gilt aber erst recht für das Theater der Politik, auf das sie sich richtet. Diese Zweideutigkeit hat der Rousseausche Demokratiediskurs kritisch zu entscheiden versucht: in der Gegenüberstellung einer dem Theater verfallenen Politik, der „Theatrokratie“, und einer theaterfreien Demokratie. Wenn sich aber diese Unterscheidung schon für die kritische Politik des Theaters

nicht aufrechterhalten lässt – weil diese Politik selbst theatral ist –, dann wird der Versuch, sie in ihrem Gegenstand, in der Politik, geltend zu machen, aussichtslos. Kritik und Unterhaltung sind die beiden untrennbaren Seiten des Theaters wie der Demokratie.

¹⁶ Diedrich Diederichsen, „Das Gespenst der Freiheit“, in: *Schlingensiefels Ausländer raus. Bitte liebt Österreich*, Dokumentation von Matthias Lilienthal und Claus Philipp, Frankfurt am Main 2000, 183-185, hier 183.

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For the democratization of art, agitation on Republic Square, Zagreb, 1979



For the democratization of art, the "book" of signatures from the first action

„For the democratisation of art“

The "democratization" opens with the star on the palm of the hand from 1980 and leads us to the graffiti "For the democratization of art" in a public space; the "activist call" for democratization is to be then immortalized as a motto sentence within the photograph published in 1981 in Zagreb's Studentski list (Student journal). On this photograph the same "activist call" adorns Molnar's portrait as a terrorist/ or a criminal implying that there is an actual "good" dosage of terror in the field of arts. That means that an external difference is always an internal one, that the external limitations pressing on arts are always reflected within the field, as an inherent (im)possibility to become domesticated in the art work. It

is not possible to erase the traces of the production/thought process, it is inscribed right there. What is that we can learn about this process? The work under our consideration is not expressing simply a certain aspect of the narrative content, but on the contrary it re-marks precisely the part of the content that is excluded from the field or art. This is why Molnar had to go beyond the explicit content including a formal feature – precisely that masked/terrorist portrait – which acts as a representative of the repressed aspect of this very content.“

Marina Gržini :

Separation For the democratization of art On the 19th of October 1979, at the then Republic Square in Zagreb, during the exhibitionaction organized by The Working Union of Artists, I was asking the passers-by to sign under the title For the democratization of art, which was written on 100 leaves of paper. From noon to 5 p.m. 45 people signed the papers. This work, initiated as an "agitation", got new politically and socially connotations in its further presentations: the banner that imitated the official and pompous style of political messages and graffiti as a form of urban underground expression. By the end of this cycle my photograph was published in the newspaper Studentski

list. It was the imitation of the photographs of urban, anarchist and terrorist groups of these times. My face was face masked and I was wearing a woolen cap. I was standing in front of the flag with a star and text For the democratization of art. The work was concluded by the installation that consisted of the same flag, a chair and a table on which the flyers with series of statements entitled For the democratization of art were placed.

Marijan Molnar



For the democratization of art, banner on the SKUC building, Beograd, 1981



For the democratization of art, graffiti on the building , Beograd, 1981



For the democratization of art, graffiti action, The passage, Zagreb, 1981



For the democratization of art, graffiti in the passage, Zagreb, 1981



For the democratization of art, installation with the flag, ŠKUC, Ljubljana, 1981



For the democratization of art, installation in the gallery Koprivnica; 1983



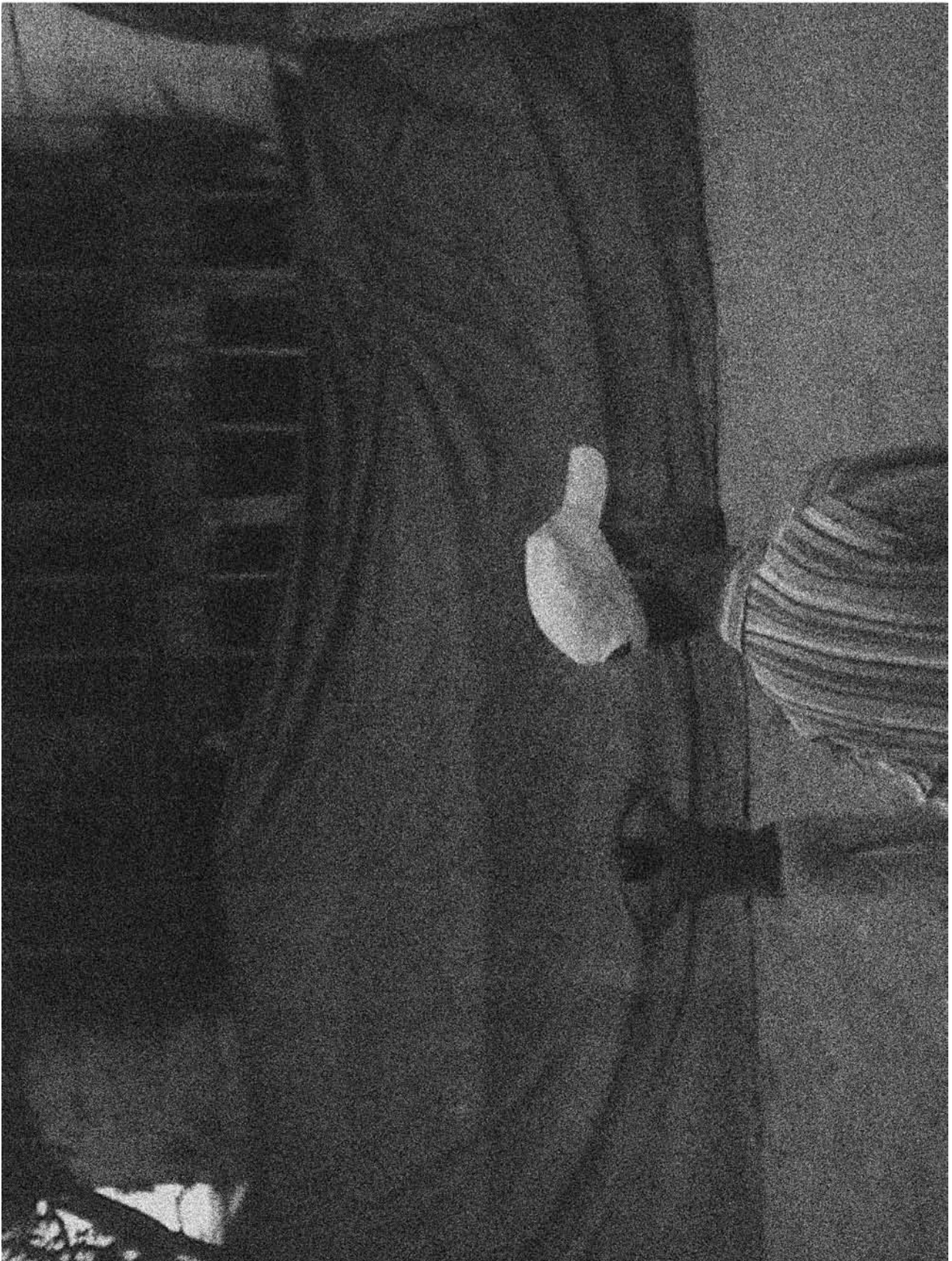
For the democratization of art, banner on the SKUC building, Zagreb, 1981



For the democratization of art, photo published in Studentski list, 1981.

Distribute ideas,
liberate activity,
and radiate energy

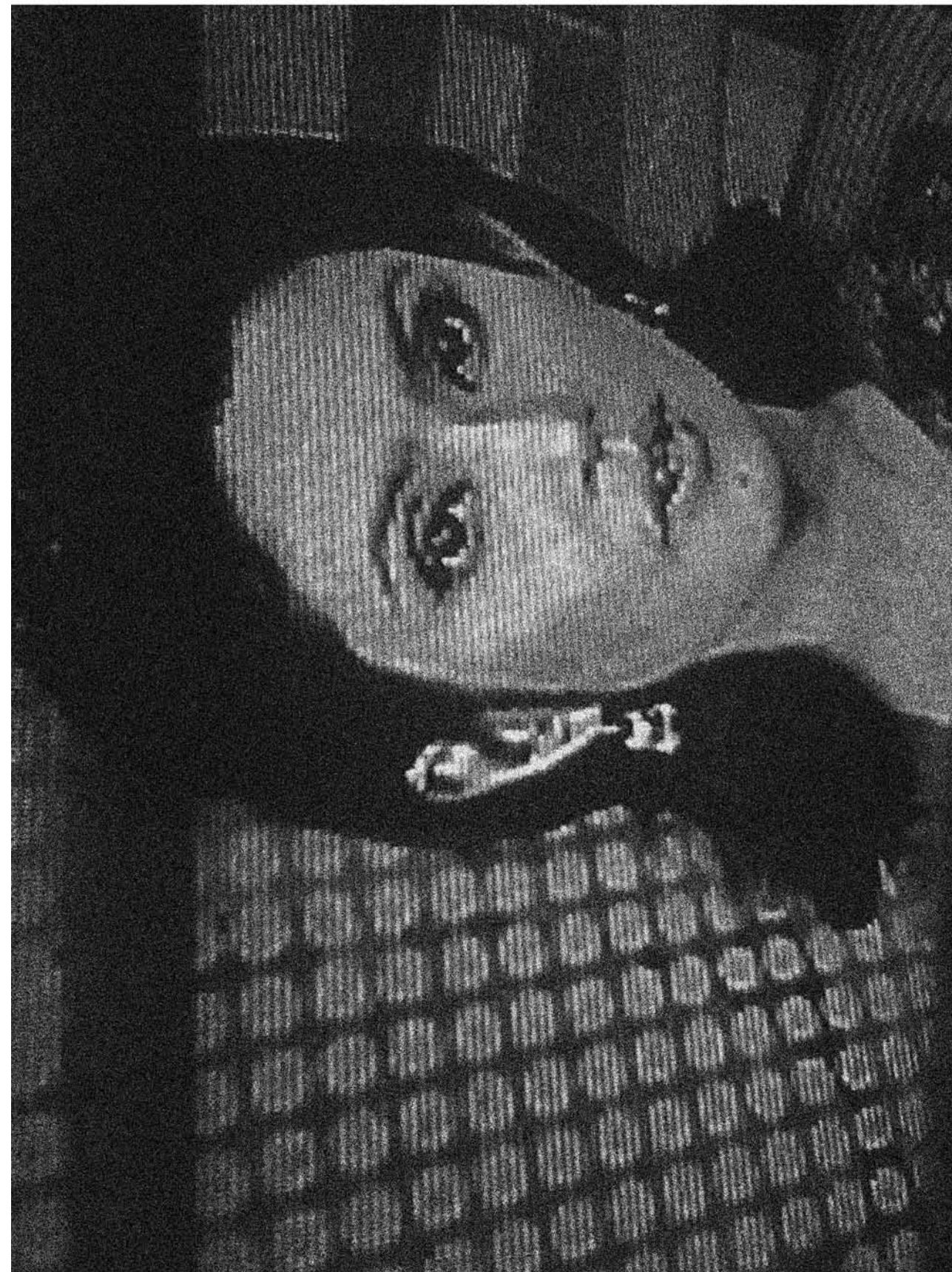
—Andrea Phillips & Suhail Malik



The Sign Said Stop, So Errr... I Ran
Digital Print, 50cmx66cm, 2008



On Learning To Keep A Straight Face On The 9 o'clock News
Digital Print, 50cmx66cm, 2008



Went for a random walk around Dhaka during the 3 hour curfew break. Rickshas rare commodity, couldn't find any empties. Walking is good for me anyway, have to get rid of any flab. Get ready for the "revolution".

Near our house, a flood refugee's child is held up by the mother as he takes a shit. Liquid stream of light yellow forming a quick pool under him. Late stage diarrhea. WASA pipes broken at many places and poisoned water is being pumped into homes. ICDDRB over-run with cholera patients. The pavement is as good a place as any. Near Kalabagan, a woman is giving a fiery, four engine, double blast jhari to her husband. Their four halfnaked children cowering near his feet. He looks completely cowed. Bangali naari in anger is a dangerous cheese, "durdondo pratap".

At Shukrabad, two police are idling and talking to a civilian. The civvy seems to be a friend. He's saying: "You understand that a page of the book has turned, but now the wind has blown that page back over." I want to stay and hear more, but I really don't want to idle near police. Not today. At Manik Mia Avenue, one of the armored police cars is open while the men rest outside. They seem relaxed. This is the first time I've seen the interior. Inside there are tall black seats like on a deluxe bus (Dhaka-Chittagong oy oy).

I was supposed to meet a friend. I'm twenty minutes late. All cell phone networks were shut off as soon as curfew lifted (clever move, that one), no way to tell him I'm late. Isn't it interesting that the dependence of the country on mobiles in last ten years is such that you can control populations by toggling the on/off switch. I'm sure people had informal modes of communication before to organize political action, but over-dependence has made other channels wither. Now when we get <<no network>>, we're paralyzed. I heard a person complain they could not tell their parents they were ok, but how did people do it before?

Grameenphone/Aktel/Banglalink/Warid must be going batshit. Running all these mobile ads with competing rates (1 taka 20 poisha...amra ekhon 1 taka 15 poisha....zahi postpaid...20 ti FnF... all you can eat..stella has come to dhaka'e...desh desh desh...montu'ke ektu search koro tho) but their networks are shutting down. Funnily enough with so many shops shuttered, those that have the grameen blue or banglalink orange painted on the shutters are getting maximum daylight exposure. But I don't think this is what they had in mind.

I finally meet my friend. He's been patiently waiting this whole time, in the time of no mobile. Oddly, he has a scarf around his neck. "Hey why a scarf around your neck? In this heat?":::"No I need to hide my long hair. What if the military grabs us and cuts my hair off.":::"Why would they do that?":::"Well they did it in January."

People are walking and going about their business. Moving purposefully to get to their destination, eye on the clock. I suppose everyone got used to this crisis routine in Dhaka, over the last one year. Now it returns. At some point we go by Agora shopping mall. A mad rush inside, and the gates are shackled. Long lines of people at the cash machine. I go into another small department store, and the crush of people is unbelievable. Everyone moving very fast, all looking for essential items. I may be the only person who has come in for a luxury item like juice.

One bidesh-feroth dhongi says to another, "Did you imagine you would ever see Bangladesh like this?" Shut up you idiot, I think, a military crackdown isn't being staged for the benefit of your summer vacation. But I'm being a bit unfair, these days that American twang could just as easily be from Wills Little Flower school in Dhanmondi as it could be from New Jersey. A boy starts pulling his mother, drawing her toward chocolates, but her eyes are firmly fixed on the essentials. The line is too long, to hell with my Pran juice. As I walk out empty handed, I hear a voice yell, "bhai, sausage ache, sausage?"

Sausage!...Superstore gulo are eating Bangali's head!

We finally decide to come back to Sat Masjid Road and survey the damage. Four Seasons burnt to a husk, Xindian, Café Kozmo attacked. But actually the damage not as widespread as I had feared. But how did they manage to burn Seasons so completely? And why that Chinese restaurant. China ra ki korlo amader?

We park the bike and walk. Nothing going on, nothing to see. As we near BDR camp, a platoon of soldiers march past, in slow file. I don't know ranks, but these seem very junior. I spot a Pahari soldier among them. That's not something you see every day. Possibly riot duty in Dhaka is the only work a Pahari will be trusted with.

People have stopped walking, they wait for the soldiers to pass. Not so nonchalant after all. Everyone is a bit on edge. But so are the soldiers. For a moment I imagine they are as scared of us, as we of them.

Not quite what they imagined they would be doing, when they signed up. Or the Army, when they took over on 1/11. Not what we imagined either. Cat on a hot tin roof.

Naeem Mohaiemen blogging as eyshob_dinratri
Thu 23 Aug 2007: Sausages On My Curfew Break
Posted under Crisis Management, I-Witness
<http://www.drishtipat.org/blog/2007/08/23/curfew-break/>

I Like Hauser and Wirth

Prologue – the mirror

I like Hauser and Wirth. It's good to say that. Not to write it or think it but to say it. This is the power of the spoken word and its impact upon the speaker. Not to think too much about it (it produces its own meaning) but to enjoy the words becoming audible and back again while staring at my face, smudge-eyed and vaguely anxious in the bathroom mirror.

1922 New Delhi

The London branch of Hauser and Wirth is housed in a 1922 Sir Edwin Lutyens designed Midland Bank building in Piccadilly and can be accessed through the front entrance. It is a gallery that is in some respects reminiscent of one of the larger rooms at the old Saatchi Town Hall in the ubiquity of polished oak panels cladding the walls. Rather than being used as a strong framing device, as in the often clumpy memories that float up from the Southbank, the clear monumentality of this oak bank interior was cleverly dispersed and integrated, and Hauser and Wirth's architecturally/context-sensitive statement of intent presented at the outset, through a spillage of light and activity in the 2003 inaugural exhibition featuring Paul McCarthy's site-specific video *Piccadilly Circus*. His video of the initial privately staged performance was multi-projected overlapping in time, and overlapping around the room rather than categorically directed at a particular point in a particular time frame. Overlapping also with the original set for the performance remaining in the center of the gallery with traces of the Queen Mother, Bush et al getting up to food stuffs that looked increasingly like foreign policy. The flood of clanking, hammering and leather apron shuffling spilt over the constructed wooden set and the oak panelling wherever it could and which in turn became integrated as part of the family abattoir sound itself. The 'chaos' and incongruity of this presentation suited the first impression of the Bank.

That was then. This is now - the summer of 2009. Six years later.

Volcanic trade in salt and slaves white gold, hair products, eyes and mouths - 2006

The interior of the Midland bank itself, without the reflecting half light cast by eye-watering Bushwanigans, comes across differently - with the lights up, as it were. Or at least that's what occurred to me on visiting the Ellen Gallagher exhibition *The Salt-Eaters* at Hauser and Wirth, and the difference is again specific, I am sure, to this exhibition. I haven't seen the interior of Hauser and Wirth without an exhibition in front of it, but what the exhibition was in front of this time is unmistakably a no longer functioning bank. Still with traces of its own 1920's postwar commercial and imperialistic optimism, it predominantly imparts upon the perennial customer a day-to-day memory of personal banking. As such, and in this emptied state, this building has what

appears to be its own qualities of the vaguely apocalyptic, particularly reminiscent of The Children of the Damned and other grainy black and white films containing scenes of a near-deserted London in the 50's and early 60's.

Upon the oak panelling of this no longer functioning bank interior were Gallagher's black-Irish-American nauseously obsessional wall pieces – small grid-like type settings and paste-ups, blond and the like Play-do intrusions upon advertisements for hair products and skin creams and larger expanding Hair and Oz-like drawings and collages made up of tiny eyes and mouths floating and disembodied from any face or solid point to speak of. They not so much framed the oak panels rather than infested them with their intense corrupt maggoty detail of past-imposed consumerism, and volcanic hallucinogenic eruptions. So this empty disused bank, with its own vaguely apocalyptical associations, was corrosively stitched together by a kind of strange act of time-warp woodworm (weaving in and out, in and out) with the building's function on another level and at another time as a gallery.

This disturbing honeycomb of time and place was a slippage less shrouding than in McCarthy's piece. I couldn't remember, for instance, where the gallery staff were sitting on that inaugural day or even if they were there at all. Within the Gallagher exhibition I knew precisely where they were. They were established at the far end of the gallery when you walk in, behind what must have been the original desk (more like a pew) of the bank's own former reception. It is oak and the top of their heads could just be seen to poke out above it like fresh pink organic matter in polyester navy blue suits and white blouses. Also clearly visible was a cctv monitor on the desk, showing murky cameronesque-underwater shots of the basement where a large safe was just visible in the darkness. In the basement itself, in one of the vaults to the left of the safe, was a small black and white 16 mm fragment of the ocean horizon, changing in light quality projected on the greasy wall. The scratched and worn fragment itself was silent but was accompanied by the functional hum and clatter of the heavy projector. Back upstairs at the desk there was a real and awkward silence, the kind of patient voiceless silence brought on from watching others engaged in business. Reminiscent of being in a queue

A small oak compartment.

On the same day, in the very elegantly titled Blow de la Barra Gallery on Heddon Street is an exhibition entitled *The Title of the Exhibition as an Artwork*. A complex and multi-layered exhibition in a more organised and graspable sense but with its own impacts. The title is taken from an online source of exhibition titles, generously set up by Stefan Brüggemann and freely available for anyone to use. The title, *The Title as an Exhibition as an Artwork*, is #347 and was chosen (one assumes, but probably delegated to someone else) by the curator Mathieu Copeland. Paintings (in the expanded sense of the word) and the spoken word itself also contribute to this exhibition that the on-going Copeland, both selects and then integrates within a larger and increasingly growing warez-style website. Within the main conventional white cube gallery space Claude

Rutault and Jaroslaw Flicinski both dealt with painting in a combination of Lukas & Sternberg white retinal imprint wall painting (Flicinski) and slapstick remnants of a Charlie Drake sketch involving white paint, overalls, buckets and ladders, in which a painting purchased at Bonhams Auction House was hung up and painted over whilst preparing the space (Rutault). The noise of this part of the exhibition was wisely covered up and left as a memory in respect to the piece as title and the spoken word exhibition.

Behind the screen of this painting imprint was Rebecca May Marston, one of the two directors of Blow De La Barra, who had to be approached to deliver the voice pieces, which she did standing up with one arm. These pieces were short written pieces supplied either daily, as a batch, or as a single statement to be repeated the same each day, that were then read to the visitor on request. Some that would have been newly supplied each day, or from the circulating batch were perhaps never heard, depending on the attendance levels to the exhibition, a fact that almost seems Japanese. Practiced but slightly irritated she read the pieces from the white sheet, a white sheet that I was grateful for and perhaps she didn't need, but anything less would appear directed specifically at me from her. The paper became the mediator in this case. She didn't start with Nick Currie's (AKA Momus) Chinese Whisper, but it was the most uncomfortable, not because of what was said but because of the simultaneous reestablishment of my own voice. The piece was hard to hear not because of the pressure of business-like exclusion (rudeness), but because it was not whispered in my ear. Rebecca whispered something at me, and not in my ear. I thanked her, loud and clear. As it was a Chinese Whisper I don't think it mattered that I missed it. Lawrence Weiner's piece, on the other hand was spoken clearly, was its own title, and whose effect was not unlike asking gallery staff a question. In that sense, formal to the last. Ian Wilson is short and sweet. The delivery was straightforward and to the point – 'Time'. A singular spoken word can engender more confidence than a sentence, drawing as it does on memories of the imperative. Karl Holmqvist's Genet clip was in French and added another layer to our moment. Douglas Copeland was quasi-futuristic trash statement gathering in the recesses of hyperspace and delivered with a mind elsewhere. It went on I guess, until the very last word was spoken. I wanted to talk and made some comment about short straws and gallery directors, strain and how I was often in need of the occasional statement uttered without too many ties. All this was gentle and trivially ice breaking. However, what had been dislodged was a thought. The spoken word had dislodged a thought that had been placed up in my cranium a little earlier when navigating the tiny stone steps from the bank vaults to surface by the desk of Hauser and Wirth. A thought of how Gallagher had presented a glimpse of that which McCarthy had shrouded in his momentarily conservative assertions, through her own exposure, via her own navigations, of the architecture and apocalyptic nature of grainy authoritarian post-war London and its effect upon the unwitting staff of Hauser and Wirth. A glimpse of queuing up to queue up to get back where I came in, eating my own slightly distant tail and in this spiral, observing two members of polyester-clad staff locked in private business with the effect of a sharp and sudden loss of oxygen that extinguished my voice, silently, in an instant, without me even noticing. Maybe it was sometime in the 1920's or maybe the '50's, maybe it was New York, London or Rotterdam, doubtful it was Cape Verde for all the promises. Wherever it was, the voice had gone in a form of respectful 16mm silent

waiting while other voices were animated, busy and whirring, ticker-tape-like. Whilst a tautology that was a product of particular circumstances and complicated by the different levels with which the work of Gallagher brought together or exposed as a glimpse, it is none the less a glimpse into a small drawer of an old oak desk that leaves one momentarily silenced with only the possibility of exercising and strengthening beforehand or afterwards the timbre of one's voice, smudgy in the bathroom and thinking of Rebecca – I like Hauser and Wirth. Now, today and always.

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The Cult of the Goddess and the Cult of the Public

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ABSTRACT

In this paper, I will argue that democracy in art in India has to deal with representation in two senses: representation as visual semiotics and as political representation. Given Indian democracy's prehistory in colonialism, some key issues get thrown up such as secularism and patriarchy which figure as gendered discourse centering around the trope of a goddess. Political aspirations and expediency get organized around the body of the goddess as it traverses the public sphere. I will examine the image of the goddess across modes of representation from colonial/nationalist (Abanindranath Tagore), secular/nationalist (M F Hussain); and finally in the post-secular/post-colonial moments (popular posters of Gujarati Garba). In this chequered journey of the goddess from the sacred realm of high art to the public sphere, she moves between two poles of representation, one that is governed by regimes of representation aligned to the patriarchal system and the other constituted by its transgression when the goddess becomes a dangerous supplement exposing the fragility of secular-modernism. The three moments located within colonial, nationalist, and post-colonial cultural representations emblemize shifts in the constitution and reconfiguration of public culture across the national, regional and global spaces and their corresponding modes of visuality.

The emergent debate on public culture is making its presence felt across many disciplines offering new perspectives on the notions of the 'public' and 'culture.'¹ In this paper, I

¹ Arjun Appadurai and Carol A Breckenridge, "Why Public Culture ?" *Public Culture Bulletin*: Vol.1, No. 1: Fall 1988, pp. 5-9.

would explore the concept of public culture as it emerged in the context of visual practices of colonialism and post-colonialism.

While the feminine body has been central to the formation of nationalist imaginary in the west, its career in India moves by its specific dynamics. In this paper, I will examine the image of the goddess across modes of representation from colonial/nationalist (Abanindranath Tagore), secular/nationalist (M F Hussain) and finally in the post-secular/post-colonial moments (popular posters of Gujarati *Garba*). In this chequered journey of the goddess from the sacred realm of high art to the public sphere, she moves between two poles of representation, one that is governed by regimes of representation aligned to the patriarchal system (as in Abanindranath Tagore's *Bharatmata* or the *Garba* posters from Gujarat), and the other constituted by its transgression when the goddess becomes a dangerous supplement (as in Hussain's Hindu goddess series) exposing the fragility of secular-modernism. The three moments located within colonial, nationalist, and post-colonial cultural representations emblemize shifts in the constitution and reconfiguration of public culture across the national, regional and global spaces and their corresponding modes of visuality.

The journey is more of a rhetorical term to plot these moments which are by no means teleological but linked to the wider discourses of nationalist and post-colonial cultural politics. Through the means of mechanical reproduction when the goddess enters the public space in limitless copies, the figure of public worship venerated as a unique cult object gets transformed into 'public property' enacting roles of an ideal woman. In this manner; the goddess in a diffuse sense pervades the bodies of women lending sanctioned embodiment to the state controlled notions of past and tradition. This process acquires particular urgency when the nationalist trope of tradition-as-woman meets its neo-orientalist counterpart of India-as-woman in the age of globalization. Ultimately, it can be said that the even the manner in which public is imagined as pliable and docile bodies to be governed retains traces of the feminine if, following Judith Butler, the feminine is understood less as a biological category and more as a performative identity.

Tracing its nationalist beginnings and exploring its reconfigurations in more recent times via the trope of the goddess, it seems to be vital to distinguish between the concept of public culture and that of public cult. It is via the notion of 'public cult' that public culture in India can be understood as inflected by its own cultural history and traditions.

With the cult of the goddess as the central motif of analysis, it becomes possible to foreground the religious imperatives that have powerfully structured and restructured the space of public culture in India, something that no study of culture in India can afford to discount. This, of course, does not imply that there is no secular space available but that even the latter is mediated powerfully by religion. It is equally crucial to understand the term religion as primarily performative and secondarily textual.² One of the main reasons for the omnipresence of the religious in public life is that it underwrites the very codes of patriarchy which pervade the everyday life of the society through cultural practices.

Through the cult of the goddess as it has entered the domain of art, I would examine the visual regime that had dictated the nationalist representations of nation as goddess. So intersecting are the spheres of the sacred and the nation embodied by the figure of the goddess that transgressions against one translated into that of another. When the regime of representation is felt to be violated, it leads to a crisis of public sphere itself, as exemplified by the controversies surrounding the depiction of goddesses by M F Hussain.

I will place particular emphasis on the visual/textual practices of embodiment in which a tradition acquires corporeality. What is remarkable is that this body or bodies around which dense historical, art historical and ideological meanings are fleshed out happen/s to be gendered and marked by class, caste and communitarian identities. I would, in the end, argue that the articulation of visual images under discussion is not a secondary activity, which simply responds to the political and social ideology of the time but that it is a primary act, which helps to constitute and maintain particular and partial interpretation of culture and society.

² S Balgangadhara, *The Heathen in His Blindness* Leiden: Brill, 199.

Public Culture and Public Cult:

Public space is not only constituted as a place for the citizens of a nation state but also by a set of cultural practices that have the potential of registering the aspirations or discontents of the public, a place of consensus formation or contestation over civic concerns. What if these public cultural practices also converge around certain religious figures and aspire to capture the public imaginary in the name of nation, secularism and globalization? With the advent of globalization and multi-national economy of late capitalism, the contours of public space have altered in urban and rural contexts in its mode of address and registers of representation.

In India, the shift has demonstrated new internationally oriented religiosities that have adapted the contemporary technology particularly of mechanical reproduction to its own ends possibly of resistance to the homogenizing dynamics of globalization itself. It is within the persistence or the transformation of the religious discourse in the age of globalization that I locate the term “public cult” as opposed to the more standard concept of public culture. In India, the public sphere itself stems from the public cult and when the latter enters the modern civic space, it gives rise to the possibility of public culture.

In public cult in the modern context, certain, usually dominant sections of the public aspire to present a homogenizing picture of themselves around a religious identity by systematic exclusion of others. Such a public cult places particular emphasis on the spectaclization of the body, very often the female body but in mythical terms. (the male body of the *Yogi*, the female body of *Bharatmata* in the RSS³ posters and so on).

In India, the space of the public cult is so dominant making it difficult to segregate the space of public culture from it. In the west, it was against the idea of a cult understood in pejorative sense as anti-modern and superstitious that the sphere of the public was defined. In India, it is from public cult, say a tree, both a place of worship as well as a centre of community life that the public sphere emanates. If we define public culture in the Habermasian sense of public sphere as the site of formation of free public opinion, it

³ Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh is a cultural organization of the Hindu Right.

leaves out the public cult from its purview and therefore cannot grasp the dynamics of public sphere in India.

In public culture, there is heterogeneity of representations where the religious factor edged off to the margins and the centre stage is occupied by the “secular”, opening itself to political propaganda and/or the forces of capitalist consumerism. Even here, the female body is objectified (so is the male body occasionally) but the marks of religious identity are disavowed or naturalized.

The cult of the goddess as it travels across different modes of representation from her singular iconicity (singular when standing in for the nation) and her dispersal into many bodies to stand in for tradition is poised in the interstitial spaces of the public cult and public culture. When the representation of the goddess in public culture is seen in terms of the public cult, it would pose a crisis not only within the public sphere but also for the nationalist and secularist discourses.

Central to the project of forging an authentic tradition is the question of its epistemological and visual efficacy. Claims of authentic representation are rallied on the grounds of better visibility/textuality whether it concerns Abanindranath Tagore’s painted image or his textual constructs from ancient Sanskrit sources. Central to the controversies surrounding Hussain’s Hindu goddesses was the issue of visual authenticity of their representation (textual and historical sources were cited to justify them) which acquired political resonance whereas the political was diffused and subsumed by the cultural in the State sponsored digital posters on the *Garba* festival. Traversing one moment to another involves a) a methodological crisis within art history traditionally orientated towards the high art genres and objects subsumed under the acceptable categories of painting, sculpture and architecture. It is here that the notion of visual culture is productive in enabling one to give visibility to new objects of study such as posters and hoardings, products of mechanical reproduction;⁴ b) a crisis for the Indian modern which had now to

⁴ The term and concept of Visual Culture represents development within what is generally referred to as New Art History and to some extent, registers the impact of Cultural Studies on the discipline of Art History. For more information, see Nicholas Mirzoeff’s *Introduction to Visual Culture*, Routledge, London & New York, 1999.

address the question of politics of representation when secularism began to lose its ground and legitimacy.

Abanindranath and the Nationalist Imaginary of the Goddess:

Abanindranath Tagore, the pioneering ideologue of Bengal Revivalism, emerges by the 1920s as one of the leading cultural nationalists, and his credentials are in no small way established by his painting which was originally labeled as *Banga Mata*, the Mother of Bengal. (Plate 1: *Bharatmata*) To use a more contemporary phrase, Abanindranath's *Bharat Mata* constitutes an archetype for the body-scape where the female body is deployed to visualize the territorial landscape of the nation.⁵ Today, cultural nationalism of militant Hinduism has fully appropriated the possibilities opened up by Abanindranath Tagore and forged a geo-body, where the woman's body along with the long expanse of her *sari* map onto the imagined geographical boundary of India. (Plate 2 : RSS Goddess).

What perhaps marks the emergence of Indian modernism as different from that in west is its intense engagement with the textual "high culture" of a golden past which could only be recovered fragmentarily through Sanskrit sources. In this, the reliance of the cultural nationalists upon the Orientalists' project of restoring the glorious past of the colonized has to be recognized. One such texts that Abanindranath Tagore embraced for a concentrated reading was Yashodhara's *Shadangas* as culled out from Vatsyayana's *Kamasutra*..⁶ At the heart of visual public culture launched by *Bharatmata*, lay the public cult of the goddess dictating the configuration of the public space within which would circulate its mechanical reproductions in form of calendars and prints.

A retrospective glance at the formation of the Bengal School and their pivotal role in the Bengal Renaissance cannot ignore its patriarchal underpinnings, given the split between

the real and imagined women anchoring its representations. Women acquired prominent visibility as objects of representation in the nationalist imaginary of the time but/and therefore, as actual practitioners of art, they were strongly marginalized.⁷ In the symbolic realm, the female figure served a double and complimentary function of bearing the inscriptions of an imagined past, and functioning as a ground upon which artist's subjectivity could be forged. As Kumkum Sangari and Sudeshna Vaid have alerted us to this split between the real and imagined women:

...womanhood is often part of an asserted or desired, not an actual, cultural continuity.⁸

Whose Goddesses ? Hussain's or Ours : The Indian Secular Modern in Crisis

Much has already been written about the controversies triggered by Hussain's depiction of the goddesses, *Durga*, *Saraswati* and *Laxmi* who are central to the Hindu pantheon. The debate around them has polarized itself into two camps concerning the right of an individual artist to represent a visual image in public space: those who expressed anguish and contempt for "liberties" Hussain was taking and thus offending the religious sentiments of the Hindus; and those consisting mainly of fellow artists who stood in solidarity with Hussain in defense of artistic and creative freedom.⁹ The persistent question raised was whether public reaction would have changed if the artist were not a Muslim. I would read in this a crisis first of Indian modern and then of secularism.

It is paradoxical that most of the writings on the Hussain controversies treat the actual works as points of departure for broader debates about secularism and identity politics in cultural politics¹⁰ and seldom engage with the materiality of these images as representations. And the ones that do closely look at them, happen to be the alleged

⁷ Recent feminist art historiography has "discovered" women artists such as Sunaina Devi of the Bengal School who was largely ignored by art historiographers. For more details, see Gayatri Sinha's "Expressions and Evocations: Contemporary Women Artists of India," *Marg Publications* 1996.

⁸ Kumkum Sangari and Sudesh Vaid, eds, *Recasting Women: Essays in Colonial History* (New Delhi: Kali for Women) 1986, p.17.

⁹ Tapati Guha-Thakurta, *Monuments, Objects, Histories: Institutions of Art in Colonial and Post-Colonial India* (New Delhi: Permanent Black) 2004, pp.245-253.

⁵ Sumathi Ramaswamy, 'Visualizing India's Geo-body: Globes, maps, bodyscapes,' in her *Beyond Appearances ? Visual Practices and Ideologies in Modern India* (New Delhi: Sage, 2003), p. 154.

⁶ Abanindranath Tagore, *Shadangas: Six Limbs of Painting*, *The Modern Review*, May/June, 1914, pp.12-28. Ironically, the same *Kamasutra* that later was to bear only erotic connotations for several generations of westerners, provided a verse embedded which spurred nationalists like Abanindranath Tagore to arrive at a justification of the most sanitized and desexualized imagery of *Bharata Mata*

representatives of the offended Hindu sentiments. Ironically, it is their critiques of Hussain's representations of the gods and goddesses that make possible a contemporary retake on these images. Attention to the materiality of the signification yields a reading which makes possible a feminist appropriation of Hussain's paintings.

In the politics of visual representation, nudity of the Hindu goddesses became the prime target for condemning the artist, so claimed the enraged critics representing the offended Hindu sentiments. That the gods like *Vishnu* (Plate 3) and *Hanuman* (Plate 4) were also depicted in the nude did not feature as objectionable. It is this double standard reflected in the attitude to nudity in the representation of gods and goddesses that betrays the patriarchal authority under-girding Indian modernity. Here I would like to relate the banning of the nude Indian goddesses with the prohibition of the kiss in Indian cinema.¹¹ A presence of the nude goddess is as scandalous as a cinematic kiss by a couple as they encroach upon the patriarchal ordering of the private/sacred space.

How the sphere of the private space got constituted has a nationalist origin and has been understood as implicated with the history of capitalism and colonialism.¹² Such a concept of the private was non-existent in the pre-modern culture in India. This explains absence of prohibition of nudity in the pre-modern religious iconography and the profuse presence of erotic imagery in "public spaces" as on the walls of the temples in medieval times. Witness any of the medieval temple sites of Modhera, Rani ki Vav or Khajuraho and one will find semi-nudity a norm for representing gods and goddesses (Plates 5). No direct equation was made between nudity and eroticism but the category of the erotic was distinctly formed and read more in terms of postures and gestures. It was this cultural specificity of the language of the erotic that was lost when modernity set in. Once nudity became coupled with the private space, and once this private space became feminized as

a corollary of the nationalist discourse¹³, a straight equation came to be formed between the unclothed body whose proper domain is the private space and the erotic body.

In traditional art practices in India, there developed a highly sophisticated tradition of the female nude which even if placed on the walls of the temple or a step well, assumed a 'connoisseurial' gaze and may be regarded as an art form without the autonomy of the European female nudes. It is possible to find a highly erotic female nude co-existing with a semi-nude goddess but nudity or semi-nudity of a female body was not necessarily a sign of eroticism. The goddesses in the medieval sculptures, although portrayed as semi-nude, assumed authoritative postures with all their prescribed attributes just like their male counterparts beside them. Perhaps, by referring back to a medieval Saraswati, Hussain was gesturing towards a pre-modern past and the paradox of Indian modernity which in its prudishness towards corporeality is more aligned with the Victorian ideals of sexuality than the indigenous ones.¹⁴ But to a public which had lost his traditional bearings, the goddess appeared to be disrobed by the artist as an act of provocation.

As far as nudity is concerned, it is the goddess, not the gods who bear the responsibility of morality of culture and the nation. The goddess here is the sublimated Indian woman, a locus of Indianness and to a nationalist, an epitome of counter-assimilation and a means of maintenance of national originality.

The female nude was as constitutive of the western modern (and the classical academic cannon) as the draped female form of a sacred goddess was of the Indian nationalism. It is around the female figure that the discourses of nationalism and modernism collided emphatically and generated the binary of the clothed goddess "owned" by the former versus the female nude as the art form authenticated by the latter.

Ravi Varma had to straddle both the demands, i.e. the national and the western academic. Occasionally, when he was drawn to the imagery of the female nude, the class and caste

¹⁰ Monica Juneja, 'Reclaiming the Public Sphere: Hussain's Portrayals of Saraswati and Draupadi', *Economic and Political Weekly*, 32:4 (25 January 1997), pp.155-157.

¹¹ See Madhava Prasad, 'Cinema and the Desire for Modernity' *Journal of Arts and Ideas*: Numbers 25-26, pp. 71-86 for an excellent reading of the censorship of the kiss in popular cinema in the context of Indian modernity.

¹² Ibid. p.75.

¹³ Partha Chatterjee, Nationalism, A Derivative Discourse

¹⁴ Hussain is said to have derived his Saraswati from an 11th century nude Saraswati in the Vimala Vasahi temple at Mount Abu in Rajasthan. Tapati Guha Thakurta, 'Art History and the Nude', *Monuments*,

differences factored in. That Ravi Varma's female nudes found greater acceptability stems from the fact they went along with the sensibilities of feudal patriarchy. The *Saraswati* (Plate 6) by Ravi Varma has over the years captured the imaginary of the viewers as the perfect embodiment of the goddess. So naturalized has been his representation of the *Saraswati* that the historical markers in terms of the dress, class and caste have become invisible. This would also have bearing on the impossibility of coming across any goddess in the nude within the body of work produced by Ravi Varma. While the Hindu Goddess inhabits a high caste status, the only female nudes painted by Varma are marked by their lower class and caste status. (Plate 7).

The female nudes stormed into the Indian art scene with modernism. Much of western modernism was predicated upon the female nude as it was around her that the text of modernist rebellion was inscribed¹⁵. For F N Souza, expressing his rebellion against the establishment of the art institutions on the malleable bodies of women was an authentic modernist act. In this context of desacralization, drawing from the sphere of Hindu goddesses perhaps wouldn't have suited his purpose and anachronistic given his commitment to the international modern.¹⁶

But Hussain could not detach the international modern from the national modern with Souza's gusto. Setting up a conversation of the one with another, he also wanted to start a dialogue with the past as tradition. Another way of saying the same is that the Indian modern had to assert its difference from the European modern and this is where the realms of religion and mythology became the twin terms around which 'indigenous' claims of modernism could be made. In Hussain's case, the journey to the mythical past was the effect of such a process of appropriation. The answer to why this mythical past was peopled more by goddesses than gods lay in the masculinist underpinnings of

western modernism itself from which Hussain both sought to distance himself, as well as deploy as a set of formal language.

Where the western modernists have turned to mythical and even religious reference, as in the works by the French Fauvist, Georges Rouault, (Plate 8) they had to inflect it via iconoclasm, i.e. of breaking up the inherited language into pieces and rebuilding radically new configurations- as a necessary mode of appropriating the past and bringing it to the present.

It is this iconoclasm attempted by Hussain which had created a furor in public sphere. What the critics found most objectionable in Hussain's depiction of the religious figures is not only his iconoclasm but how it figured differently in male and female divine figures: While the nudity is not the cause of discomfort in the case of the gods, the abrupt ending of their hands into stumps in place of graceful hands had disturbed the critics. With the Hindu goddesses, it was more the mode of re-suturing the fragmented parts, as in his *Lakshmi*, (Plate 9) rather than the missing parts that has enraged the standard viewership. Despite her lacking a limb, the three handed goddess *Lakshmi*, 'joins' too intimately with the elephant. As a modernist, perhaps Hussain rejected the standard mode of flanking the goddess between two devout elephants who are traditionally made to raise their trunks in deference (Plate 10). Here the element of transgression is located by the critics along the lines of junction where the forms of animals or humans meet; declaring these 'unions' as points of uninhibited sexuality.

'Luxmi' is also stark naked, perched on the head of Ganesh, a posture of highlighting unmasked sexuality.

The critics have interpreted a single elephant as lord Ganesha instead of Lakshmi's attribute and vehicle and the female goddess surmounting a male god amounted to an act of subversion.

Again, on Durga's iconography (Plate 11: Durga):

Hussain has violated all norms of decency and artistic fitness while painting goddess 'Durga'. She is in fact not shown astride, but in sexual union with a tiger. In many paintings, Hussain has taken up the theme of sex between animals and women. He has done paintings on sex between a horse and a woman, and a bull

Objects, Histories :Institutions of Art in Colonial and Postcolonial India, (New Delhi: Permanent Black) 2004, p.251.

¹⁵ 'The Female Nude as the Site of Modernity', *Modern Art: A Critical Introduction* (London: Routledge) 2000, pp.83-107.

¹⁶ F N Souza's paintings of female nudes in the Bombay Art Society Exhibition in 1949 created a furor in the public space but non of them related with Hindu goddesses.

and a woman. But he has done the most abominable act by extending this series in portraying goddess 'Durga'.¹⁷

On the other hand, the Hindu god, Vishnu (Plate 12) is depicted with missing palms and their attributes. In India where religion pervades every sphere of life as a living force, this iconoclasm was read as 'amputation' by the practitioners of Hinduism whose only historical reference to iconoclasm reach back to Islamic conquests of India.

Lord Vishnu is mostly painted with four hands holding 'Shankh', 'Padma', 'Gada' and 'Chakra'. But hands of Vishnu that hold these attributes have been amputated in Hussain's portrayal.¹⁸

The place that a modern artist gives to signatures is reserved for labeling the goddesses as *Saraswati*, *Durga* and *Lakshmi*; so crucial it was for the artist to have the audience identify the deities 'correctly'. It is this exactitude with identification that corresponds with the religious zeal of fundamentalist of any religion that, on one hand may seem to violate his own modernist handling of forms (which allows for such a degree of ambiguity that an elephant can be read as a 'Ganesha', a 'Visnu' for a truncated human body, perhaps of a victim and so on) and on the other, offends the religious sensibility of the Hindus.

The question of nudity also bring to the fore the contradiction in the stance taken by the Hindu fundamentalists. On the other hand, Hussain is chastised for displaying double standards in representing the Hindu goddesses and his own female relatives (Plate 13):

Hussain has painted his daughter and mother with all their clothes on and covered from head to toe, *as should be normally done*. He has not disrobed them as he has done with the paintings/sketches of Hindu goddesses-'Durga'. 'Saraswati', 'Luxmi', and 'Sita.' Why has he not availed artistic license in painting his mother and daughter ? (my emphasis.)

¹⁷ Cited from the Press Note from Sanskar Bharati by D. P. Sinha on 25.5.1998

¹⁸.Ibid

On one hand, in the Hindu fundamentalist discourse, freedom offered to women constitutes one of the grounds for condemning Islam. Islam is vilified for not offering freedom to Muslim women, the kind enjoyed by their Hindu counterparts. On the other hand, the Hindu critics of Hussain's paintings draw upon the very culture that is viewed as a threat and a site of difference, to derive the normative dress code for *all women*.¹⁹

What if we shift the premise from a modernist to post-modernist codes of reading Hussain's goddesses? Rather than registering a discomfort with the religious subject matter which from a modernist/secularist perspective is an anachronism, let us remain with the artist in his urgent claim for the 'correct' label which has in fact displaced even the mark of his personal authenticity, i.e. his signature.²⁰ Perhaps the critics sensed in the displaced signature Hussain's transference of ownership; the names of the goddesses in place of Hussain's signature amounted to a scandalous claim of their bodies as his own ! The scandal of the artist was not merely an artistic transgression but it powerfully resonated with the scandal of the state, where the "exclusion of women has been (as) *constitutive* to the notion of public sphere"²¹ and as their conspicuous presence within the nationalist visual culture.

It is possible to argue that Hussain in his selection of the linear mode for representing the goddesses not only desired them to be 'seen' but also 'read'; but read against the grain of the received traditions. As witness to the patriarchy of Islam, Hussain sensitivity to its manifestations in the Hindu culture translates itself in his re-reading of the familiar iconography of the Hindu pantheon to the extent of critiquing it as an artist. Female sexuality becomes central to his agenda of upturning the gendered hierarchies enshrined in the tradition which offered a conspicuous place to women on the walls of the temples but as harnesses bodies in the service of patriarchy. Perhaps he imagined the full force of

¹⁹ I am grateful to S Santosh for pointing out this contradiction in the position of Hussain's critics in our discussion.

²⁰ See Karin Zitzewitz's "On Signature and Citizenship: Further Notes on the 'Hussain Affair'", *Towards A New Art History: Studies in Indian Art*, eds. Shivaji Panikkar, Parul Dave Mukherji and Deeptha Achar (New Delhi: D K Printworld) 2003, pp.276-287, for another take on Hussain's signatures.

his critique was best realized on the bodies of not any traditional female type like the *yakshini* or *surasudari* but of the very goddesses who are revered within the bastion of Hindu patriarchy. In this respect, his choice of Lakshmi and Sarawati was not random but strategic. By his fixation on the female subjectivity via sexuality, he invents a new role for them and also envisages an alternative social reality.

Let us turn attention to his *Sarawati* (Plate 14):

Art historians and artists have expressed disbelief at the objections of indecency raised by the critics when the linear drawing of *Saraswati* was deemed to be far too slender and attenuated to warrant such a reading. Perhaps what has to be closely considered is the manner in which Hussain frames this image. The two official attributes, the peacock and the *veena* are depicted in close proximity to the goddess. The fish in the upper left hand corner is the supplement which literally upturns the traditional norms of iconography. In opposition to the traditional practice of placing *Saraswati* above the water, resting benevolently upon a lotus, Hussain plunges the goddess under the water with her hair floating beside her. One hand of the goddess is lifted above the water level holding a lotus aloft. Perhaps, here one can pitch Hussain's representation between the visual and the verbal registers. Deploying a metaphor drawn from Hindi in which "*pani sir se upar beha jana*" conveys an idiomatic sense of transgression itself. *Water flowing over ones's head* is a state of emergency, perhaps sounding a warning to women's tolerance of patriarchy.²² Even the verbal labeling that accompanies the image occupies the space of artist's signature gesturing towards the idea of feminist self representation. In other words, Hussain appears to be suggesting that were these goddesses to represent themselves outside the constraints of patriarchy, the conventionally sanctioned norms of representation will not contain them.

Those who object to Hussain's representations of the goddess do so on grounds of propriety which easily translates into that of property. Hussain's transgressions were read as transgressions into the very privileged domain of production of cultural symbols marked as upper caste and Brahmanic.

²¹ Rajeswari Sunder Rajan, *The Scandal of the State: Women, Law, and Citizenship in Postcolonial India*, (New Delhi: Permanent Black) 2003, p. 168.

²² It is to be noted that Hussain has again played around with his own name and adopted McBull while representing the Bollywood actress, Madhuri Dixit as Europa.

Any attempt to regard representations of the female nude in ancient Indian art, as for example on the walls of the temples as sign of auspiciousness enjoyed by women is fraught with misconceptions.²³ To assert that in the context of ancient Indian art and the representations of the female body in art, there is no place for the male gaze unlike their representations in the west, is to ignore the symbolic mechanisms of patriarchy whereby the power to represent is maintained as a male domain.

Hussain by depicting Hindu goddesses in the nude not only offended the religious sentiments but shook the very ground of patriarchal authority whose claim to power rested significantly on representation of women in the symbolic realm. Considering the kind of objections and endorsements made by the critics and supporters of Hussain, the public response to his works have served to expose the contradictions of Indian modernity, both within the right wing and secularist camps; the former's identity formation around religion and latter's disavowal of the religious in the name of freedom and progressive politics.

Public Cults and the Cultural Practices in the Age of Global Capitalism

How does the state in the times of globalization deploy a public festival centering around the mother goddess and women's fertility to showcase a region for promoting global trade and to address an international audience is the theme of this section. That culture is inevitably the site of the political is most blatantly established in the recent statewide display of posters celebrating the *Navratri* or the Nine Days of *garba*.

Garbas derive from the Sanskrit term *garbha* meaning the womb traditionally associated with celebration of women's fertility in Gujarat. With modernization it has transformed itself into a cultural event celebrated during the festival of *Dussehra* generally in the

²³ Vidya Dehejia, ed. *Representing the Body: Gender Issues in Indian Art* (New Delhi: Kali for Women), 1997, p.8.

month of October. Today *garbas* offer occasion for community dancing for nine days around the image of the Mother Goddess Amba. (Plate 15).

In the Department of Indian Tourism, *garbas* enjoy a status of a synecdoche and represent the State of Gujarat as a whole. *Garbas* are annually celebrated with much pomp as the shops vie with each other in their colourful display of the *chaniacholis*, *dupattas* and the *kurtas* for men and women. (Plate 16)

What is particularly noteworthy is the centrality that the *garbas* received in the unprecedented publicity campaign undertaken by the State of Gujarat in terms of massive *garba* posters, pamphlets and stickers. These posters were placed in main public spaces, e.g., near traffic signals and dominated all other advertisements in size, scale and colours. The smaller size posters were freely distributed to all public institutions, the Faculty of Fine Arts in Baroda being one of them. They featured prominently in the state-sponsored campaign to promote Gujarat under the theme, *Vibrant Gujarat: Global Investor's Summit*. As far as the spectatorship is concerned, the promotional brochure proudly announces the Non-Resident Indian investors who were the main invitees.

The promotional brochure best expresses how culture is interwoven with economics as follows:

Gujarat is a state renowned for its unique blend of business enterprise and festivity. Emphasizing this very fact is the Government of Gujarat's Global Investor's Summit. Organized with the backdrop of *Navratri* celebrations, this summit ensures that your casual holiday ends up opening exciting business opportunities for you.²⁴

In the same vein as the Festivals of India, which carried Indian culture to the west, during the 1980s, in this case, the NRIs are wooed to visit Gujarat where its cultural heritage is flamboyantly showcased for their consumption. The *Garbas* were thought to be the ideal vehicle for state propaganda to strike a cord with the NRIs hailing from Gujarat.

Welcome to Navratri, the world's longest dance festival. Nine nights of unmatched joy, passion and excitement, celebrated by millions in the state of Gujarat (India). A festival

²⁴ Event website: www.navratrifestival.com & www.vibrantgujarat.com and the Gujarat State Tourism Brochure.

you can experience first hand between September 25th and October 5th, 2003. ...Gujarat- the land of Lord Krishna and home to the festival-is located on the west coast of India. It is a land of peace, prosperity and progress, with a rich historical and cultural tradition dating back to the Indus Valley civilization.

In their folklorization of 'traditional Indian culture' for the NRI (Non-Resident Indian) consumption, women's bodies are redeployed as screens on which the State inscribes its economic and political agendas. (Plate 17). The visually arresting circular format, with its eye-catching colours converging around the dazzling lights from the lamps in the centre, communicates a sense of social coherence. The black background, which vaguely suggests, the teeming multitude of people is to be read both as the vast audience assembled to witness the *Navratri* festivities as well as the people of Gujarat offering a comforting picture of unity. On closer scrutiny, the ring of dancers around the lighted lamps is constituted mostly of ethnically dressed women dancers, some accompanied by their male counterparts. Interspersed among them are young girls dressed up in more modern attire, with their hair open suggesting a happy juxtaposition of traditionalism and modernity. Interestingly the few male dancers punctuating the female dancers pose themselves as *Krishnas* specially the one in the foreground, holding an imaginary flute echoing the brochure text- "Gujarat- the land of Lord Krishna." (Plate 18)

The sharp line of differentiation that Abanindranath Tagore observes between the coercive power attributed to the aggressive presence of the colonizers and the benign rule of Bharata Mata made possible by native consent seems to vanish as we shift our focus to the present cultural scenario. The photographic image powerfully denigrated by Abanindranath Tagore as an inauthentic agent of representation and for its close overlap with academic realism proves to be the most powerful tool for State propaganda and manufacturing consent. Extremely slick and professional posters employing digital photography turn out to be the most easily appropriated mode of representation to project an image of a peaceful and vibrant Gujarat in the post-riot, post-Godhra and post-Akshardham tragedies. Repeated emphasis on peace and prosperity betray the anxieties of the State's complicity in the recent history of violence, and the brochures' empty

rhetoric desperately gestures towards an amnesia of this very recent past. It is within this context that the garba posters and hoardings have a strategic role to play to wipe the slate/state clean of its messy recent past and seduce the prospective NRI investors back to their ‘original’ homeland.

Guy Debord’s theory of the spectacle, although, derived from a western context seems to capture the dynamics of popular festivals as spectacles in such a post-colonial public space.

²⁵ Traditional discourse with its sanction of the descent of gods to take part in ordinary world acquires a contemporary dimension in case of Krishna:

The spectacle is the material reconstruction of the religious illusion. Not that its techniques have dispelled those religious mists in which human beings once located their own powers, the very powers that had been wrenched from them – those cloud enshrouded entities have now been brought down to earth. ...The absolute denial life, in shape of a fallacious paradise, is no longer projected onto the heavens, but finds its place instead within the material life itself. The spectacle is hence a technological version of the exiling of human powers in a “world beyond” – and the perfection of separation within human beings.²⁶

It is through the sacred body of the goddess, the very entity of the nation and pure uncontaminated tradition is invoked which is imagined variously in the popular culture of calendars and advertisements. It is line with the same tradition that Hussain was compelled to focus on the bodies of the goddess as a site for staging his appropriation of western modernism. However, in the third instance, the singularity of the sacred body implodes into multiple bodies of women to capture the diffused sense of “pure past”, “authentic tradition” and at the same time become representative of the “people” at large whose cultural identities have to be protected from outside influences.

²⁵ Guy Debord, *The Society of the Spectacle*, trans. Donald Nicholson Smith (New York: Zone Books, 1994).

²⁶ Debord, p.18.

It belies any neat modernist division between cultural space and useful space, between the space of leisure and that of work.

In a recent interview with Chief Minister, Narendra Modi, a journalist asked him :

Isn’t your government becoming known as a government for festivals what with Navratri, Uttarayan and more such programmes being planned ?

Here comes the official reply:

My job is to release the creative energies of people. Festivals are the time when people on their own are charged and gather for celebrations. I want to tap this energy and use it for positive purposes.

The positive purpose for which the crowd is objectified and the festivals harnessed is revealed in the next statement:

These officials from my culture department have organized the programmes well, but you saw the crowds - they are from nearby villages. They are not connoisseurs . Next year we must have corporate sponsorship for the festival and extend invitations far wide.²⁷

In the hands of the media-savvy government, festivals become local sites of staging “authentic” culture but move beyond it seek linkages with the global world of tourism, trade and commerce. While Tagore’s *Mother India* allegorizes the space of the nation via the body of a female ascetic and the aspiration of the newly emergent bourgeoisie, the Garba posters commodify women’s bodies in the name of culture and global investment and partake in the State’s strategy of hegemony maintenance.²⁸

²⁷ Times of India, Thursday, January 22, 2004. “I am a 24-hour Chief Minister: Narendra Modi, page 2.by Kingshuk Nag.

²⁸ Recent news paper coverage refers to last year’s failure to attract the NRI investors and the hollowness of extravaganza of Vibrant Gujarat enterprise. The Times of India Correspondent, Radha Sharma in her ‘Medical tourism magnet for NRIs this Navratri’ writes- “For a moment, forget the creaking public health infrastructure in the state. A few weeks from now, it’s going to be Navratri time again in ‘vibrant’ Gujarat. But thankfully, no business summits are going to be held. The buzzword in the government, which has little to show on the ground in terms of actual investment after last year’s extravaganza is medical tourism. The latest move is being billed as a safe

When the popular is turned into populist, the public space and the coercive space merge. Modernism's suspicion and discomfort with tradition is displaced by a spectacular espousal of tradition and a celebration of self-exoticization leading to a neo-orientalism, at work from the most local to the most global. In the words of Lewis Mumford, which help to encapsulate reflections on public space in the age of globalization, what our contemporaneity symbolizes is "the inflation of money, the deflation of human hopes and what one must perhaps call the 'normalization' of the irrational."

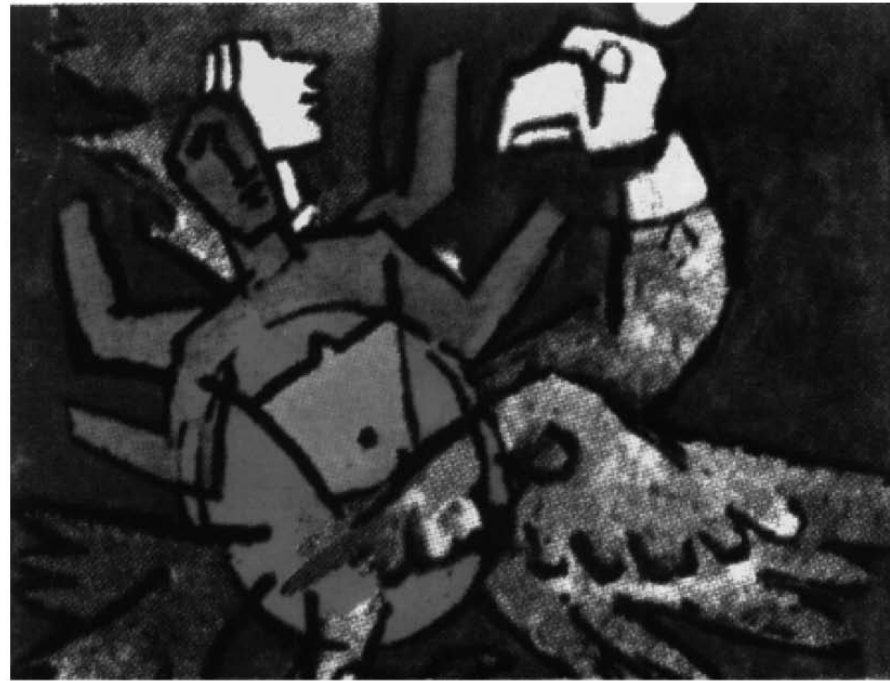


Plate 1. Abanindranath Tagore, *Bharat Mata*. 1905.

option considering that a number of NRIs visit Gujarat during the festival to get their check-ups done, which otherwise would have cost them a fortune in foreign lands. ..."(27th August, 2004).



Plate 2. The RSS *Bharat Mata*, Contemporary Print



.Plate 3. M.F. Hussain,
Vishnu, 1967



Plate 5. Durga seated on a Lion, Roda, Gujarat, 8th Century
AD.



Plate 4. M.F. Hussain, *Hanuman Rescuing Sita*,
1980s.



Plate 6: Raja Ravi Varma, *Saraswati*, 1896.

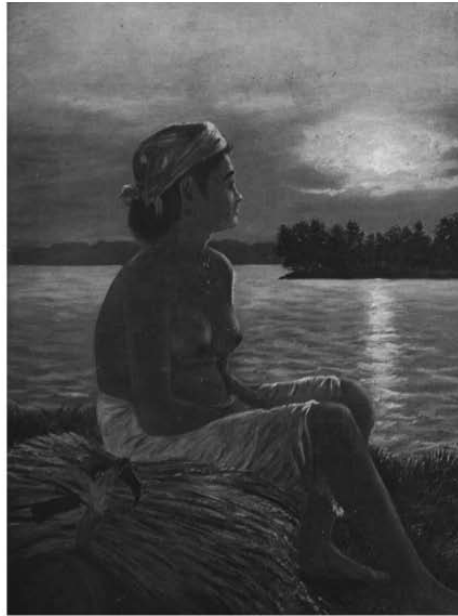


Plate 7: Raja Ravi Varma, *The Reaper*, 1900



Plate 9: M.F. Hussain, *Lakshmi*, 1970s

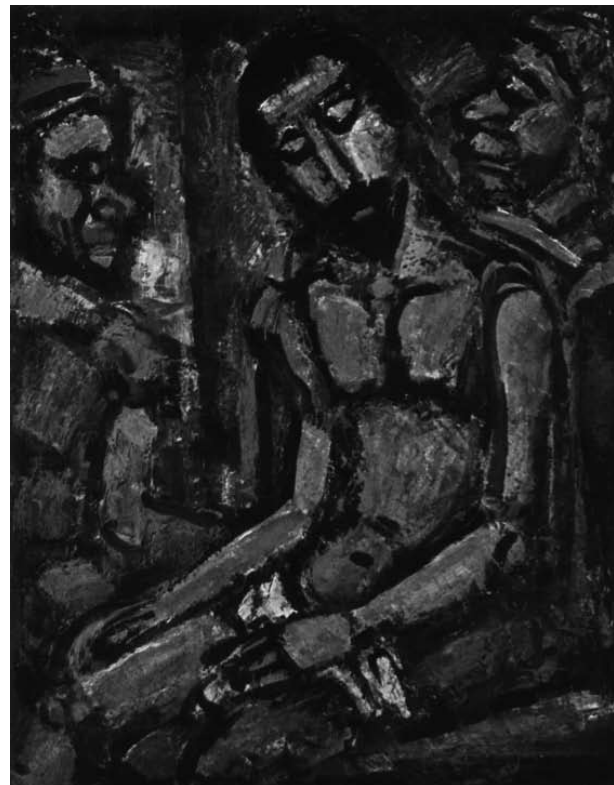


Plate 8: Georges Rouault, *Christ Mocked by Soldiers*, 1932



Plate 10: A Popular Calendar Print of Goddess Lakshmi

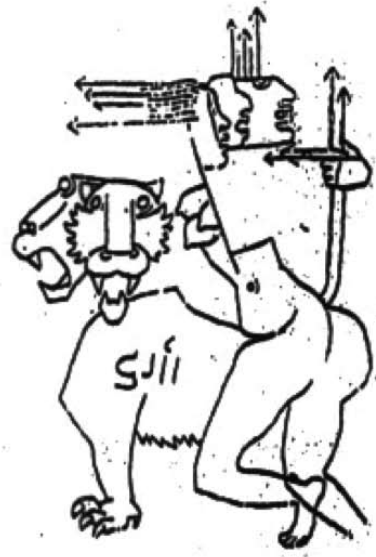


Plate 11: M.F. Hussain, *Durga*, 1970s



Plate 13 : M.F. Hussain, *Mother*, 1970s

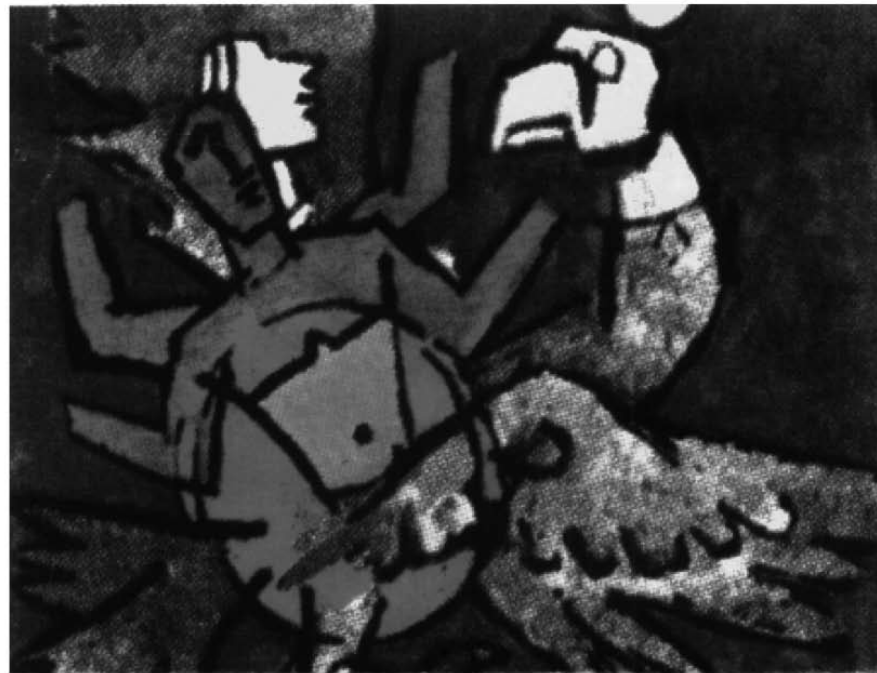


Plate 12:M.F. Hussain, *Vishnu*. 1980s

Plate 14: M F Hussain, *Saraswati*, Line Drawing, 1973



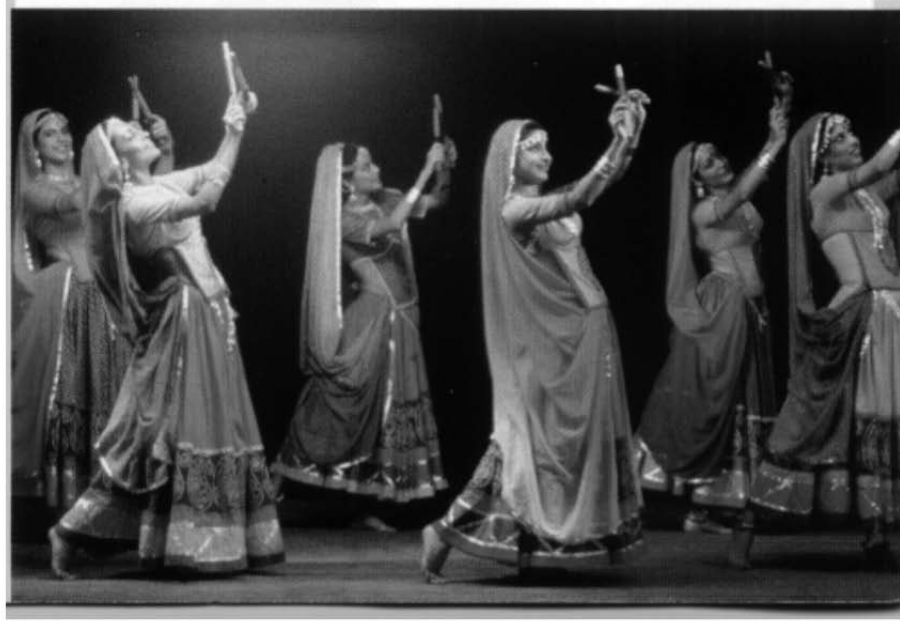


Plate 15: Gujarat Garba from *Vibrant Gujarat* Brochure, 2003



Plate 17: Gujarat Garba from *Vibrant Gujarat* Brochure, 2003



Plate 16: Gujarat Garba from *Vibrant Gujarat* Brochure, 2003



Plate 18: Juxtaposing details of Lord Krishna from the local newspaper *Sandesh* and from Gujarat Garba poster, 2003

Right now, everyone
is thinking how
they can prevent
things like Littleton

075



The bystander

the moments we do not know what to do
or we just don't do anything...



Marcus Neustetter, Johannesburg 2008

"African languages and the internet..." Staged image of Adama Samassékou (President of the African Academy of Languages) at the UNESCO between two phases of the World Summit on the Information Society (17-19 May 2005, St. Petersburg, Russia)



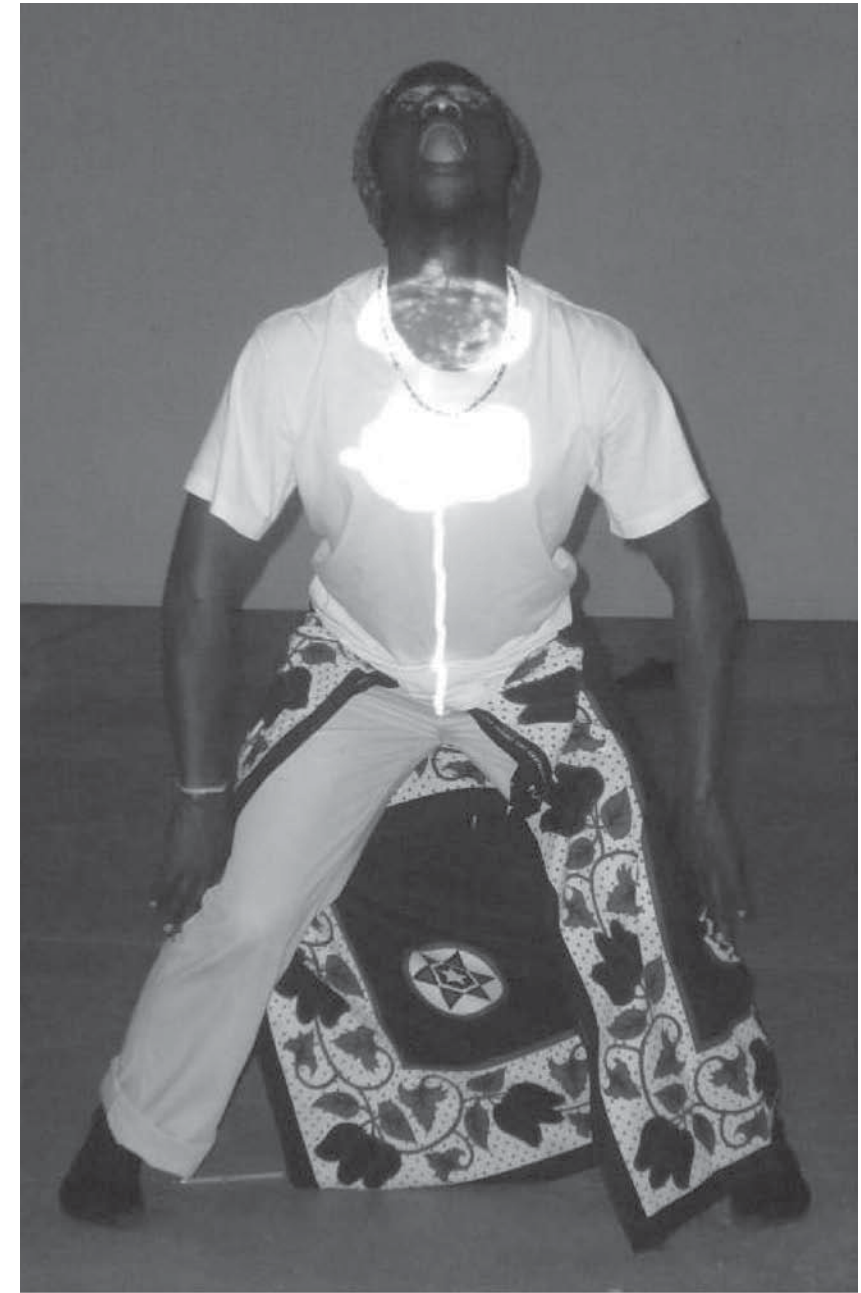
Johannesburg suburb, 4:50am 24 September 2004



Post-xenophobia attacks immigrant camps outside Johannesburg, June 2008



Graffiti wall Johannesburg, June 2008



Prophet JD performance in Johannesburg, June 2008

navigate the terrain:



6.00 fortifying your position:

No matter what you’ve done on your turn, you may, if you wish, end your turn by fortifying your position. You are not required to win a battle or even to try an attack to do so. Some players refer to this as the “free move¹.”

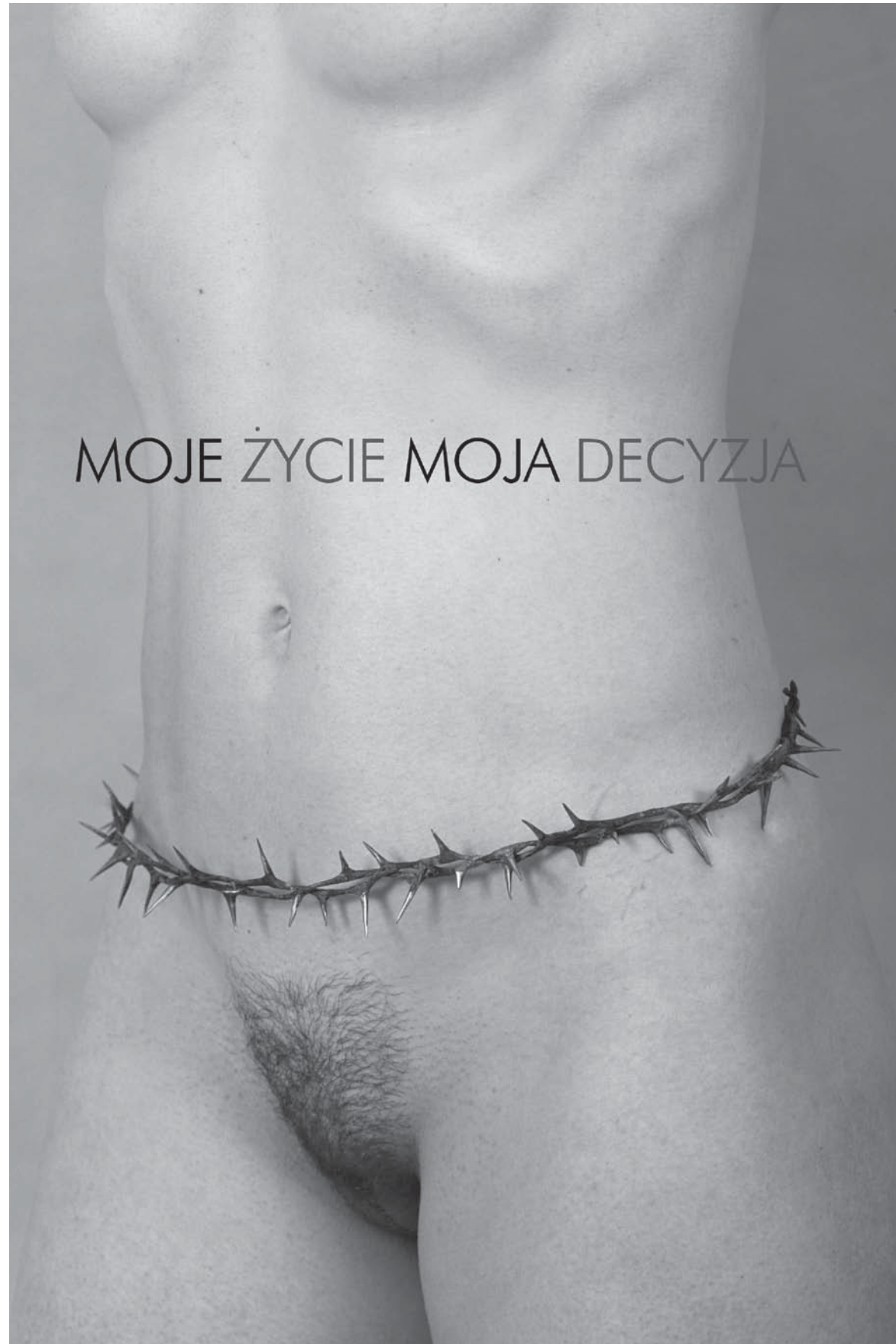
To fortify your position, move as many armies as you’d like from one (and only one) of your territories into one (and only one) of your adjacent territories. Remember to move troops towards borders where they can help in an attack! In moving your armies from one territory to a other, you must leave at least one army behind.

6.10 Eliminating an opponent:

you must immediately trade in enough sets to reduce your hand².

¹ Community is another word often best cut out. Not only is it usually unnecessary, it purports to convey a sense of togetherness that may well not exist. The black community mean blacks, the business community means business men, the intelligence community means spies, the international community, if it means anything, means other countries, aid agencies, or just occasionally the family of nations. from The Economist Style Book, 2003

² from Risk 1980, Parker Brothers



“Art and Democracy”: A Few Notes

© Ugochukwu-Smooth C. Nzewi

In January 2004, the Pan-African Circle of Artists based in Nigeria convened the third series of its *Overcoming Maps* projects, contrived as a Study Tour of six West African countries. The tour witnessed series of touring exhibitions and round table discussions that interrogated the role and meaning of art in society with specific reference to the African experience.¹ Put in different words, the series of roundtable discussions explored a clearly obvious question, which was, the relationship between art and democracy. However, the roundtables struggled with conjectures and semantics and did not arrive at a consensual interpretation of democracy in view of its multi-faceted nature, or the role of art in post-colonial, post cold-war African democracies. Democracy as a concept is ambivalent but for western knowledge operations, it is figured as a modernising convenience of the ‘civilised’, traced to the greatly mystified early Greek representative assembly. But in a more reflective sense, this rather highlights a sweeping singular interpretation of participatory representation, framed from the dogma of eighteenth/nineteenth-centuries Western episteme still in operation.

Interrogating the relationship between art and democracy invites a few pertinent insights that underscore the complex interpretations of the twin concepts of democracy and art that extends beyond the essentialising understanding of democracy as a political idea, or art as strictly aesthetics. One argues that the relationship between art and democracy can be discussed under the rubric of representation and representivity which the two concepts embody. Melzer, Weinberger and Zinman discuss the two functional representational canons of social and aesthetics which foreground conventional democracy and the reified boundaries of arts and high-culture. This, they pursue from the position of early Greek culture, as mutually determining aesthetic and social canons that gave rise to the emergence of democracy and Greek sculpture. Thus, according to them, “the representation of the citizens in a shared aesthetic ideal of equality corresponded to the representation of the citizen in the shared social ideal of equality.”²

Yet, I marvel at the intervention of popular or mass culture as a diametric opposite of high-culture. Mass culture is expediently discussed as a democratising process that challenges the reification of art which John Simon has argued as inherently elitist, exclusionary and despotic. According to him, “art is self-assertive and inimitable and thus basically anti-democratic.”³ With the benefit of hindsight and treading a much familiar path, although we are wont to argue that mass culture enjoys popular appeal, yet on the contrary, not only is it dictatorial in its nuanced ways, it becomes hardly surprising how the mass public is subjected to mass hysteria and puppetry by a tiny few wielding such enormous social control at both local and global levels.

Simon, Latour and Weibel posit the interweaving relationship between art and democracy. In trying to make sense of Weibel’s argument that art is one of the pre-conditions of a functioning democracy, the paradox of the homogenising ideology of national aesthetics promoted by early-independent African leaders as Nkrumah and Banda as a political strategy against ethnic nationalism, suggests that there is a thread connecting the two concepts. However, such leaders ultimately became afflicted with the paranoia of dictatorship even when they construed themselves as ideologues of participatory democracy.

In concluding, one argues that both democracy and art share a commonality in the fact that they are representational, ambivalent as well as autocratic. It is also safe to assume that since society and aesthetics are not stable or fixed concepts in themselves, this relationship however remains slippery, paradoxical and largely fraught with ambiguity.

Notes

¹ See *Overcoming Maps 3: Report of the PACA Study Tour of Africa* (Enugu: The Pan-African Circle of Artists and Prince Claus Fund for Culture and Development, The Netherlands, 2004), and, Chike Aniakor and C. Krydz Ikwuemesi (eds), *Crossroads: Afrika in the Twilight*, (Enugu: National Gallery of Nigeria and The Pan-African Circle of Artists, 2000).

² Peter Weibel (2005), *Art and Democracy: People Making Art Making People* (Massachusetts: Massachusetts Institute of Technology), pp. 1008.

³ John Simon (1999), “Movie: The Democratic Art?”, in Arthur Melzer, Jerry Weinberger, M. Richard Zinman (1999) (eds), *Democracy and the Arts*, pp. 28

⁴ Bruno Latour and Peter Weibel (2005), *Making Things Public: Atmospheres of Democracy*, Karlsruhe Germany and Cambridge Massachusetts: Centre for Art and Media (Massachusetts Institute of Technology, 2005)

Note on the Contributor

Ugochukwu-Smooth C. Nzewi is a Nigerian artist, culture activist and writer. He is a graduate of Fine and Applied Arts, University of Nigeria, Nsukka, Nigeria (2001), and recently concluded a postgraduate Diploma in Museum and Heritage Studies at University of Western Cape, University of Cape Town and Robben Island Museum, South Africa (2006). He has been involved in a lot of artists’ initiatives and projects in Nigeria and across Africa.

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Arte e Democrazia: una convivenza pacifica, certo, volta però ad aggirare o addirittura a evitare l'ipotesi di trovarsi in un luogo d'incontro (o di scontro).

La stature, la grandezza dell'una e dell'altra non possono cioè evitare che le due aree, al di là di una civile e rispettosa considerazione reciproca, si ritengano incompatibili e quindi inconciliabili.

La Democrazia risiede, ha messo radicinell'arena, nella piazza (del popolo).

L'Arte è accolta (e non esce) nei confini di una località segreta, chiamata a volte esilio o rifugio.

La prima gode della garanzia del numero (del grande numero), la seconda comunica in codice, i suoi sono segnali cifrati.

La Democrazia considera il mondo come un territorio governato (o governabile) da una dichiarata (o auspicata) armonia, da cui generalmente prorompe un cieco e dogmatico culto della Natura.

L'arte osserva invece il mondo a dovuta distanza e ormai da tempo ha capito che non conviene neppure pensare di correggerlo.

Giulio Paolini



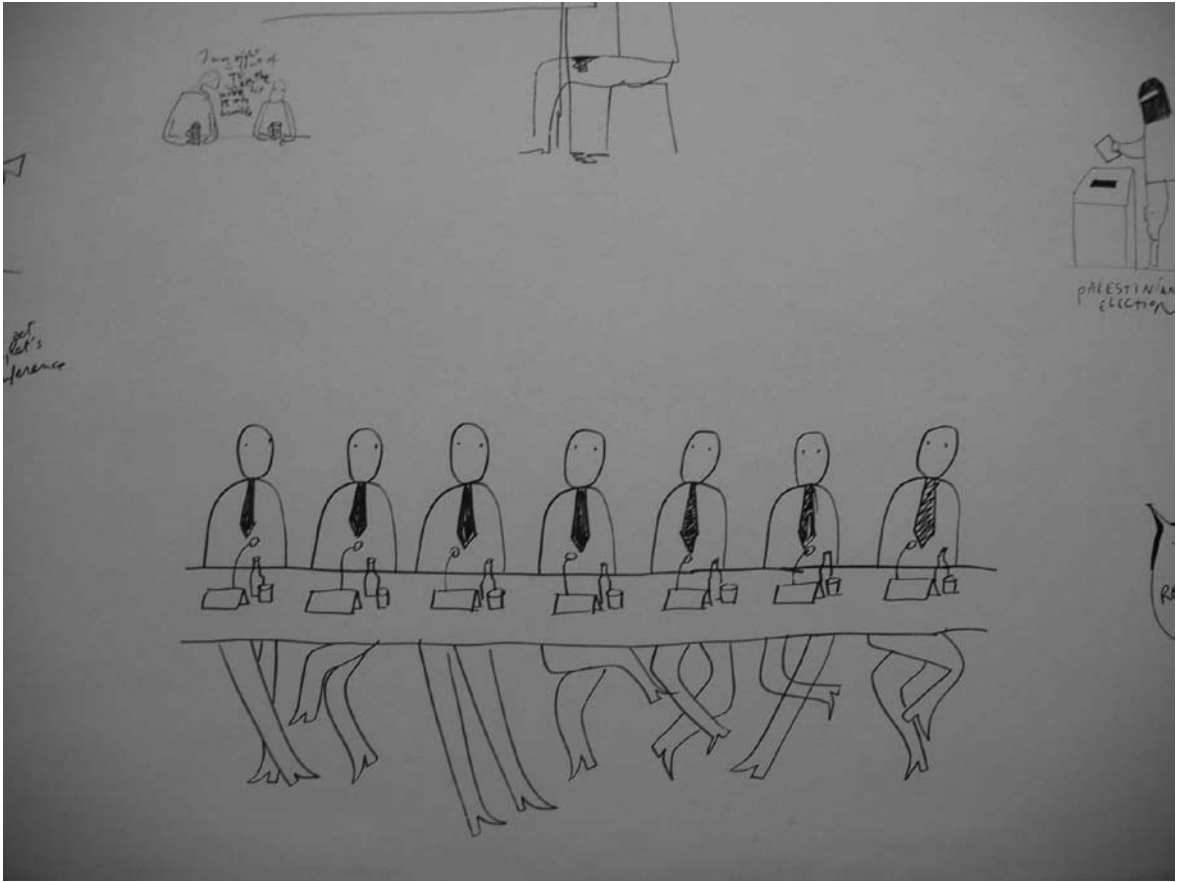
“By September, military officials held a series of brainstorming meetings at Guantánamo about how to crack through the resistance of detainees such as Qahtani. One source of ideas was the popular television show *24*. The fictional drama was written by a Hollywood conservative who had no military or intelligence expertise whatsoever. But on Guantánamo, as everywhere else in America, its macho hero, Jack Bauer, who tortured his enemies until they talked, was followed with admiration. On *24*, torture always worked. It saved America on a weekly basis.”

Jane Mayer
*The Dark Side: The Inside Story of
 How The War on Terror Turned into
 a War on American Ideals*, 2008

To make the great
 leap—to organize
 the sky itself into
 art—we must first
 justify our faith
 in infrastructure

—Hiliary Koob-Sassen

082



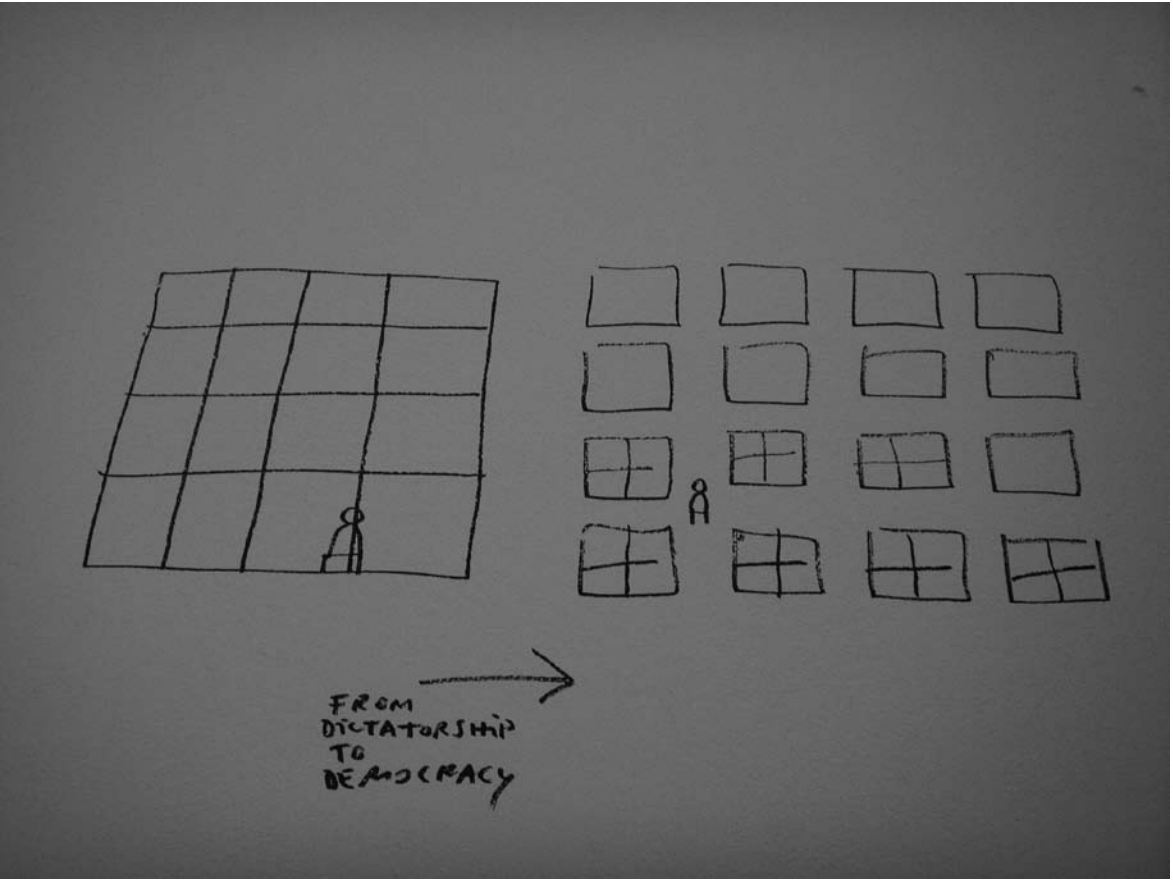
083



084



085





WE, ALL OF WHOM ARE SOVEREIGN - TOWARDS A CRITIQUE OF DEMOCRACY

Andrea Phillips & Suhail Malik

Department of Art, Goldsmiths

For Jacques Rancière art is politically interesting because 'art as we know it in the aesthetic regime is the implementation of a certain equality'¹ and equality is 'the condition required for being able to think politics',² which is to say: democracy. That is, a certain kind of art makes (for) democracy, each of these substantive terms being understood as social re-organization of equality. This determination of art in the aesthetic regime, which we more fully elaborate below, makes Rancière's thinking attractive to contemporary art, particularly art that is made to provoke or provide space and time for an often fantasized heterogeneous participant/viewer – that is, quite a lot of art over the past 40 years or so. Since art produces objects that are, apart from anything else, ontologically problematic for inclusion in traditional democratic procedures (in that they are autonomous), and since a large percentage of cultural theory has been devoted over the last 40 years to problematising this production ('art should be heterogeneous'), Rancière's aesthetic regime is expedient in its production of an adequate and appropriate description of artistic and curatorial concerns for the *paradoxically* democratic desires of contemporary art. Paradoxical because, as will be seen, the aesthetic regime specifically knits together autonomy and heterogeneity; equality and singularity, individual authorship and general 'ways of doing and making', performative distribution and dramatic event-making in a way that supposes a political situatedness for art. Importantly, such political situatedness is not based on the specific and content- or form-driven desire of the artist, curator or viewer but is rather understood to operate outside of, or apart from, subjective accounts of them. It offers an attractively 'open' yet practical and specific proposal for art as actively and insistently democratising.

This is a very precise account of the political fate of art in contemporary democracies as it is maintained by most dominant parties in its current configuration (however 'marginalized' they may otherwise claim to be). More precisely, the enjoyable paradoxical space – or contradictory assemblage – that Rancière celebrates, in which the heterogeneous sensible appears at the deliberative fold of art and non-art, or art and everyday life, serves to capture well art made today that makes claims to be political or critical in what are then necessarily non-didactic ways. It is the kind of contemporary art now being commissioned by museums and galleries that at once wish to observe arts' autonomy while simultaneously fulfilling governmental-corporate imperatives for public engagement and participation as a palliative project of inclusivity signalling social responsibility. Equally, on the other hand, 'progressive' art critics turn to Rancière's work to finesse concerns regarding art that proposes some sort of more radical, disruptive political agenda. Reading Rancière as a blueprint for artistic activism the theorist Brian Holmes says that art produced in the aesthetic regime 'create[s] a short-circuit between the anonymous, abstract equality of immaterial labor and the

¹ Jacques Rancière, *The Politics of Aesthetics* (London: Verso, 2004), p.52.

² Ibid.

subjective exceptionalism of art'.³ The art-historian Claire Bishop, in an article on the misconceptions of much 'engaged' or 'participatory' art, suggests that for Rancière 'the aesthetic doesn't need to be sacrificed at the altar of social change, as it already inherently contains this ameliorative promise'.⁴ In contrast to these several, divergent emphases on the social-public engagement with art as its democratic moment, sometimes made by Rancière himself (no accident that it is the article that most emphatically makes this claim that appears in the March 2007 issue of *Artforum* dedicated to him), we propose that Rancière's account of art's politicality usefully relocates the discussion of the political currency of contemporary art, shifting the focus away from the content and individualized benevolent effect of the work towards an understanding of the position of artistic production in terms of the circulation and distribution of images and objects as part of a broader contemporary aesthetico-political regime. So, whilst Rancière's recent texts on aesthetics have been widely utilised to defend what might be described as the localised practices of artists who work with communities to, temporarily and in our view misconstruedly, 'redistribute' authorship and power away from themselves and towards their audience (work often termed 'socially engaged' or 'participatory' art), the interest here is rather in how his ideas of art in the aesthetic regime might contribute to a critique which situates contemporary art not as a panacea for, but instead as protagonist in democratic distribution strategies. That is, our concern in this paper is the relation between political democracy (by which we mean democracy structured through and accountable to processes of power arrangement decided by a *demos*), Rancière's determination of art in the aesthetic regime, and their common limit in equality. We examine this formation initially with regard to Thomas Hirschhorn's art as an example of a production that makes tendentially political claims for itself and for art on the basis of the destruction of hierarchical regimes that represent a 'police order'. The logic of such a destruction is compared to Giorgio Agamben's influential characterization of the exception as the condition of contemporary democracies. Formal similarities between these logics of destruction are tracked out and circumscribed in order to find what particular determination by they have with regard to political democracy rather than the juridical or language-based determinations that Agamben favours. Assuming art's advocacy of democracy takes place on this basis (understood at a structural rather than content-based or authorial level), we show that art in the aesthetic regime paradoxically re-institutes a sovereign condition for its own democratic politicality *and* that the condition of the exception is not the demise of political life, as Agamben proposes, but rather the condition by which art maintains (its) politicality qua manifestation of a 'hot' democracy of equalization-dissensus. This formulation captures the simultaneous (wish for the) prominence of art as political protagonist in contemporary democracies (and non-democracies for that matter) as well as art's marginal because aesthetically restricted role in concrete political circumstances, both of which attest to a politicized sovereignty as condition for whatever democratic traction art may have but which also, importantly, means that it is necessarily non-democratic.

³ Brain Holmes, in *Cabinet* No.4, Fall 2001.

⁴ Claire Bishop, 'The Social Turn: Collaboration and its Discontents' in *Artforum* Feb 2006

Before turning to Hirschhorn, Rancière's characterization of the aesthetic regime of art needs to be further delineated. The 'implementation' of equality of the aesthetic regime occurs as the disruption of the received 'distribution of the sensible' that challenges extant ordered or hierarchical regimes. The given distribution of the sensible is what Rancière calls the police order: it is the historical system of *a priori* divisions and boundaries that makes up what is visible, audible, sayable etc., constituting therein a political regime. The distribution of the sensible has at its core a contradiction in that it 'establishes at one and the same time something common that is shared *and* exclusive parts'.⁵ This primary contradiction in the aesthetic and therefore in politics enables it to be the basis not just for the police order but also for the emancipation of the *demos* or the supernumerary (people extra to the count in the distribution of the sensible). The disruption of the police order, as a disruption of ways of saying, seeing, hearing, etc, is an implementation of equality with regard to the aesthetic, an equalization that is characteristic of art in the aesthetic regime. Equality is not however a 'founding ontological principal' but instead 'a condition that only functions when put into action'.⁶ And when it is 'put into action' equality effects a democracy through the redistribution of 'what is seen, what is said about it, and who has the ability to see and speak'.⁷ Such a redistribution of *politics* makes manifest a *demos* which is otherwise insensibly external to the police order. Aesthetic regime art is distinguished in this general aesthetic condition solely by what Rancière calls the 'sensible mode of being specific to artistic products'⁸ rather than art's mimetic (non-)relation to everyday life or its use-value for the propagation of community values for identification (defined by Rancière as, respectively, the representational and ethical relation of other regimes of art). Two 'police orders' can be analytically distinguished (though they are integrated in fact), that of art's formalism and that of social politics. Aesthetic regime art can activate equality through the destruction of previous regimes of art based on hierarchies of form and content and through its participation in the distribution of the sensible. In doing so, aesthetic regime art is 'extricated from its ordinary connections and is inhabited by a heterogeneous power, the power of a form of thought that has become foreign to itself: a product identical with something not produced, knowledge transformed into non-knowledge'.⁹ As the enactment of this contradictory limit, aesthetic regime art enacts a kind of equality, which is the presupposition and requirement of politics qua democracy. Aesthetic regime art is thus political, but in a complex way. In its singularity and specificity it is not the known, designated politics of the police order, and this characteristic is the foundation for its potential political enactment in redistributing the sensible through the force of an equality only achievable through its autonomous/heterogeneous capacity.

⁵ Rancière, *ibid.* p.12.

⁶ *Ibid.* p.52.

⁷ *Ibid.* p.13

⁸ *Ibid.* p.22.

⁹ *Ibid.* p.23.

Rancière asserts the duality - or 'galvanizing tension' and 'positive contradiction'¹⁰ - of aesthetic regime art with regard to the political in terms of art's singularity, a heterogeneity constituted on the basis of art's 'specificity':

The aesthetic regime of the arts is the regime that strictly identifies art in the singular and frees it from any specific rule, from any hierarchy of the arts, subject matter, and genres. Yet it does so by destroying the mimetic barrier that distinguished ways of doing and making affiliated with art from other ways of doing and making, a barrier that separated its rules from the order of social occupations. The aesthetic regime asserts the absolute singularity of art and, at the same time, destroys any pragmatic criterion for isolating this singularity.¹¹

The contemporary Swiss artist Thomas Hirschhorn has produced many projects that would seem to directly implicate the double mode of identification that Rancière insists upon as specific to the enactment of equality of aesthetic regime art. In particular the artist's 'monuments', each dedicated to a philosopher, each located in traditionally disenfranchised districts of the cities whose festivals commission them, and each enlisting local people to work on their construction and maintenance, are widely regarded as sites of potent contradiction in debates about contemporary 'political' art. Hirschhorn produces installations and sculptures that range in scale and site yet are recognisable by his use of signature 'everyday' materials such as plastic sheeting, tin foil, newspaper, parcel tape and cheap wood, and by their sheer overload of information – visual, textural, architectural. Whilst he has produced many commissions for galleries and museums, most of which command the space of a room or are built as rooms in themselves (and it should be noted that most prestigious private and public collections own, or are currently trying to buy, Hirschhorn installations), the artist is most well known for a series of publicly-sited 'kiosks', 'alters' and 'monuments' that he has made from the late 1990s to now, each dedicated to a philosopher or writer. The *Monuments*, for example, are dedicated to Spinoza (Amsterdam, 1999), Deleuze (Avignon, 2000), Bataille (Kassel, 2002) and Gramsci (in planning stages at the time of this writing though an altar dedicated to Gramsci altar appeared as part of Hirschhorn's installation for the 1999 Venice Biennale). The *Bataille Monument* is instructive here. It was commissioned for Okwui Enwesor's 'global politics' Documenta11 and sited in a Turkish area of Kassel a taxi-ride away from the main sites of the exhibition. The 'installation' comprised a set of chipboard units containing a café, bar, library, local TV station and social space. Central to the installation was a sculpture, covered in parcel tape, of a set of huge tree trunks. For the duration of the show (June-September) these rooms and facilities were manned by local Turkish people whose children played around the place as if it were a climbing frame, as if, in the parlance of soft psychoanalysis, they 'owned' the place (which they did, but not fiscally). The library was filled with primary and secondary material on Bataille. A local taxi service, whose cars Hirschhorn decorated, overcharged Documenta tourists for the journey to and fro. Hirschhorn initially dismisses the idea that his work needs to be activated through some sense of community participation – short-circuiting this

kind of 'social contract' with a clear fiscal one by paying those he worked with in order to suggest another one generated by the 'visitors and inhabitants' themselves:

the only social relationship I wanted to take responsibility for was the relationship between me, as an artist, and the inhabitants. The artwork didn't create any social relationship in itself; the artwork was just the artwork – autonomous and open to developing activities. An active artwork requires that first the artist gives of himself. The visitors and inhabitants can decide whether or not to create a social relationship beyond the artwork. This is the important point. But it's the same in the museum. The idea of success or failure is also present in the museum: a lot of visitors pass in front of the artwork, but what is the visitor's implication? Yet people want me to subscribe to this shabby 'contract' with my projects in public space. The *Deleuze Monument* and the *Bataille Monument* were much more than that: they were experiences.¹²

Whilst Hirschhorn acknowledges that 'such projects have an aesthetic that goes beyond art towards service' and thus might 'lose its strength as an object', he also claims that the autonomy of the object is never sacrificed in favour of activism but instead that it 'develops other strengths through the fact that it can be "used"... The will to confrontation and the assertion of its autonomy works!'¹³

Hal Foster has pointed out that Hirschhorn's use of monument-building shifts his works as political devices from objects that are 'univocal' and designed to 'obscure antagonisms' towards 'counter-hegemonic archives that might be used to articulate such differences'.¹⁴ Hirschhorn is at best ambivalent about the articulation of his works in such an art-historical and -theoretical terms, a mode of discourse that has become dominant around public art and site-specificity over the past few decades (a mode geared towards proving art's ability to produce a critique of liberal democracy at the level of site and public sphere, yet which often serves to return to it). Instead he says, in interview with Hans Ulrich Obrist, that he wants to 'distribute ideas', 'liberate activity' and 'radiate energy'.¹⁵ That is, Hirschhorn does not say that he wants to improve the lives of people in Kassel, or build a local facility to enable the people of a disenfranchised area of Kassel to be heard. He instead articulates the concept of an active, autonomous work, an account that matches Rancière's description of the way in which equality, and therefore politics, is produced in the aesthetic regime:

I'm not an animator and I'm not a social worker. Rather than triggering the participation of the audience, I want to implicate them. I want to force the audience to be confronted with my work. This is the exchange I propose. The artworks don't need participation; it's not an interactive work. It doesn't need to be completed by the audience; it needs to be an active, autonomous work with the possibility of implication.¹⁶

¹² In interview with Alison Gingeras, *Thomas Hirschhorn* (London: Phaidon, 2004), p.29.

¹³ Ibid, p. 31.

¹⁴ Hal Foster, 'An Archival Impulse' in *October* 110, p.9.

¹⁵ Quoted in Foster, ibid.

¹⁶ Hirschhorn, ibid. p.25.

¹⁰ Ibid. p.59.

¹¹ Ibid. p.23.

The drive of Hirschhorn's work can be characterised to be one of equality, and on several registers simultaneously: in his declared indifference to the site of his pieces be they museum spaces or poorer urban locales; in situating memorials to complex theoretical-philosophical 'stars' starkly outside of their regular academic milieus in sub-proletariat zones; in the conflagration of complex and highly-valued thinking and artworks with the mundane hardware-store materials and construction of his fabrications (packing tape *and* Deleuze, breezeblocks *and* Bataille, foamfiller *and* Gramsci, the Pompidou's collection *and* plastic sheeting), and so on. Some of these 'equalities' are clearly codifiable in terms of regular socio-political arrangements (to do with distinction, wealth, poverty, immigration, proletarianisation, etc), others are not and do not reveal any 'counter-hegemonic antagonisms'. It is the equality of each of the elements of Hirschhorn's pieces that extends the high/low juxtaposition deployed in his work beyond the effects of devaluation and irony in other the so-called postmodern practices and which, for him, characterize it as *political*. Asked why he used certain materials, for example, Hirschhorn answers:

because they are economical. Economical is not cheap; economical is political. I work with these materials because everyone knows and uses them. These materials are disposable. They exist, although not for the purpose of making art. Economy interests me. Economy has nothing to do with rich or poor....¹⁷

Furthermore, as already evidenced here with regard to 'economy', Hirschhorn's declaration of his and art's autonomy as the condition of his practice distances it very specifically and forcefully from any pre-established political programme to which he or it might otherwise be held accountable, such as that of socially-engaged art:

From the moment I decided to be an artist ... I wanted to be responsible for every side of my work. That's what I call 'working politically' as opposed to 'making political work'. I wanted to work in the height of capital and the height of the economic system I'm in. I wanted to confront the height of the art market with my work. I work *with* it but not *for* it.¹⁸

Hirschhorn's art avows a heterogeneity to regular or established formations as the condition for its artistic operations and whatever other consequences – including political ones – that may follow from it.

If Hirschhorn's art and his declarations for its autonomy seems to belong to the aesthetic regime of art as Rancière describes it, we need to be more specific yet as to its politicality and that of the aesthetic regime in general. Hirschhorn's work certainly seems to ascribe in every respect to the 'destruction of the hierarchical system of the fine arts' and to 'a sensible mode of being specific to artistic products'¹⁹ that Rancière proposes as defining the politicality of the aesthetic regime of the arts. But for this very reason, and as we have seen Hirschhorn also spell out, we *cannot* identify it *directly* with a notion of

political democracy as social equality (or to the counter-hegemonic antagonism that, following Mouffe, is the trait of a 'good' democracy) since 'this does not mean, however, that equality in general, political equality, and aesthetic equality are all equivalent'.²⁰ (Locally, Rancière speaks of how the democracy of the written word in modern literature is 'not yet democracy as a political form'.) What then is this distinction – the non-identity or non-equivalence - between equality in the aesthetic regime and political equality that an artist such as Hirschhorn relies upon to at once disavow an obvious well-meaning political programming of his work and yet declare its politicality? The question is that of the political specificity of art in the aesthetic regime – a question of democracy – and is, to that extent, central to Rancière's more recent work insofar as 'equality is the presupposition of politics' and such equality is tracked through the aesthetic regime.

We have seen that for Rancière aesthetic regime art is political in that it is 'a recomposition of the relationship between doing, making, being, seeing and saying',²¹ thus challenging the received distribution of the sensible: this is art's specificity in the aesthetic regime with regard both to other regimes of art and to the general domain of the sensible. The exhibition of the sensible is there 'extricated from its ordinary connections and is inhabited by a heterogeneous power, the power of a form of thought that has become foreign to itself: a product identical with something not produced'.²² While the 'recomposition' of the ordering of different modalities of the sensible is nothing other than the specificity of the aesthetic regime as the *condition* for the 'extrication from ordinary connections' in which the object or idea of the artwork would ordinarily reside (Deleuze in the academy or at a philosophy conference or in the regular artworld, say), the declaration of its 'heterogeneous power' restates in another way the paradox with which we began. Namely: that aesthetic regime art is *directly* political in that it recomposits the police(d) order *qua* the established distribution of the sensible of 'doing, making, being, seeing and saying', doing so in 'the specific type of economic circuits they lie within' and not as "'exceptions" to other practices', thus directly 'represent[ing] and reconfigur[ing] the distribution of these activities', and yet it is *not* directly political in that such art maintains the specificity of the aesthetic regime since it '*strictly* refers to the *specific* mode of whatever falls within the domain of art, to the mode of being of the objects of art. In the aesthetic regime, artistic phenomena are identified by their adherence to a *specific regime* of the sensible' (emphases added).²³ The singular heterogeneity of the aesthetic regime is constituted on this latter basis which is only in indirect relation to the police order. The aesthetic regime itself at once asserts the singularity of art qua its 'heterogeneous power' *and* 'destroys any pragmatic criterion' for isolating it. To speak of art in the aesthetic regime is then to speak at once of the aesthetic regime itself, and the contrary. (Our presentation of Hirschhorn's work is then as both a specific and, in our view, structurally exemplary production of aesthetic regime art and as an instance or a case of it.)

²⁰ Ibid. pp.52-53.

²¹ Ibid. p.45.

²² Ibid. p.23.

²³ Ibid. pp.22-23.

¹⁷ Hirschhorn cited in Douglas Fogle, 'No Heroics Please' (1998; www.thegalleriesatmoore.org/publications/hirsch/fogle.shtml).

¹⁸ Hirschhorn in 'Interview with Gingeras', op.cit., p.21.

¹⁹ Rancière, ibid. p.22.

This paradox or productive contradiction on the politicality of aesthetic regime art and of the aesthetic regime itself could be run towards aporetic formulations ('on the one hand, on the other hand...') but that would quickly lead, as we know, to a certain subjective decisionism and to the determinations of political finitude. That is of limited relevance here since our concern is not the politicality of the subject, be it the artist or the audience-participant, but that of the aesthetic regime which 'strictly identifies art in the singular and frees it from any specific rule, from any hierarchy of the arts, subject matter, and genres'. The contradiction at work in – as - the aesthetic regime is instead characterized by Rancière in relation to literature as a 'positive contradiction':

literature has been constructed as a tension between two opposing rationalities: a logic of disincorporation and dissolution whose result is that words [for instance] no longer have any guarantee,

- the 'extraction' from ordinary circuits of sense that is characteristic of the aesthetic regime in general –

and a hermeneutic logic that aims at establishing a new body for writing. This tension is, for me, a galvanizing tension, a principle of work and not by any means a principle of *desoeuvrement*.²⁴

Rancière's insistence on the tension between the aesthetic regime's disincorporation and the restabilisation of meaning demarcates his thinking from that which one-sidedly affirms exteriority of literature or art to the stabilisation of meaning (Bataille and what Derrida affirms in Bataille, Blanchot, Nancy, *écriture féminine*, etc). With Rancière there is a politics of aesthetics because its recompositing of the police order involves, as Hirschhorn also says in other terms, *both* the aneconomy of the aesthetic regime *and* the economic circulation of aesthetic regime art. The dual characterisation of the aesthetic regime's politicality is summarised by the condensed statement, already cited: 'The aesthetic regime asserts the absolute singularity of art and, at the same time, destroys any pragmatic criterion for isolating this singularity'. (Art in) The aesthetic regime is not political in general *and* this is how and why it is political. Rancière calls this a productive tension; we can say that it is the *specific* politicality of the aesthetic regime.

Our question is: what is this specificity?

The issue is that of the political specificity of art in the aesthetic regime. This is not only a critical concern for Rancière's more recent work in that, for him, 'equality is the presupposition of politics' and this is at once a matter of aesthetics. It is also key to current formations of how art can claim a political relevance or action that is not simply anecdotal, cynical, naïvely demonstrative – each of which returns it and the aesthetic order to the police order. That is, our concern is what politics an artist such as Hirschhorn can in fact instantiate through the trenchancy of his claims and the bluster of those made for him. We take up the question through Giorgio Agamben's theorisation of the state of exception in *Homo Sacer* rather than his writings on art in *The Man Without Content*. The latter are of

no interest here because they are directed, first, to the Kantian sense of aesthetic judgement, presented by Agamben as being an evacuation, or a 'shadow', of the artwork as such and, second, Agamben's primary concern there is to return art to its basis in 'human activity' and even, in a proto-Heideggerian move, to its 'poetic essence' (be it demonstrated through the making explicit of its *dúnamis* rather than its materialisation through work, *energeia*, as it is for Heidegger). Neither of these determinations of aesthetics or any politics that could possibly emerge from them accord with Rancière's characterisation of the aesthetic regime premised as it is, respectively, on what that *regime* determines for art and not on the judgement upon it and, furthermore, Rancière's declared interest is the work done by art in the aesthetic regime not the *desoeuvrement* typically emphasized in the post-structuralist advocacy of art that Agamben is also prone to celebrate. What is important to Rancière is the regime itself and what the art is (actualities, possibilities) rather than the modalities in which they are made (fabrication, becoming). 'Distinguishing a sensible mode of being specific to artistic products' is to do with the demands of the aesthetic regime (distribution) not the sensibility of the critic or spectator (judgement). For this, it is Agamben's juridico-philosophical account of the exception and law that are pertinent because, as we will now see, there is a formal identity between its logic and that of the specific politicality of the aesthetic regime. Establishing this theoretical identification will bring us to our concluding propositions which summarily outline the trouble thereby generated for each of the philosophically organized determinations of politics (Rancière) or its evacuation (Agamben) under review here.

Agamben's characterisation of the state of exception is, in brief, a logic of included exclusion:

The exception is a kind of exclusion. What is excluded from the general rule is an individual case. But the most proper characteristic of the exception is that what is excluded in it is not, on account of being excluded, absolutely without relation to the rule. On the contrary, what is excluded in the exception maintains itself in relation to the rule in the form of the rule's suspension. The rule applies to the exception in no longer applying, in withdrawing from it.²⁵

Drawing up a distinction between 'the rule' – the particular order or orders – and 'rule' – the power and authority of any particular which enforces the rule – we can say that the state of exception stands outside of the rule and, as exception, serves to call up rule. It proposes the demonstration of the force of the rule:

The exception does not subtract itself from the rule; rather, the rule, suspending itself, gives rise to the exception and, maintaining itself in relation to the exception, first constitutes itself as a rule. The particular 'force' of law consists in this capacity of law to maintain itself in relation to an exteriority.²⁶

In the juridical register, where rule is law, this relation to an exteriority, by which a body or code of law can act on an actuality that lies outside of it, is the force of law. But the exception also arises from law

²⁵ Giorgio Agamben, *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1998), pp.17-18.

²⁶ Ibid. p.18.

²⁴ Ibid. p.59.

suspending its relation to the individual case and making an exception of it. This authority and force of the suspension of law is, of course, sovereignty. Quoting Carl Schmitt directly, Agamben writes:

If the sovereign is truly the one to whom the juridical order grants the power of proclaiming a state of exception and, therefore, of suspending the order's own validity, then 'the sovereign stands outside the juridical order and, nevertheless, belongs to it, since it is up to him to decide if the constitution is to be suspended *in toto*'.²⁷

That is, sovereignty and the force of law are as one: the sovereign is no less in the state of exception that she or he has the authority and disposal of force to decide – that authority and force coming from the law enacted through the sovereign's own exceptionality in (non)relation to the law. (In this way, the sovereign as 'decider' of the state of exception only ever recognises a state that mirrors her or himself.)

Returning to Rancière's dual characterisation of the politicality of art in the aesthetic regime, we recall that it arises from the productive tension of at once sharing 'the mode of being of the objects of art', such that they are 'extracted' from the police order to which they are otherwise obliged to adhere (packing tape is for packing, etc), thereby challenging or recomposing the known distribution of the sensible, *and* also in 'destroying the mimetic barrier' such that art is involved in the general process of equalization that is politics in general for Rancière determined as democracy. It is in the artworks' suspension from 'ordinary' relations *and*, with that, the destruction of the (police) barrier that keeps art *qua* mimesis of the world distinct from the other activities – 'saying, seeing, doing, hearing' etc - of the world, this double operation that we can formally identify with the logic of exceptionality outlined here from Agamben.

But we must tread carefully in making such an identification, not least in view of Rancière's (correctly) severe repudiation of Agamben's formulation of biopolitics *qua* condition of generalized exceptionality with regard to the sufficiency of rights as condition of equality.²⁸ The aesthetic regime is a principle or rule for art (which is why the term 'regime' is right): it is a rule that observes the destruction of other more police-friendly compositions and linkages. To that extent it is, in Agamben's terms, an order of exceptionality – this is the 'heterogeneous power, the power of a form of thought that has become foreign to itself' of the object in the aesthetic regime, a determination reinforced by Rancière's characterisation of the aesthetic regime as one that 'strictly identifies art in the singular and frees it from any specific rule, from any hierarchy of the arts, subject matter, and genres'. That is, the aesthetic regime is a rule but it is a rule for exceptions to, or a suspension of, the 'ordinary rules' of composition and linkage – including, we have seen, those of democracy as a process of socio-political equalization. We draw attention to this last 'suspension' because the key issue here – the politicality of art – is the relation or non-relation between the specificity of the aesthetic regime and the generality of democracy: in an autonomy redux, the rule of the aesthetic regime falls outside of the

²⁷ Ibid. p.15.

²⁸ Jacques Rancière, 'Who is the Subject of the Rights of Man?', *The South Atlantic Quarterly*, 103:2/3, Spring/Summer 2004.

regular operations of democracy as the social politics of equalization. In doing so it however calls up the general operation of equality. That is, in being exceptional to politics in general, (art in) the aesthetic regime observes the principle of equality, which is for Rancière the rule of politics *qua* democracy. We can confirm this in acknowledging that the appeal or force of art in the aesthetic regime is that of democracy, of equality.

In its formal logic, this 'being-outside-of' and 'calling up' is the logic of exceptionality Agamben vexes over primarily with regard to law or language in his version of their biopolitical formation. It is here however determined with regard to (art in) the aesthetic regime and democracy so we cannot yet speak of sovereignty except by analogy. The pertinence of the logic of exceptionality is however confirmed by: first, the now prevalent appeal to, or force of, equality and democracy in aesthetic regime art; and, second, that for all these avowals this logic requires us to accept that art in the aesthetic regime is a suspension of directly political democracy, for example, public, social, work-organised, activist, collective democratic politics which marks the clear and evident futility of art as a political operation in these terms. This is no less the distinction Hirschhorn draws up between being an artist and a social worker, between art as recomposing the distribution of the sensible and art as a political therapeutic. This suspension of politics from aesthetic regime art is not however its outright extirpation. Rather, it only serves to call up and draw upon the general operation of equality that is for Rancière not just democracy but politics as such beyond its well regulated and policed figurations (including notions of collectivity, activism, social organisation and so on). (Art in) The aesthetic regime thereby serves politics in general; it is, if you want, exceptionally political in that what it each time proposes and advocates is the presupposition of politics: equality shared *and* distributed. What is evoked by (art in) the aesthetic regime, perhaps primarily and certainly in manner free from the interests that shape the social-political space, is the force of equality that underwrites – that actualises – political democracy. We have seen furthermore that in the aesthetic regime this force *rules*. It follows that the politicality of the aesthetic regime is a sovereign operation – not by analogy but in fact: the principle of equality is realised through the force of the aesthetic regime. Equality is sovereign in the aesthetic regime. The suspension of politics in/by the aesthetic regime draws out the force of equality that is political democracy *qua* general equalization, of which aesthetic regime art is then an exceptional case. Put the other way, this identification of democracy and sovereignty is not only formal-theoretical but actualised and put into practice through art in the aesthetic regime.

It is in this sense that we understand the 'heterogeneous power' of the artwork, 'the power of a form of thought that has become foreign to itself: a product identical with something not produced'. This autonomy of aesthetic regime art attests and promulgates what constitutes for Rancière the true movement of democracy – that is, as a general force of equalisation. As such, the sovereignty of the aesthetic regime cannot be separated from the general determination of politics – not least if the aesthetic regime and indeed politics altogether 'recomposit' the prevailing police order. It is in the demand for the generalisation of the force of equality – democracy and, to give its sovereign force its conventional name, its justice – that Rancière's determination of politics as immediately and at root an aesthetic operation is to be understood, 'aesthetic' now indexing not only the base universality of sense-experience but also the sovereignty of equality (which itself underwrites that universality and

enables it to become a lived political actuality). Likewise, Hirschhorn insists on this terminal identification when he proposes that the artwork in its autonomous indifference to the creation of social relationship requires the artist to 'give of [her or] himself' and only 'implicates' its visitors and inhabitants in a confrontational 'exchange' instead of participation in it. 'Implication' means that the visiting art audience, the inhabitants of the area where the artwork is set up, and the artist all decide for themselves whether a social relationship can arise from it on the basis of their (individuated) experiences which do not suppose any commonality but that of their respective, equal sovereignties (for which autonomy is the warranted polite term in current art discourse). Politics understood as the general movement of equalization *qua* aesthetics thus bears a force at its core, a force that is the sovereignty of equality. We democrats, all of whom are equal, we are sovereign.

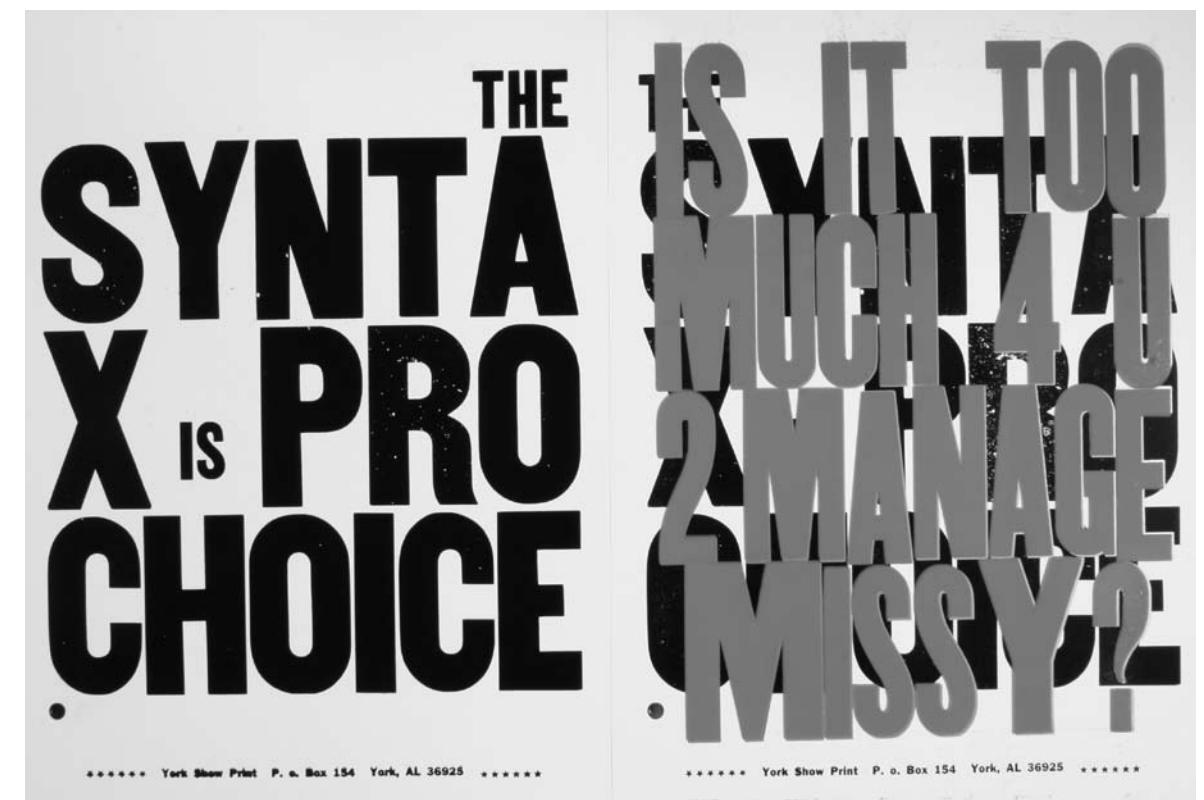
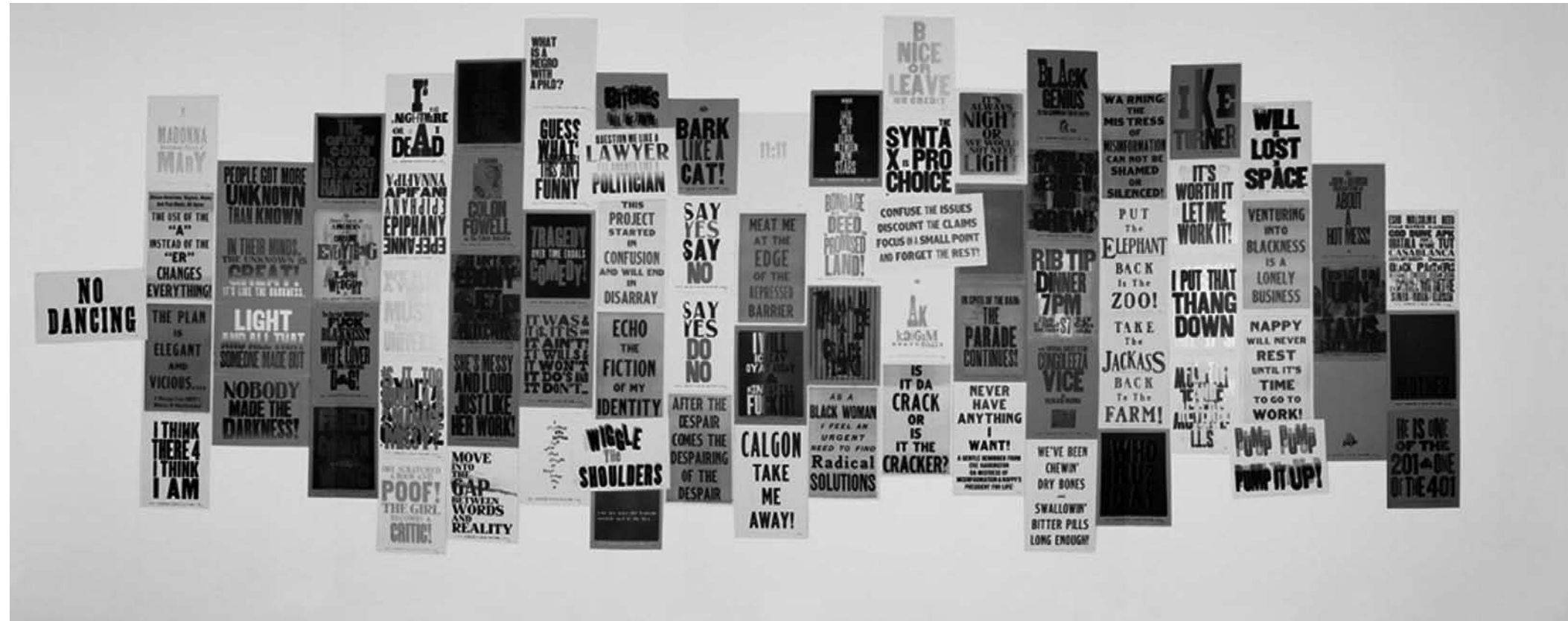
Insofar as it is a sovereign operation, however, such a democratics is not itself democratic or subject to democracy. The force of aesthetic equality is not itself equal to that which it corrodes or recomposites but is avowed as the primary interest or characteristic of art in the aesthetic regime (by Rancière not least). Equality cannot be 'implemented' or instigated if it is equal to the extant and dominant police orders that are undone and redistributed by aesthetic democracy and its art. If there is to be democracy, if democracy can continue to be actualised, it is sovereign. Democracy – political or aesthetic - *qua* equality is not then democratic.²⁹ This is the condition for politics as the general democracy of aesthetics as Rancière envisages it. Equally, if sovereignty is the condition of equality, this disoblges us from following Agamben's characterisation of the political condition of the planet as being organised through the universality of sovereignty under the name of liberal democracy such that, in the extension of its nomos over the earth, the entire population of the planet becomes encased under law or rule as the exception of 'bare life', and the death-camp becomes the paradigm for existence in general today. No, it is here the 'rule' and force of equality that is advocated under the name of democracy instead of the rule of law or its suspension through the exception to the law that Agamben proposes. Art in the aesthetic regime proposes not the 'bare life' of liberal democracy but new 'forms of life' predicated on art's past and its promises;³⁰ a contemporary political democracy that affirms the *bios*.

If it is equality that is the presupposition of politics, rather than the enforcement of rule or law; if, that is, the exceptionality to the rule (and the rule for it) are aesthetico-politically rather than juridical-philosophically constituted (the latter is the limit-condition of Agamben's theorisation and all that follows from it), then the sovereign operation of the generalised state of exception is a promulgation of democratic equality through what Rancière has called dissensus. That is, the sovereignty of equality constitutes a 'hot' democracy rather the fatal world of the generalised death camp Agamben sees in it exclusively. Aesthetico-political democracy signals that our democracy can be fully-fledged - dissensual, hot, destabilising of extant hierarchies, for and by a yet-to-be-recognised *demos* rather

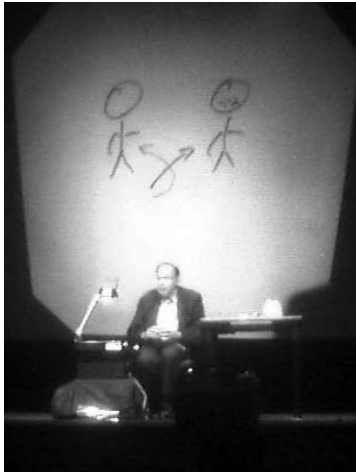
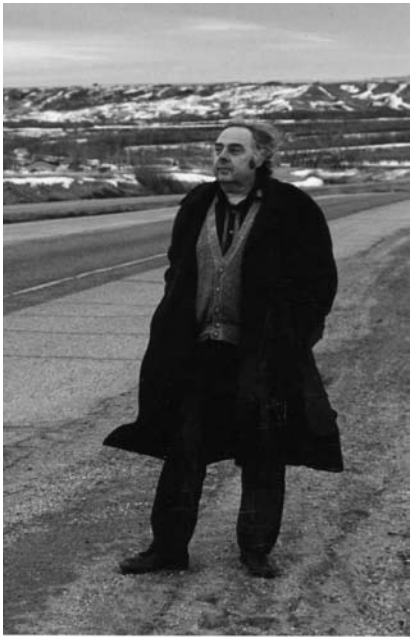
²⁹ Replaying Derrida's formulation in *Rogues* of 'rogue' American sovereignty in global institutions which purport to uphold democracy.

³⁰ Rancière, *The Politics of Aesthetics*, p25. With explicit reference to Agamben's formulations and dispositions, Rancière remarks in *Hatred of Democracy* (London: Verso, 2004, p.60), that 'the opposition of "bare life" to political existence itself can also be politicized'.

than the police – and also, because of this, that our politics is limited by our demands for justice and democracy. If we are to be democrats, such must be our sovereign demands – for the sovereignty of equality.



089



Immature, ineligible, indifferent –**1**

Breton and his faithful fraternity grouped as in an altarpiece, present a phalanx of dreamers to confront the hostile world of the prosaic and the disloyal. The closed-eyed Surrealists can ‘see’ what the profane cannot... unsight = sight.

Chantal Mouffe divides art into two categories

- Consensual art
- Critical art

Mouffe says that artistic practices play a role in the constitution and maintenance of a given symbolic order or in its challenging. She distinguishes four distinct ways of making critical art.

- ...the kind that more or less engages critically with political reality, such as that of Barbara Kruger, Hans Haacke or Santiago Sierra.
- ...art works exploring subject positions or identities defined by otherness, marginality, oppression or victimization. This has been the dominant mode of making critical art in recent years: feminist art, queer art, art made by ethnic or religious minorities. But one should also include here the work of Krzysztof Wodiczko.
- ...the type of critical art which investigates its own political condition of production and circulation such as that of Andrea Fraser, Christian Phillipp Mueller or Mark Dion.
- ...art as utopian experimentation, attempts to imagine alternative ways of living: societies or communities built around values in opposition to the ethos of late capitalism. Here we find for instance the names of Thomas Hirschhorn (Bataille Monument) Jeremy Deller (Battle of Orgreave) or Antony Gormley (Asian Field).

Distinctions are important for Mouffe as somebody with a special role in mind for art - a role in which art makes visible what is obscured and obliterated and unveils what is silenced and repressed - however the distinction Mouffe makes between consensual and critical art is not only a distinction between forms of practice or the relation between artistic practices and their public. It is an administrative distinction for the purpose of evaluating, categorising and managing art, a distinction that renders critical art critical because it makes explicit, often apriori, a particular practices efficacy, and hence its lexical admissibility within a recognisable or established artistic vocabulary of critical art. A distinction that affirms arts usefulness and participation in the public sphere and underlines arts fidelity and commitment to the democratic process. The danger for Mouffe is when left to its own devices, when art like politics goes unmanaged by the democratic process it either results in too much emphasis on consensus and the refusal of confrontation leading to apathy and disaffection or alternately mans creativity and energy are used in less than productive ways leading to the crystallisation of collective passions around issues which cannot be managed by the democratic process.

Clarity is at the core of Mouffe’s distinction - consensual versus critical art. A distinction she uses to try to tame art in the manner Stanley Fish says she tries to tame politics so that art and politics are assimilated to and managed by the democratic process.

According to Fish, the process of taming unfolds in two steps

- ...recognising domination and violence for what they really are – a recognition which Fish says you perform from a distance – whatever they are, they are not you.
- ...establishing a set of institutions through which they can be limited and tested [...] this step is taken the moment you imagine it, for if you imagine that domination and violence can be isolated long enough to become the objects of institutional manipulation, they have already been limited, if only in your mind.

And while Mouffe claims that in order to act politically people need to be able to relate to or make common cause with a collective identity which provides an idea of themselves they can valorise, it is precisely this potential identification and the danger this poses she cautions us about and which needs

to be managed within the democratic process - the growth of various religious, moral and ethnic fundamentalisms are for Mouffe the direct consequence of this democratic deficit - democratic confrontation is replaced by a confrontation amongst other forms of collective identification

2

Georges Bataille says The secondary community needs a commitment and must have recourse to some form of ‘creative effervescence’ if it is to endure [...] The belonging of fact cannot satisfy us, since it does not allow our relation with the others to be founded on what is, according to the choice we make, most important for us. We are complete only outside ourselves, in the human plenitude of an assembly, but we become complete only if, as we gather together, we do so in a way that responds to our intimate demands. Thus to the extent that we no longer want to be disfigured and ridiculous in our own eyes, we are in search of a secondary community whose aims are in complete accord with our being.

During a decade long relationship with the Parti communiste français (PCF), the Surrealist group withstood PCF demands to acknowledge and engage with a rational, instrumental politics and political party and to clearly affirm their adherence and commitment to the communist cause – Mouffe makes similar demands of contemporary on behalf of a properly engaged democratic process - demands implicit in her call on artists to make an agonistic or critical art

The Surrealist group discussed joining the PCF at a meeting on 23rd November 1926. Roland Tual in the opening address said; it is necessary to consider the revolutionary origins of our idealism, which is in perfect accord with revolutionary ideology, in the correct sense of the word. The noted intercession of the marvellous is of the same order as revolutionary action which has communism as its goal. I ask that we examine if the action of Surrealism is no longer valuable except on a political plane, that is to say practical. It will be necessary to examine rigorously if Surrealism is a spiritual state which can have consequences without its members participating in communist action....

Pierre Naville, one of the leaders of the French Trotskyist movement attacked the Surrealist group, claiming they had to make a choice between metaphysics and materialism, anarchism or communism and argued that they stood at a crossroads and should make the decision to join the PCF.

Breton countered by attacking Naville’s opposition between what he called the interior reality of the mind and the world of facts, which Breton felt, was an artificial opposition. In the realm of facts, Breton wrote, there can be no doubt: there is not one of us who does not hope for the passage of power from the hands of the bourgeoisie to those of the proletariat. In the meantime, we deem it absolutely necessary that inner life should pursue its experiments, and this, of course, without external control, not even Marxist.

The right to decide its own destiny was jealously guarded by the Surrealist group with the autocratic Breton at its centre. Louis Aragon and Paul Eluard would be dismissed for their adherence to the PCF, following the failure of the Surrealists’ attempted alliance with the Parti communiste. Philippe Soupault for being too literary, and Robert Desnos for the crime of writing journalism for a living. Their communal or shared activity played a vital role in defining their political culture and attitude of the Surrealist group by presenting its members as a unified front. Jack Spector says the group photographs of which there were many, helped to reinforce this sense of unity by betraying no sense of internal, conflict or strife wrought by internal rivalries, and excommunications. So while the individual faces might change, the group and the Surrealist revolution they represented remained steadfast.

3

Jules Monnerot has characterised Surrealism as a meeting of individuals based on elective affinities – a Surrealist bund (as in secret society) or in Bataille’s terms, a secondary community, in opposition to Gesellschaft - society of contract and Gemeinschaft - community. Monnerot, like Bataille, understood the Surrealist group in terms of the more fundamental distinction between societies based on affect and societies based on contract making the Surrealist group a religious phenomenon as Bataille and Monnerot understood religion, as a collective psychic phenomenon that is the necessary by-product of human affectivity and communal bonds. Their failed relationship with the PCF is intimately bound up with the collective form of the Surrealist group as a bund or secondary community and prevented the PCF from reducing Surrealist activities to a particular discourse of revolution and the proletariat and in effect become assimilated to the PCF’s politics under the sign of revolution as Mouffe would have contemporary art assimilated to democratic politics under the sign of agonism. Critical art becomes

tasked with envisaging democratic citizenship from a different perspective. And while it can be argued the Surrealist group were never in danger of tearing at the very basis of civility which according to Mouffe can be a consequence of collective passions not being fully managed by the democratic process, neither can it be said they were usefully deployed in the service of politics in the manner in which Mouffe would like to see contemporary art currently deployed.

As a result of their encounter with the PCF, Breton published the Second Surrealist Manifesto and in a Dadaist spirit of épater le bourgeois, openly celebrated the virtues of random violence by attempting to push the creative act as far as possible outside the confines of the rational mind, and as far away from what the PCF embodied at this moment – suggesting that the simplest surrealist act consists of dashing down into the street, pistol in hand, and firing blindly, as fast as you can pull the trigger, into the crowd.

By 1935, Breton and Bataille were convinced that politics had to be kept out of the hands of the PCF and away from the institutional practices of politics. Bataille formed a radical left ‘non-party’ called Contre-Attaque, which Breton agreed to participate in. Contre-Attaque would be the continuation of politics by other means. It failed utterly to contribute anything plausible to the everyday political problems of their day¹.

Some observations

- The transformation from antagonism to agonism, enemy to adversary is the transformation from one form of engagement [unclear outcomes] to another more sustained form of engagement [clear outcomes]
- The political within art is arts ambivalence and disinterestedness
- Art is sectarian, good for art
- The ambivalence of the Surrealist group towards political action (the interval between word and deed, image and action) is a manifestation of the political in art
- Mouffe wants art to be agonistic, in other words to have none of this ambivalence. She calls this critical art
- Distinction and clarity are essential for Mouffe in her attempts to tame art as Fish says she attempts to tame politics
- Political reality, Barbara Kruger, Hans Haacke, Santiago Sierra, otherness, marginality, oppression, victimization, feminist art, queer art, Krzysztof Wodiczko, Andrea Fraser, Christian Philipp Mueller, Mark Dion, utopian experimentation, late capitalism, Thomas Hirschhorn (Bataille Monument) Jeremy Deller (Battle of Orgreave) or Antony Gormley (Asian Field).

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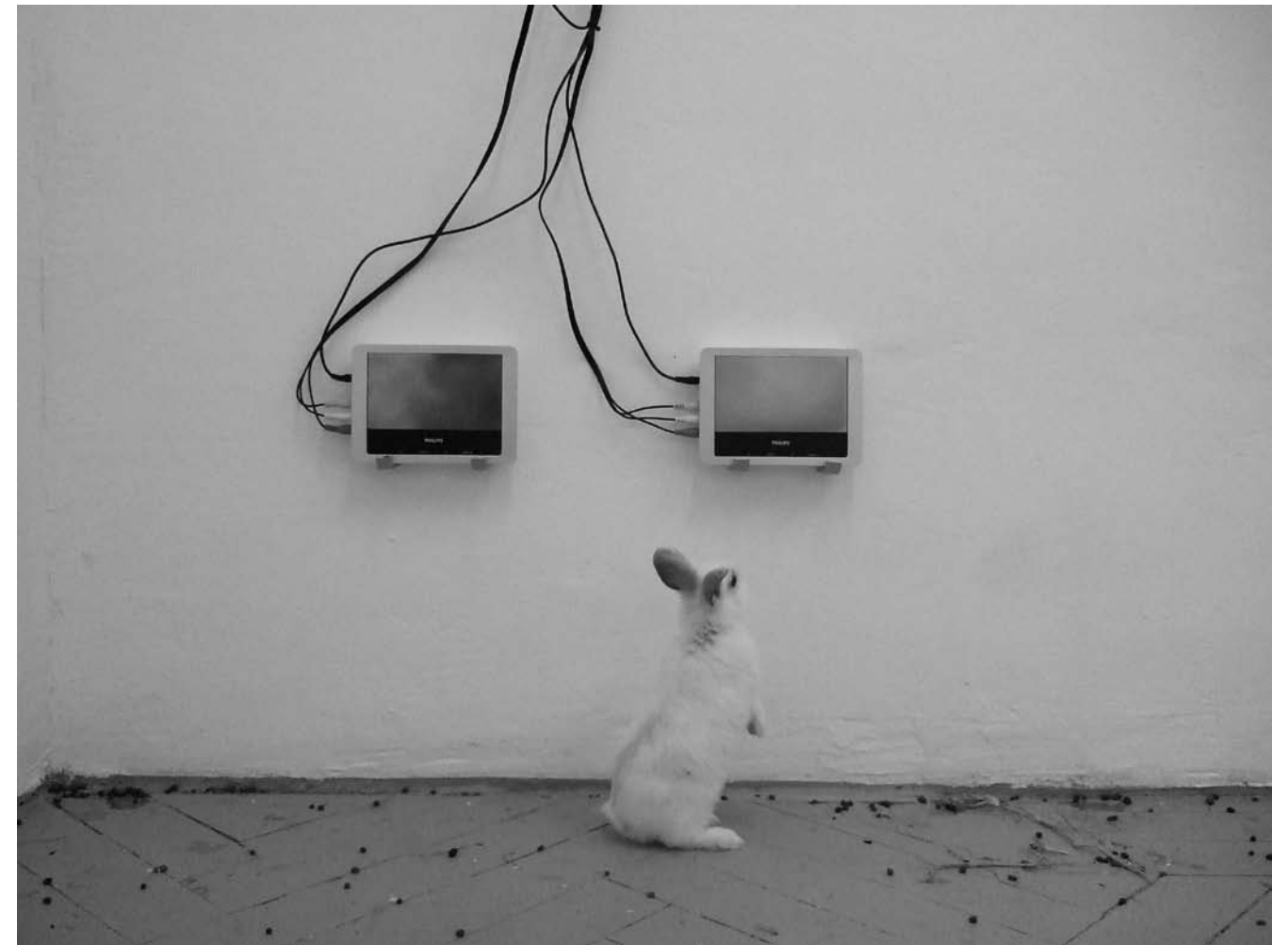
Jack Spector Surrealist Art and Writing/Georges Bataille The Absence of Myth, Visions of Excess/Raymond Spiteri and Donald laCoss Surrealism, Politics and Culture/Leela Gandhi Affective Communities/Chantal Mouffe The democratic Paradox, The Return of the Political
André Breton What is Surrealism Edited by Franklin Rosemont/Richard Wolin The Seduction of Unreason/Stanley Fish The Trouble with Principle/Jules Monnerot Sociology of Communism
Louise Tythacott Surrealism and the Exotic/Ramona Fotiade Conceptions of the Absurd

¹ Richard Wolin says that in 1936 Breton and the surrealist group withdrew from Contre-Attaque, accusing Bataille and his supporters of embracing a surfascisme – a superfascism paralleling Nietzsche’s advocacy of a surhomme or Superman. Henri Dubief, of Contre-Attaque described Bataille’s political thinking circa 1935 - persuaded of [fascism’s] intrinsic perversity, Bataille affirmed its historical and political superiority to a depraved workers’ movement and to corrupt liberal democracy...

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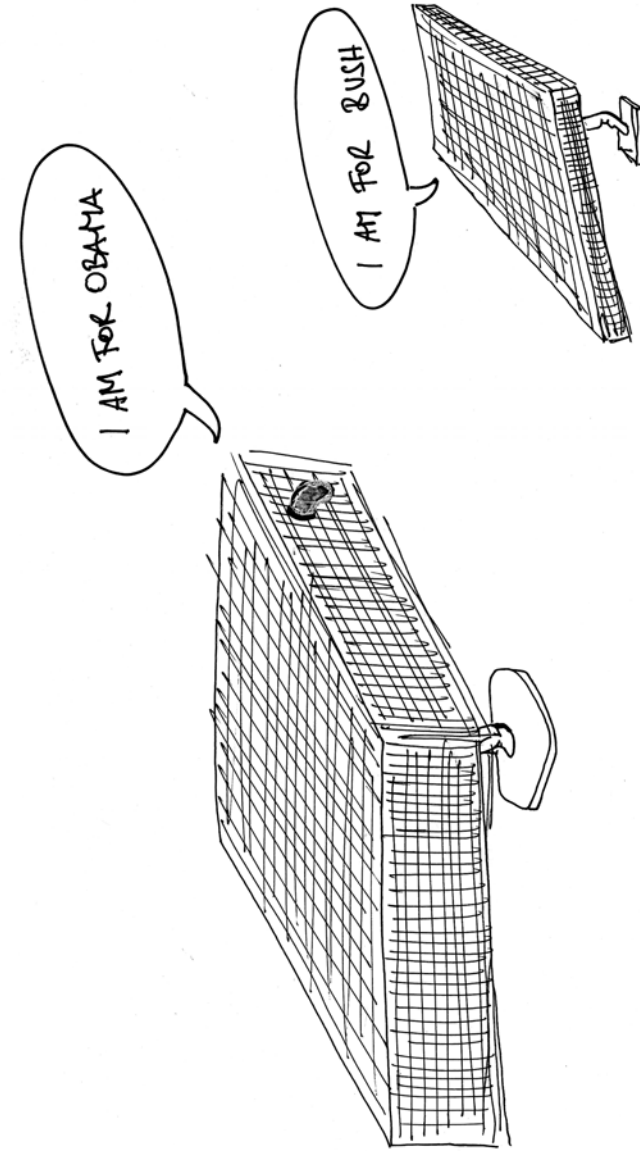








092



FROM THE SERIES: POINTLESS CONVERSATIONS
IN ~~AMERICAN~~ DEMOCRACIES.

12/08





The Precarization of Cultural Producers and the Missing "Good Life"

Precarization is not happening for the first time because so-called normal working conditions are changing. There are continuities running through the history of capitalist nation-states. In the past two hundred years, those who have been affected again and again by precarization are the ones positioned as "others" with respect to a hegemonic male, white, national norm.

Precarization is not solely an economic issue. For this reason, we take the question of precarization as an impetus to think about the fundamental constitution of our western societies. Hence our point of departure is precarization as a mode of societization, from which we seek to understand the associated conditions of subjectification in their historicity and current transformation. If we break this down, it means, for example, that precarization has something to do with the experience of a non-functioning identitary ascription/appeal and its associated disambiguations, which nevertheless materialize in subjectification conditions in certain ways. For instance, that being "woman" is not only what one can, should, wants to be – but that a subjectification "as woman" also takes place at the same time. Various professional, status-related, gendered, sexual and ethnicizing positions, which are socially very contradictory, frequently have to be taken at the same time or one after another.

We propose a perspective of precarization that attempts to address the difficulties associated with accommodating this incompatibility. For it seems that one mode of precarization results specifically from a shortcoming of these practices of identification.

Impossibility of Disambiguation

Taken in this sense, the term may also present an opportunity. Indeed its open-endedness, the way it is impossible for it to define an identitary "we" enables connections to other groups, especially in the context of "Euromayday".

We are in contact with feminist groups such as *precarias a la deriva*, for example, who carry discussions revolving around care economies or with groups such as the "Frassanito Network" that relates from the perspective of migration. To begin with, "Euromayday" creates a political space, in which different approaches and politics of precarization can be articulated and related to one another. We regard this as an important process of political constitution. "Euromayday" does not stand for a certain specific understanding of precarization. Instead, there are many different groups, collectives and individuals participating, who get involved in the debates and mobilizations.

Traversing Different Fields: Cultural Producers

With the interviews that we conducted with cultural producers in late 2003, we wanted to focus on the relationship between the precarization of the respective circumstances of life and the intractability of cultural and knowledge production, in order to look for the lines capable of collectivity there, which lead out of individualized experience. The thesis of our



investigation was that neoliberal appeals do not become wholly submerged in subjectifications, that the desires in the practices of cultural producers do not completely dissolve in the disciplining of flexibilization. We thought that there must be – perhaps initially individual – practices to elude the "economization of life".

We use the term "cultural producers" quite strategically. In this way we do not speak of a certain sector (cultural industry), nor of a surveyable social category (members of the artist social class in Germany, for example), nor of a professional self-understanding. Instead we speak of the practice of traversing different fields: theory production, design, political and cultural self-organization, forms of collaboration, paid and unpaid jobs, informal and formal economies, temporary alliances, project-related working and living.

When we speak of *precarized* cultural producers and investigate the conditions of their existence, we want to pursue the obvious phenomenon of a simultaneity of seemingly contradictory modes of subjectification. On the one hand, there are the increasingly efficacious ideas of freedom and autonomy that function according to the traditional bourgeois logic of sovereignty, and on the other there is self-exploitation in precarious circumstances: in other words, the simultaneity of sovereignty practices and precarious, heterogeneous, fragmenting practices.

Action!

What is important is that with the term cultural producers, we speak – in our investigation and in the film project "Kamera Luft!" ("Action!", Berlin 2004) – of those people with whom we collaborate for a specific form of political practice in the cultural field, or whose practice we refer to. For the investigation we interviewed fifteen people – including ourselves – in Berlin, who produce cultural products, critical discourses and socio-political fields of action. The selection is based on our respective positioning, concerns and interests.

Our questions were based on the survey action conducted by "Fronte della Giovent Lavoratrice and Potere Operaio" in early 1967 in Mirafiori, "Fiat is our university", which asked, among other questions, about what people imagined as a "good life" and about organizing.

In the course of the investigation, we found that we did not really get answers to these questions, which actually address the socio-political and collective dimension of precarization. The case was different with questions about individual practices of working and everyday life. We were able to document long descriptions of feeling overwhelmed, of stress, but also of individual strategies of refusal as responses. With a view to a potential politicization of cultural producers, however, we were also interested in collective strategies of refusal and the concomitant desires to improve one's own life, the lives of others, ultimately to change society. Yet the only thing that permeated all the interviews at a more general level was a suffering from a lack of continuity.

We were not so surprised that we hardly received responses to the question of politicization and organization. Nevertheless, what was perplexing was that none of those interviewed could really express what a "good life" would look like, or what would distinguish a life that would consist not only of a constant appeal from others or from oneself to be, paid or unpaid, productive and creative.

Even in our own horizon of ideas, we hardly found alternative conceptions of life that could counter the existing conditions with something clear and unequivocal.

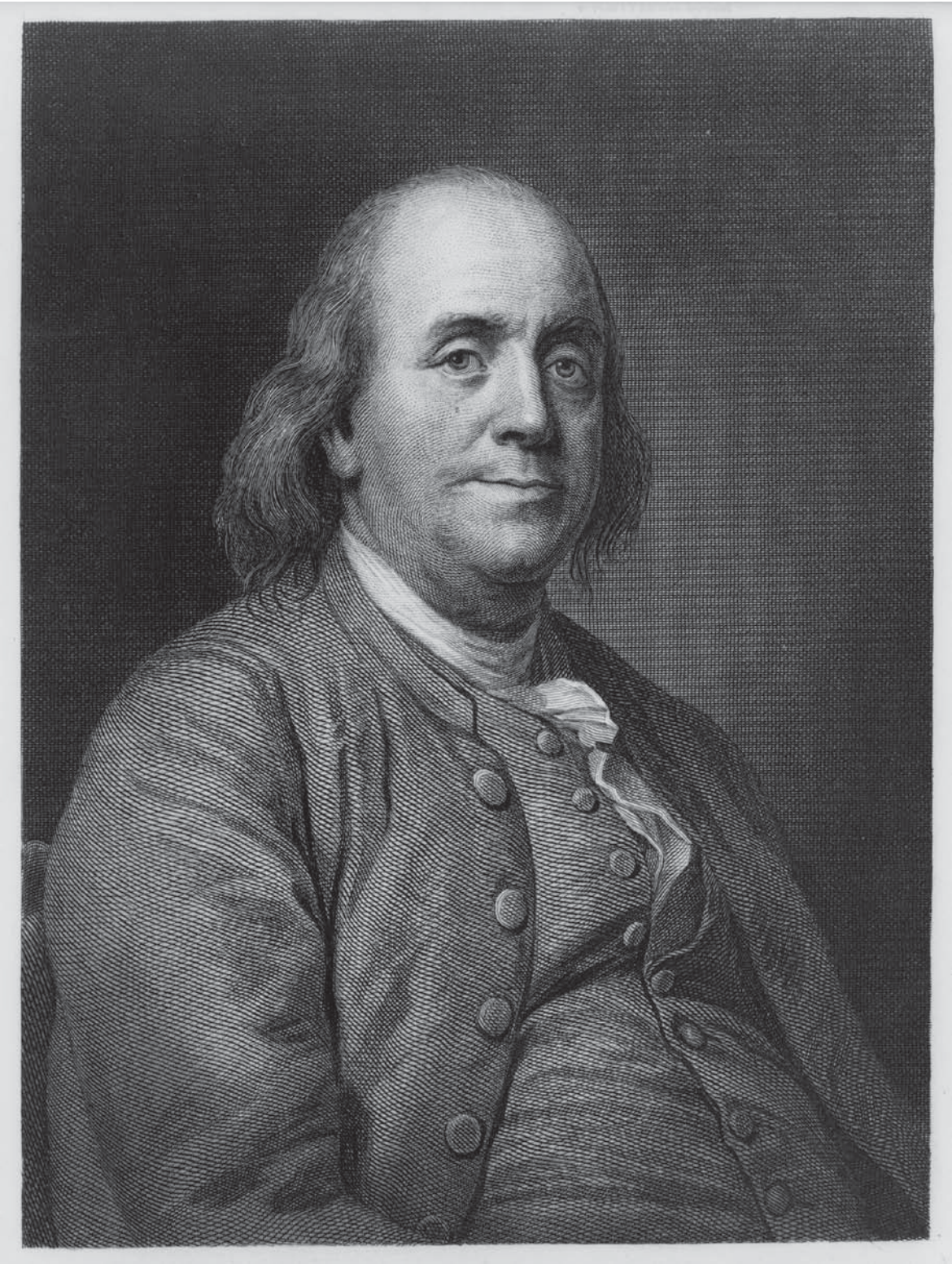
Yet if work and life increasingly mutually permeate one another, then this means, as one interviewee said, "work seeps into your life". However, it is obvious that there are not enough notions of a "good life" seeping into work, so that it could, in turn, be transformed into something that collectively signifies a "good life".

Atelier Europa

Following our investigation, in the context of the exhibition project "Atelier Europa" we attempted to answer the question of organization by noting that, in part, there are already alliances between different social fields. For this reason, we used the invitation from the Kunstverein Munich to meet in this location, present approaches and exchange different experiences, in order to be able to continue thinking about this together. Thus, instead of describing the field of cultural and creative work as a place where the source of economic innovation could be identified, we invited magazine projects, artists, filmmakers, fashion designers, theater artists and designers from Spain, France, England, Switzerland, Austria and Germany, who have worked in past years on the criticism of neoliberal economicization from the perspective of culture, to reflect on their participation as actors in this discourse.

The desire for other concepts of working and living, new forms of collaboration and knowledge production in interdisciplinary contexts became the starting point and motif for a desired social change that adheres to the criticism of the conditions of wage work and consumption organized on the basis of the society of control. (Translated by Aileen Derieg)

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kpD are Brigitta Kuster, Isabell Lorey, Katja Reichard, Marion von Osten
www.kleinespostfordistischesdrama.de



Post-Master

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January 17, 2006 -- As it turns out, today is Benjamin Franklin's 300th birthday. Writer, typographer, printer-publisher-politician, inventor, statesman, gentleman scientist, lover, linguist, librarian and the first Postmaster General of the United States, Franklin was the consummate networker -- distributing his ideas far and wide through a dizzying range of practices. He established a network of printing franchises by sending former apprentices to set up shop in a new town and collecting his dues; he travelled extensively to London and the Courts of France fostering relationships and helping to form a nation; he wrote incisive arguments and entertainments under a constellation of pseudonyms to suit the purpose-at-hand including The Causist, Silence Do Good, Busy-Body, Poor Richard, and J.T.; he advocated a paper currency to facilitate liberal distribution of goods and services; he (reportedly) spread his affections among any number of women in the Colonies and beyond; and he published a weekly newspaper, an occasional magazine and the annual Poor Richard's Almanack. Along the way, Franklin pursued his polymathic interests while inventing (a partial list): the medical catheter, the Armonica (a musical instrument), the first public lending library, a phonetic alphabet, volunteer fire department, American Philosophical Society, the circulating stove, swimfins, a university, bifocals, the lightning rod, and the United States Postal Service.

Benjamin Franklin was born in Boston, 1706, the youngest son of seventeen children to Josiah Franklin, a candle-maker and merchant. He studied briefly at the Boston Latin School before being removed for a more practical training. By age 12, he was apprenticed to his older brother James, a printer and publisher of the first independent Colonial newspaper, the New England Courant. (1) Initially, young Benjamin assisted with page composition, typesetting, leading, brushing, burnishing and miscellaneous production tasks. In this busy print-shop, Franklin received an intimate education in the mechanics of printing. James' shop was a hub of pamphleteering where pithy and pointed documents were produced to distribute political points-of-view. Further, his newspaper, the New England Courant, provided the most widely-distributed communication platform in Boston. As an increasingly competent writer himself, Franklin wished to add his voice to the public discourse circling around the print-shop. He knew his older brother wouldn't consent to print his writing, so he tried another tactic.

Franklin assumed an alter-ego, Mrs. Silence Dogood, the dignified widow of a country parson. Writing under this pseudonym, he crafted a series of letters, entertaining yet critical of Boston's Puritan establishment. Given his insider knowledge of the New England Courant's production process, Franklin carefully slipped the letters under the front door of the shop late at night. The writing was funny and the contents not inconsequential -- James Franklin published the first of eight Silence Dogood letters on April 2, 1722 in his newspaper. Mrs. Dogood quickly gained a wide readership. And yet, he begins the first with a back-handed acknowledgment of the power of his pen-name, writing:

"And since it is observed, that the Generality of People, now a days, are unwilling either to commend or dispraise what they read, until they are in some measure informed who or what the Author of it is, whether he be poor or rich, old or young, a Schollar or a Leather Apron Man, &c. and give their Opinion of the Performance, according to the Knowledge which they have of the Author's Circumstances, it may not be amiss to begin with a short Account of my past Life and present Condition, that the Reader may not be at a Loss to judge whether or no my Lucubrations are worth his reading." (2)

By the time that the eighth Silence Dogood letter was printed, Benjamin had unveiled himself as Mrs. Dogood, much to James' displeasure. The younger brother commanded too much attention, the relationship fell apart and soon, Benjamin left without completing his apprenticeship. He fled Boston, first for New York and then on to Philadelphia.

Benjamin Franklin arrived in Philadelphia in 1723 at the age of 17, already an accomplished writer and print-shop apprentice. He found printing work and lodging with Samuel Keimer, and soon established his own print-shop. By 1728, he had befriended the Mayor, assimilated himself into polite society and was doing modestly well as one of three printers in Philadelphia. As both writer and printer, Franklin enjoyed a privileged position from which to distribute his ideas, which were rather distributed themselves, from advocating the use of paper currency to detailing the cyclical patterns of weather systems to sage advice dispensed to a young tradesman in 1748:

"Courteous Reader, Remember that TIME is money." (3)

Being intimately acquainted with the production process from writing to editing to typesetting to page composition to printing, Franklin knew that it was not only WHAT was said, or WHO said it but, most importantly, TO WHOM it was said. Writing and printing would only lead him so far -- the real power of print production, like any mass medium, was in its distribution network. And the primary channel was the colonial postal system which had grown up around several Colonial roads (such as The Boston Post Road or US 1, from New York to Boston via Providence). A rival printer, Andrew Bradford, currently published the town's only newspaper, the American Weekly Mercury, and also was the Postmaster of Pennsylvania. As Postmaster, Bradford commanded first access to news from afar and also directed the network for distributing his newspaper. The result was a virtual monopoly on what was news and who read it. Franklin contrived to reverse these circumstances.

He first tried to establish a rival newspaper, but was too slow. His intentions leaked and the third printer, his former employer and landlord, Samuel Keimer, slap-dashedly assembled and launched his own newspaper, grandly named the Universal Instructor in all Arts and Sciences and Pennsylvania Gazette. Figuring that the small town of Philadelphia couldn't possibly accommodate three newspapers, Franklin resolved to eliminate one. (4) Using his supple pen and exploiting the triangulated relationship between Keimer, Bradford and himself, Franklin wrote a series of letters to the established newspaper, American Weekly Mercury under the pseudonym Busy-Body. The first letter began by suggesting his intent to enliven the rather dull, but established newspaper, beginning:

"I design this to acquaint you, that I, who have long been one of your Courteous Readers, have lately entertain'd some Thoughts of setting up for an Author my Self; not out of the least Vanity, I assure you, or Desire of showing my Parts, but purely for the Good of my Country.

I have often observ'd with Concern, that your Mercury is not always equally entertaining. The Delay of Ships expected in, and want of fresh Advices from Europe, make it frequently very Dull; and I find the Freezing of our River has the same Effect on News as on Trade." (5)

The Busy-Body letters were published in the Mercury prominently on the front page with a large byline. Franklin continued to write these engaging letters from his manufactured author, which served both to enliven the established, yet dull, newspaper as well as to spurn the new upstart and its publishing strategies, which at the time consisted primarily of serializing encyclopedia entries. Keimer responded to these assaults in an increasingly shrill tone and desperate manner -- the ensuing war of words left Keimer and his newspaper in considerable debt. Keimer was briefly imprisoned and then fled to Barbados, selling his newspaper to Franklin as he was leaving town. (6) In October 1729, Benjamin Franklin became the proud publisher of The Pennsylvania Gazette

The Pennsylvania Gazette provided Franklin with a platform for his provocative publishing and over the following eight years, he developed a substantial reputation. By 1737, his newspaper had firmly supplanted Bradford's staid Mercury and Franklin was appointed Postmaster of Philadelphia. Benjamin Franklin now commanded the central strategic position that he had angled for: he was a producer with a proud tradesman's intimate knowledge of printing; he was a writer who knew the power of his pen and authorial position; and now he was Postmaster, directing and redesigning the networks of information distribution. This combination of an on-the-ground knowledge and a from-the-sky view served him extraordinarily well. Franklin soon graduated to Postmaster of Pennsylvania and, in 1753, he was appointed Joint Postmasters General for the Crown. As before, with his network of printers, constellation of pen-names, or business associations, Franklin succeeded in appointing friends and allies in many of the subordinate Postmaster jobs throughout the Colonies, ensuring himself a privileged position at the center of this emergingly critical distribution network.

By 1760, Postmaster Franklin had radically reorganized the postal service, establishing mile-markers on roads, mapping new and shorter routes (post riders now carried mail at night between Philadelphia and New York cutting delivery time in half), and developing post roads from Maine to Florida, and New York to Canada. For the first time, mail between the colonies and England operated on a regular schedule with posted times, connecting the Colonies to each other and to mother England while beginning to articulate an as-yet-formed nation. Though all of these improvements, Franklin was able to report an operating budget surplus to the Crown by 1760, the first time that the postal service made economic sense. However, by 1774, Franklin was relieved of his duties for actions sympathetic to the cause of the Colonies. Shortly thereafter, he was appointed chairman of the Committee of Investigation to establish a postal system at Continental Congress. Then, on July 26, 1775, Franklin was appointed the first Postmaster General of the (brand-new) United States of America. (7)

According to www.USPS.gov, the current United States Postal Service "descends in an unbroken line from the system he [Benjamin Franklin] planned and placed into operation." (8) Currently, the USPS is the third largest employer in the country (after United States Department of Defense and Walmart.) Operating as an independent branch of the Executive branch of the United States Government, the Post Office enjoys a de-facto monopoly status on delivery of first-class and third-class letters, where long-distance mail delivery rates are essentially subsidized by delivery of short-distance letters. Exceptions to this monopoly are given for delivery of parcels and extremely urgent letters, giving rise to a number of fierce competitors including (of course) FedEx, UPS, and DHL. Recently, increasing reliance on electronic communications including telephones, fax and e-mail continues to exert substantial pressures on this distribution network conceived and implemented 230 years ago by a Philadelphia dilettante printer.

The United States Postal Service remains (for the near future, anyway) an almost-anachronism -- a network right at the edge of obsolescence, used everyday and yet resembling a curious relic. And because of this, it offers a perfect model for considering changing paradigms and patterns of distribution today. The U.S. Postal Service as a distribution network is open, democratic, public, available and affordable. It facilitates one-to-one, asynchronous communication over great distance, is always on, efficient, economic, and reliable (well...). But then, this description corresponds to many other distribution networks today. And when the Postal System disappears, what replaces it? Certainly, the synergized Mass Media Mogul model of distribution networks like 20th Century Fox or NBC are not good enough.

Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri concisely describe a contemporary distribution

pattern in the course of their political treatise / self-help book Empire. Hardt and Negri identify a contemporary condition where the collapse of design, production and distribution occur at one place and in real-time. (quotation?) Suddenly, writers can print their texts, designers can produce on-the-fly, and printers can distribute instantly. What is needed, when it is needed, where it is needed. This kind of generalist approach and a Just-In-Time mode of production prys open a space of resistance for small actors in a massive system. Ideas can be designed, produced, multiplied and distributed on-demand. Benjamin Franklin might be excited:

"A great empire, like a great cake, is most easily diminished at the edges." (9)

So Mr. Franklin was already here before, operating as if he was anticipating this moment 300 years after his birthday. Benjamin Franklin, completely engaged and instrumental in the mass media of his day proposed an alternate model of distribution. Rather than concentrating resources and commanding an assembly line of content, design, production and distribution, Franklin retained a fundamental pride in the skills he'd first learned as a printer's apprentice. He countered the Media Mogul with his model of the Networked Tradesman -- an individual, highly skilled and committed to their work with an extended network of distributed preoccupations, assistants, pen-names, jobs, friends, politicians, royalty, inventions and hobbies. He laid his model bare in his 9th Poor Richard's Almanack of 1742, saying:

"He that hath a Trade, hath an Estate." (10)

Successfully working in the margins, an individual within a massive network, Franklin realized an exquisite understanding of the power of distribution and remains resonant 300 years later as a result (happy birthday, Benjamin). There is no need to look farther than his newspaper, The Pennsylvania Gazette -- in a prominent location, centered on the bottom margin, Franklin proudly added a byline where design, writing, production, and distribution collapse in one space and five words:

"Printed by B. Franklin, Post-Master."

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Notes and Sources

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2. Franklin, Benjamin. Silence Dogood, No. 1, The New-England Courant, Boston, April 2, 1722. See also <http://www.historycarper.com/resources/twobf1/sd1.htm>.
3. Franklin, Benjamin. Advice to a Young Tradesman, Written by an Old One, The New-Printing-Office, Philadelphia, 1748. See also <http://www.historycarper.com/resources/twobf2/advice.htm>.
4. Franklin, Benjamin. The Autobiography of Benjamin Franklin, Electronic Text Center, University of Virginia Library, 1999, <http://etext.lib.virginia.edu/>.
5. Franklin, Benjamin. The Busy-Body, No. 1, The American Weekly Mercury, February 4, 1728. See <http://www.historycarper.com/resources/twobf2/bb1.htm>
6. For a more complete detail of this incident see: Isaacson, Walter. Benjamin Franklin : An American Life, Simon and Schuster, New York, 2003.
7. History of the United States Postal Service 1775-1993, <http://www.usps.com/history/history>.
8. *ibid*.
9. Franklin, Benjamin. Rules by Which a Great Empire May Be Reduced to a Small One, Washington, 1775.
10. Franklin, Benjamin. Poor Richard's Almanack, 9th edition, Philadelphia, 1742.
11. Eames, Charles and Eames, Ray. Franklin & Jefferson Proposal Film, IBM, 1973.
12. Benjamin Franklin understood his life as a state of constant change, even evident in the epitaph he crafted for himself at the age of 22, included here for the reader's pleasure:

The Body of
B. Franklin, Printer;
like the Cover of an old Book,
Its Contents torn out,
And stript of its Lettering and Gilding,
Lies here, Food for Worms.
But the Work shall not be wholly lost;
For it will, as he believ'd, appear once more,
In a new & more perfect Edition,
Corrected and amended
By the Author.

17. This text (in a format revised and amended by the Author) is also being distributed in other locations, including at the time of printing:

Dot Dot Dot 12, New York, 2006
Manifesta 6 School Library, Nicosia, Cyprus, 2006
(<http://www.manifesta6.org.cy/library.html>)
Take One, Museum of Fine Arts Houston, 200
The Internet Archive, search title "Post-Master"
(<http://www.archive.org>)
O R G
(<http://www.o-r-g.com/view.html?project=105>)

Canvassing the Will of the People: Surveys, Suffering and Re/presentation

Art is not morally
responsible, and
it is not socially
or politically useful

In the days of consumer satisfaction and client-centred business models the art project undertaken by Vitaly Komar and Alexander Melamid in the 1990s seems an informed decision. Two Russian émigrés from the former Soviet block, bringing with them the socialist tradition of democracy as popular power, set out to ‘somehow penetrate their [the American people’s] brains, to understand their wishes – to be a real part of society’. So using the tools of marketing and statistics Komar and Melamid worked to give the United States its ‘most wanted’ painting. The picture statistically represented what most Americans wanted in a piece of art.

However, in the process of their exploration they found a different sort of dictatorship operating – namely the ‘majority’. It was through the use of majority opinion, in the form of a survey of the public that Komar and Melamid sought to satisfy their potential art customers. Once the artists had gathered this information they produced a work that met the criteria of the people surveyed, satisfied that this democratic process would produce a work that meet the needs or at least the desires of the public. The resulting picture was a landscape with plenty of blue (47% of those surveyed favoured this colour) featuring trees, distant hills, a stretch of water, an historical figure, three further people and two deer. An image created for the people, based on information gleaned from the people – well, 1001 individuals roughly representative of the ‘general population’.

Extending the survey to a number of other countries a pattern seemed to emerge. People who undertook the survey in Ukraine, France, Kenya, Finland, Iceland, Denmark, Turkey and China all desired similar elements in their ‘most wanted’ painting – they all wanted landscapes, the details of which varied far less than one might imagine: China’s featured a water buffalo but retained the distant hills, water and trees; Turkey’s featured children in the foreground but again the expanse of water, hills and a tree. What the two artists revealed was the way in which majority decisions work to erase distinctness. The survey approach exposed a banality.

What the survey also made transparent was that people wanted to see themselves in works of art. When asked what they would like to see in a painting if they had the

unlimited resources to commission an artist to paint whatever the person wanted, by far the highest percentage wanted the picture to be of their family or themselves (22%).¹ The art ‘wanted’ within this context is very much about representations that are directly relevant to the person commissioning the work rather than a work that communicates beyond this sphere. It recalls the traditional role of the artist as an agent serving the people, where commissions were concerned with immortalising their patrons as either the subject of portraits or as the money behind an image.

A number of writers (references) called the project a joke –a deliberately humorous look at what people value in art, however, others understood it as a powerful and serious critique of how the information gained through surveys, questionnaires and market research can be manipulated to serve particular ends². Did this process really tap into the voice of the people? Were the people surveyed consulted as to what type of questions were to be asked? It seems that there was a failure to deal with the questions of power circulating around the whole process of eliciting information.

Sixty percent of people in the American poll preferred to look at a painting that was realistic looking and the closer it resembled a photograph the better. Only nineteen percent agreed that ideally a painting should ‘serve some higher goal’ like ‘challenging their viewers to think about art or life in a different way than they do normally’; the majority seventy-five percent feeling that a painting ‘can just be something a person likes to look at.’³ This approach opens up the whole question of the function of the artist. Is she there to serve her own creative ends or the public who receive her work? While the idea of responding to the needs of ordinary people who prescribe the sort of picture they would like to purchase does indeed suggest a democratic process it also suggests a prostitution of art – the artist willing to make anything the buyer wants or desires.

In common with those who have voiced concerns about the wisdom of allowing all people to equally participate in the democratic process regardless of background, knowledge or education. The question that inevitably arose in relation to the Komar and Melamid project was - do the public know enough about art to be able to make judgements? Melamid’s response was that ‘everybody knows about art enough, because we are surrounded. The decoration over here on the wall, all the architecture,

reproductions in magazines – it’s all over.’⁴ And it becomes difficult to argue against this, given that we are enfranchised at the age of eighteen and allowed to fully participate in the electoral process, without ever having to demonstrate the acuity of our powers of judgement or any knowledge or understanding of politics.

So is the artist there to represent us or to represent things to us? The old Romantic notion of the artist as mystically inspired by muses, is a dusty and distant one but the idea that the artist has a unique vision and has a part to play in provoking spectators and/or communicating ‘truths’ retains a certain credence. How does such ‘truth’ function when an artist chooses to represent others unable to represent themselves?

In the current moment, here in the early part of the twentieth first century, conflict-related chaos has extended rather than abated. We live during a time of increasing globalisation, but also during a time of escalating global conflict - some would say ‘war’. U.S. President George Bush’s declaration of a ‘war on terror’ has, through its undefined and un-definable limits, made the uncertainty of the current situation all the more terrifying regardless of whether you are ‘with’ or ‘against’ him. The luxury of democracy everywhere recedes further in this climate and becomes selectively applied. The artist Mike Parr has been at pains to highlight some of the dangers and inequities that have resulted from the ‘war on terror’ particularly in relation to the erosion of democratic rights given to those that have essentially become ‘collateral damage’ in this ‘war’. In particular, Australian asylum seekers who find their situation exasperated by the increasingly restrictive measures surrounding immigration. Unlike Komar and Melamid, Parr acts alone. He represents these oppressed groups of detained individuals without consultation, positioning himself as a conduit through which the pain of those outside the ‘fortress’ and behind barbed wire is communicated.

To do this Mike Parr sat in Artspace Gallery, Sydney from the 3rd to the 5th of May 2002 with his arm nailed to the gallery wall. His eyes were taped over and while he could drink he didn’t eat or apparently speak. While Parr could be viewed in the flesh at Artspace the piece was staged as a webcast. At any time over the two days you could log on to receive images of Parr on you computer - wherever you may have been and whatever you happened to be doing. Images that on the one hand spoke of

the proximity, intimacy and immediacy of Parr's actions, while on the other hand, because they were screen images, could be dismissed as remote and distant: a world elsewhere. The piece was called *Malevich (a political arm)* (2002). The title presumably referring to Kazimir Malevich, the Russian artist famous for his *White on White* (1918) painting. Parr, with this title and accompanying action, aimed to draw attention to the racism within Australia. Sharing similar thematic lines, Parr has also performed a series called *Close the Concentration Camps* (2002) during which he had the word 'alien' branded to his leg. Unlike some of those he is symbolically representing, Parr exercises agency in undergoing this ordeal. His representation circulates around the pain we imagine he must be experiencing. But in the case of *Malevich(a political arm)*, many will have received the work via the web. That is, by means of a screen that can be switched on and off at will, emphasising the ease with which we can walk away from visions of suffering. The durational aspect (30hours) functions in two ways for screen viewers of this piece. In turning the screen off, we are still aware that Parr and his pain continues, just as the issue he is drawing attention to continues beyond our vision of it. It also points to the way that screen and other media, in their endless thirst for novelty, will move from one site of pain to another as disaster, injustice, war, and illness pull focus from one day to the next.

Democratic Torture, is the concluding part of another piece by Parr: *Aussie Aussie Aussie Oi Oi Oi* (2003). The publicity flyer for this piece states that;

At 6pm on Friday May 2, in the presence of the public, an assistant will begin sewing up my face. My face is sewn into a bind. Godot has left for Iraq and the bewildered Australian amputee has followed him! I sit still facing the audience. Through Friday night, all day Saturday. A small Australian flag hangs limply from the stump of my left arm...

and then further down in bold print... 'At 6pm Saturday night until midnight *Democratic Torture* begins.'

You can visit Parr at any time during this durational performance. The flyer includes an image of Parr's stitched face. The text on the wall behind Parr tells of a broader context in which to read his actions.

Blood bath, Hunting Pack, Filling holes in a bullet-ridden nation. Killing Room, Hundreds of Victims in Coffins, Children were burned Alive, Critic branded with hot irons, End Game, We are closer to the centre of the Iraq capital than many American commuters are to their downtown offices, Please don't hate our Dads etc....

Democratic Torture is the interactive part of the performance where you can log on to www.artspace.org.au and give Mike Parr an electric shock to his face. We are informed that any one can do this and that yes, this event is for real. Of some 50,000 people visiting the site, 23 took up the invitation to shock Parr.

Thousands were able to view his actions, both in Australia and around the globe. One can hope that the issue that Parr was at pains (literally) to highlight was successfully brought home (literally) to those who logged on – although admittedly this does presuppose a kind of informed and moral spectatorship that can not be verified.

But what are we to make of the suggested 'interactivity'? - the invitation to participate in the performance through the click of a mouse that will indirectly inflict pain on the already compromised features of Parr's face? A torture opened up 'democratically' so that all those with knowledge of the event and access to the internet can participate. And just like in a good liberal democracy our 'vote' is anonymous – nobody knows exactly who chose to shock Parr. But nor do we know what information this torture is supposed to elicit - what question has been posed to Parr? Torture, after all, in its

reversal of the usual democratic process whereby a trial is used to determine innocence or guilt depending on the evidence presented, inflicts pain in order to generate evidence – answers, confessions. Parr’s stitched lips limits his capacity to respond. He remains inarticulate throughout this performance, the twenty three shocks twenty three too many.

But Parr takes the process further – he then went on to use the documentation of this performance in the form of film as the basis of further installations where the viewing is disrupted/ dislocated in a number of different ways. The filmed documentation of *Malevich (a political arm)* became the central part of an installation. The film was deliberately made in such a way that it emulated the poor grainy quality of an old archive film. Jump cuts in the editing gave an additional disjointed feel to the viewing experience. Moreover, the video was projected in such a way that the viewer had to constantly negotiate a viewing position. Writer David Teh describes it thus ‘the Malevich film was projected at a tilt, shattering the usual rectangular complicity between the architectural reality and the mediated one...the viewer constantly, uneasily tried to ‘correct’ the tilt’’⁵ For spectators, the process of accessing these images was deliberately complicated in order to make us aware of the way in which we thoughtlessly consume imagery under more ‘normal’ viewing conditions.

In a not altogether dissimilar fashion, for *Film Noir, Politique Blanche* (2003) artist and collaborator Adam Geczy and Mike Parr combined video and film images of Parr’s *Malevich (a political arm)* with a video Geczy made of his father writing in Hungarian of his escape from Budapest during the Second World War. A cluster of television sets at a range of angles are situated on the floor of the gallery. The

spectator may walk around the sets but, because of the ways the sets are positioned, she is unable to watch more than one full screen image at a time – emphasising the partial nature of experience. However, the fact that other images on screens nearby are partly visible at the same time, is also a source of frustration as we have our expectations of screen imagery thwarted. That is, we have come to expect that images supplied to us through screens will be situated and composed in a manner that will allow us the maximum amount of access. *Film Noir, Politique Blanche* defies this logic and makes us contort ourselves to gain access to what is provided. It also forcefully reminds us of our role as witnesses (or voyeurs?) to others suffering.

Moreover, while I am straining to make sense of this representation I am also asking whether our original ‘outsiders’ are given dignity by these artistic representations? In this dislocation /remaking of previous performance imagery there is the very real risk that the immediacy and intimacy mentioned earlier as a strength of the work will be lost. In other words, will ethical spectators be generated by works like *Film Noir Politique Blanche* in a way that will enhance the ability of spectators to ‘see’ those who have little or no means of self-representation? Or will the fact that it is a representation of a representation so reduce its impact that we lose focus of the origin – the suffering and disenfranchisement of those seeking sanctuary in ‘democratic’ nations?

It’s quite possible to be distracted into pitying those Australians like Adam Geczy and Mike Parr who feel saddened and disappointed by the politics that support draconian immigration policies in Australia rather than those they profess to represent. But perhaps these thoughts express an unnecessarily cynical. One would certainly like to

believe that a piece like *Aussie Aussie Aussie Oi Oi Oi* functions very much in same way as Elaine Scarry in *The Body in Pain: The Making and Unmaking of the World* suggests that the work of Amnesty International works for torture victims:

...one human being who is well and free willingly turns himself into an image of the other's psychic or sentient claims, an image existing in the space outside the sufferer's body, projected out into the world and held there intact by that person's powers until the sufferer himself regains his own powers of self-extension. (1985: 50)

In this way the works speak on behalf of the dispossessed and act as a means of materialising bodies that have disappeared, so that the 'world' will not forget them.

But there remains the risk, also voiced by Elaine Scarry that:

there is also the danger that because artists so successfully express suffering, they may themselves collectively come to be thought of as the most authentic class of sufferers, and thus may inadvertently appropriate concern away from others in radical need of assistance.' (1985:11)

It seems there is a need for constant vigilance. For while this artist is driven to make works that challenge and inform in an effort to enhance the democratic process by providing at least some form of representation to those who are detained and are largely hidden from view, there remains a constant need to question the politics of power at work in the representation of others and particularly the motives for representing others.

Komar and Melamid attempted to democratically create a work of art that would give people exactly what they wanted. The resulting image with its greenery and stretches of water bore striking similarities to the sorts of environment people are supposed to enjoy living in; relaxed, largely pastoral scenes. But the bland insipidness of the

images made, while they are pleasant or rather, inoffensive to look at, they lack what matters most in art – its ability to generate discussion, to question and challenge pre/conceptions and prejudices – all crucial elements of the sorts of processes necessary for democracy. If art can be considered to have any connection to a democratic process however tentative, there is no doubt in my mind which of the works discussed here has revealed more about the generative potential of real democracy - Mike Parr, in his violent extremism, through his creation of Artaudian 'shocks to the system' of his audience, engages his entire being to amplify and transmit the repeated (and repetitive) pleas of those who wait incarcerated in the liminal spaces at the periphery of our society and our vision.

¹ The Nation (1994) 'Painting by Numbers: The Search for A People's Art', March 14, 346

² Ross, Andrew 'Poll Stars' *ArtForum*, January 1995, pp. 72-77, 109.

³ The Nation (1994), 341

⁴ Ibid., 335

⁵ Teh, David (2003) *Broadsheet* page 10

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<http://www.realtimearts.net/rt52/geczy.html>

<http://www.artspace.org.au>



construct a framework:

7.00 time management:

7.01 Spring four phase turn:

- 7.011 diplomatic phase
- 7.012 order writing phase
- 7.013 order resolution phase
- 7.014 retreat and disbanding phase

7.02 Fall five-phase turn

- 7.021 diplomatic phase
- 7.022 order writing phase
- 7.02 3 order resolution phase
- 7.02 4 retreat and disbanding phase
- 7.02 5 gaining and losing units phase

7.03 After a Fall Turn, if one Great Power controls 18 or more supply centres, the game ends and that player is declared World Dominator.

7.10 subject search / research:

- 7.11 teleology²
- 7.12 intuition
- 7.13 conception
- 7.14 apprehension
- 7.15 comprehension
- 7.16 experimentation
- 7.17 feedback

¹ Diplomacy is a game of negotiations, alliances, promises kept and promises broken. In order to survive, a player needs help from others. Knowing whom to trust, when to trust them, what to promise, and when to promise it is the heart of the game. Remember, you are a diplomat first, a commander second.
from Diplomacy 1961.

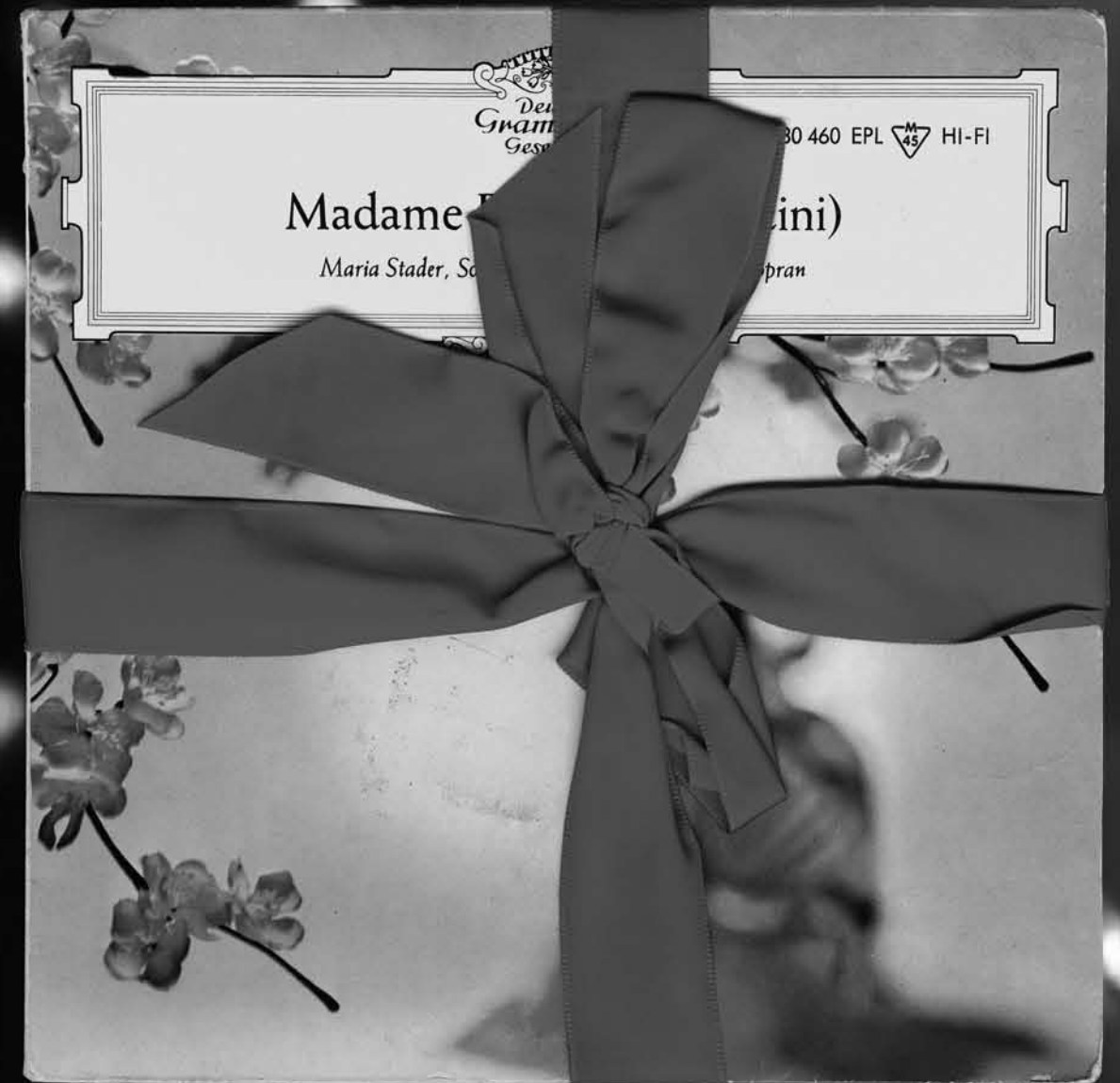
² from the World Game, R. Buckminster Fuller 1971.



Honig



Fessig



Ars Gratia Democracy

By: Marisol Rodriguez

Does art have anything to do with democracy? It is hard to say. It has a lot to do with politics; in some places they are almost synonyms. In Mexico, culture and politics are indeed synonyms; the definition of art is blurry and is generally applied, with certainty, only when referring to a few individuals certified by some exhibition abroad or a mention in a current biennale.

In my country, it is a common saying that everybody speaks of the amusement park –or feria- according to how was it for them, maybe because in Mexico those parks are not subject to security regulations and the possibilities of turning out harmless and happy are the same as those of dying crushed by the wheel of fortune.

Democracy, according to the definition offered by the Dictionary of the Royal Spanish Academy –maximum linguistic authority for all Spanish-speaking countries of the world- stands for the political doctrine that agrees with the participation of the people in the government or the pre-eminence of the people in the political government of a state.

In my experience, democracy is a rhetorical figure representing an illusion of prosperity in which the country, in some determined and surprising moment will shake free of all the ancient vices carried since it's founding as a nation and will reborn as a shining, clean new being without corruption, violence, murders, illiteracy, extreme poverty and ignorance; where the arts and the sciences will rule, turning Mexico into a great country, a leader among the concert of nations. (Add recorded applauses)

In reality, the one and only participation that the people has in the political government of the state, is the right to vote and being elected, a right whose actual performance was hotly and highly criticized after the outcome of the massive *opera buffa* created by the presidential elections last July 2006, in

which the so called left wing¹ candidate lose and created a massive witch hunt of the rich and politically influential and a general polarization between those who “supported the poor” and those that, when directly faced with the maddening blocking of streets and avenues during rush hours, just to mention a couple of the conflicts, hated them for supporting the candidate that still today calls himself The Legitimate President, and has an operational budget paid by, thank you very much, we all, tax payers.

Beyond this, democracy can be understood in terms of access to services, to information, to justice and to art, naturally, all of this conditioned by the difficulties imposed by a bureaucratic system whose rules are applied or not as convenient to the shifting terms of corruption and the interests of the minority that handles the policies of the country.

To discuss democracy and its relationship to art in Mexico is to enter, forcefully, in political matters, where the personal posture and culture of the President of the Republic and his Cabinet, notwithstanding the cultural policies *per-se*, plays a role almost as important as these.

When this text was originally written, Vicente Fox was the president. His role as head of the nation was like an endless anthology of bloopers, the kind one sees in the silent screens of a mall's food court. As watching little Chihuahuas playing the piano, boy scouts lighting bonfires just to end up with their scarves afire, wild crashes among go-carts or super formula-1 speed cars, that was how we perceived for six years a lightly educated, efficient and intelligent national leader. Some of the most memorable moments in terms of the presidential culture include the visit of President Fox, together with the then Secretary of Culture, Sary Bermudez, to the Mausoleum of First Emperor Qin where Fox, with his entourage of lackeys, started to play hide-and-seek among the ancient terracotta warriors and to photograph with terribly offensive flashes in the horrified faces of the Chinese guards and diplomats.

However, those are long gone days, or so we thought.

In December 2006, Felipe Calderon Hinojosa assumed the Presidency of the Republic for a period of six years. When introducing his presidential cabinet and his austerity programs, Sergio Vela Martinez was appointed Secretary of Culture. Vela, a lawyer by trade, but an important figure in the cultural scenario of the country since the early nineties, declared to the media, in his first public interview, that he was not going to “defend the cultural budget”, but instead he will accept a “modest panorama”. His statements, beside creating polemic commentaries since the budgetary restrictions to the cultural sector had already being instituted during the six year term of Fox, became ironic after his later performance.

Vela, a specialist on Law History and distinguished faculty member from the Escuela Libre de Derecho, one of the most prestigious in the country, began in 2007 an administration plagued by inconsistencies, now a favourite topic in the national media. Vela pleads himself to be “non guilty and honest”, even after the following figures: 1, 120 million pesos were not applied even though they were already assigned to specific programs, from these, 450 million were under-executed, while the rest were given a rank as petty cash², out of this fund came Mexico-Houston airplane tickets (a one and a half hour flight) at 2000 US dollars each, also his fiancée tickets so that they could both fly together and, in general, plenty of cash to over-spend his travelling allowances in all his national and international travels³.

Although this behaviour is in no way an exclusivity of Mexico, it is still alarming that the misplacing and embellishment of public funds from a centralized public institution keeps being one of the biggest problems present in a country that maintains itself fighting, in spite of the political forces and its leaders, directors and activists, from those in the higher echelons of power to those in the lower bureaucratic positions within the government, in order to obtain and maintain public forums free of political or ideological ties.

Vela’s performance repeats itself as an echo all around the country. The lack of interest and understanding and the numerous excesses in the bureaucratic work *per se* expose themselves in subjective decisions taken in important

scenarios by self-proclaimed powerful curators. The latest potential scandal arrives courtesy of the performance artist, professor and bureaucrat Pancho Lopez who, on behalf of the Museo Universitario del Chopo –a traditional museum due to his experimental character- issues and invitation for the *Sixth Encuentro Internacional de Performance, Performagia 2008*, stating and underlining that performance is good as long as it presents “the problems, the mourning by the loss of a dear one, the fears and our anguish”. It is no good or, it is “not allowed” when, according to López, “nonsense is made, just for the sake of doing it, to take the monsters out without a reason, a show for the sake of showing, as if it was pornography⁴”. After this shocking statement, the basis for the encounter are laid out, with rules that ambiguously forbid “the use of animals, fire or substances that place the security of the artists, the audience or the exhibition halls at risk⁵” a condition that, if enforced, would have made impossible at least a good part of the history of performance.

This “cultural” mess will remind the reader of similar situations in their own contexts, situations that, apparently, have been getting worst after the terrorist attacks of 9/11.

Guillermo Gómez Peña, the “Mexterminator” has been reacting in a critical form through performance and photography, confronting the political and identity crisis present in America for the last 20 years. Gómez Peña has known how to present the hypocrite racism and evident discrimination that plagues the continent, from north to south, where the big capitals benefit from the cheap workforce, smiling as they hold benefit galas against breast cancer back home, while at the maquilera’s neighborhoods children born brainless due to the well documented high exposure to toxic substances at factories; the governments, conveniently adjust themselves to a production system based in the devastation of the human capital and the natural resources of their own nations, and at the same time they do everything to block any initiative aimed at providing a better quality of life for the exploited, call them Latinos in the US or any other pariah in a foreign land, or even in his own land.

Gómez Peña's career follows two decades of history, art and politics in Mexico, the US and Europe. In a 2006 text published originally in *The Drama Review*, the artist takes a look at the new problematic that his *performance troupe*, *La Pocha Nostra*, has faced during the last eight years:

"In this (post 9/11) rarefied atmosphere of paranoia, distrust and scrutiny, performance artists have come to signify "potential trouble" for U.S. art institutions. We are invited with provisos, interrogated in advance by curators. It's a new American art rite.

The cultural institution decides to go ahead with the project, but still has apprehensions. We are taken to a nice art bar and, after a few drinks –bless his/her heart- the curator or presenter takes a deep breath and starts the euphemistic interrogation:

Is this performance "audience friendly"? (A euphemism for art without venom or sharp edges.) Anything we should be worried about? Frontal nudity? Violence and sex? (The deadly combo.) Bloodletting? Exposure to bodily fluids? Will your performers touch any audience member inappropriately? Will you force any audience member to do anything that might be considered humiliating or offensive? Any profanity? Any disrespect for religious imagery? Will there be flag desecration? Will you be making fun of the troops?"

Besides these *in-situ* controls, *La Pocha Nostra* has been subject to a never-ending number of searches by the Homeland Security Agency that, in every airport, searches and retains a great deal of their props and costumes, not before taking a good look at the agendas and personal objects of the artists. This situation has forced Gómez Peña to survive thanks to his presentations in Europe, where the freedom and intellect of the artist are highly appreciated, without regard for the form in which these values are communicated.

Facing these systematic violations on a national scale in a country whose cultural industry does not compare with the one in Mexico, the euphemisms of

Pancho López sound like pathetic babblings in the world of cultural censorship. Which could be something good, but it is not.

One of the expressions of democracy is the right and obligation of the citizens to watch out for it, to take care of that liberty that does not come in a combo with power and the interests of corporations nor with politics. The democratic obligation to participate, voice out their opinions and demand from the institutions a better performance or a clear and impartial account rendition is not one executed in this country, hardly at all, by the citizens.

In the fields of art, culture, politics, public function, health sector, services, the private sector and a much-extended etcetera, these right and obligation to demand honesty, development and change is almost non-existent. We sail in a sea of skepticism, cynicism, apathy, ignorance, intolerance, impotency and corruption. All of this reflects in our cultural and artistic production, and not necessarily in a way that criticizes that ocean of obstacles placed and held eternally by none other than ourselves, but in a manner that almost seems to celebrate that lack of commitment and action. We are poor and ignorant and that makes us special and exotic, it is almost a plus.

In the galleries, there is an endless flow of new artists that contribute very little to an insufferable self-referential art panorama that only rarely tries, and almost exclusively as a special project, to immerse itself into the socio-cultural or socio-political environment. Of course there are exceptions, or at least so it seems.

In July 2008, the Walter Art Center from Minneapolis, together with the prestigious Jumex Collection –part of the private Mexican corporation with the same name that has become the main sponsor of art and cultural development projects in Mexico and that is –contrasting with any other museum in the country that does not have a budget for the acquisition of art works- the most active in terms of collection development and exhibition of contemporary art in the capital of the country- presented the exhibition *Brave New World*, BNW, named after the well-known novel by Aldous Huxley "A Brave New World", known in Mexico as *Un Mundo Feliz*.

In different formats, BNW presented critics to capitalism, to the exploitation of the national and migrant work force and, in general, to the problems that global societies, not only in their economic systems, but also in their processes of social, ideological and ecological decomposition, have in common.

Putting the effort and the quality of the exhibition aside, the curatorial actions of the Jumex Collection help us to set an example: from 24 artists in the exhibition, only one was Mexican, the conceptual artist Gabriel Kuri.

Apart from this, the leitmotifs of the national art are the same and only in rare occasions they touch the hot spots, unless those spots manifest in funny ways, “wink” at the spectator with a local joke or an anecdote rapidly represented in pastel colors and bright acrylics.

Jean Dubuffet gave ample thought to the ideas on the universe of culture and art, on the cultural space and its asphyxiating nature.

For Dubuffet, the artist, instead of enjoying the freedom of his spirit, conforms himself and is carried by the wish to overcome, of being exclusive and take advantage of the privileges. “Imitation defeats originality, a casual happening the imagination”. The same cultural mechanisms that limit art and impose ominous regulations are the ones that set the parameters of creation, those that the artists happily follow in order to please the curator in the first place, and then the crowds, who in turn, are educated by the same curators and artists, to avoid confrontation or reflection, rather finding a simple reaffirmation of the *status quo*, just another show.

Going back to the original question, Does art have something to do with democracy? Seems to me that it has everything to do with it, even when things at the fairground look like the wheel of fortune is going to crush all the children.

Deep down, the problem of artistic production in my country is one of education, of equal access to opportunities, a sentence that denies itself right away, since

a country in which more than 40% of the population lives below the extreme poverty level can not even conceive the words “equal access to opportunities”.

Then, what is there to do? To think of a development of democracy and a general improvement of living conditions, therefore, of the culture of the nation, should be a priority, not for the government, but for the educated citizenship in the first place. Likewise, we can not expect an intelligent art production if the mechanisms of authentication of art are dictated exclusively by market forces, or the esthetic values are imposed by fashion, a situation where “art” has transformed into just another branch of graphic design, but with a costly and limited production; over valued till the destruction of its theoretical fundamentals, if it ever had any.

The practical interactions between art and democracy begin since the first exposure of a child to a work of art, to a visual or sensorial statement that has to be decoded and translated again according to the experiences and creativity of the young viewer. This abstract experience, this early exploration not only exposes the children to one of the greatest esthetic and intellectual experiences in their own contexts, but makes them develop the abstract thinking that will help them to give a better and more agile resolution to problems along their lives. The Fundación Cisneros, through the *Patricia Cisneros de Phelps Collection*, one of the most famous and active in all America, has created a program with these characteristics, *Piensa en Arte*, devoted to traveling Latin American countries, bringing art to the children and their teachers in underdeveloped areas, in a systematized way, based in pedagogical principles and concrete actions of proved efficacy.

But then, for all the others that do not have the benefits of a *Fundación Cisneros*, a program of education in the art, or not even a respectable basic education, what is there to do?

The change, as if it was a demand made to a large corporation, most come from the consumer; from all of us who chose to remain unaware of politics, social differences and the misgivings of a decadent democracy. From us who

do not demand change or quality while at the same time, complain of their inexistence; from us who consume the same cultural products that have passed the official censorship and are left mutilated because they did not conform to the ideological models of the day.

In the sixties, Andy Warhol created an artistic movement that went to rub in the face of all the modernists that art was not the one that affected life; it is life that creates art. All the apparently insignificant things that surround our life are, in fact, the same ones that signify it, which is why we now put them in a pedestal. But maybe it is time to give a second chance to those old statements from the early XX century, when it was believed that cooperation, struggle and art could indeed make a change, and were forced to make it, an obligation to create the new, to give a new significance to life.

1. Another leftover from modernity, in which it is believed that from among all the political decomposition of the country an individual can rise –Andrés Manuel López Obrador, someone who has been almost permanently surrounded by the harshest and acrimonious criticism when he remained stoically stone-faced in front of the video taped frauds and money grabbing of several of his closest collaborators- and represent the national hopes for legality and the abolition of poverty. The left in Mexico actually represents nothing more than the central-right, only slightly different, by inches, from the right as represented by the presidency party.

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An artist who cannot speak English is no artist!

—Mladen Stilinovic, 1997



THROW THIS PAGE AWAY!

Hilary Koob-Sassen
London, 2008

Faith in Infrastructure

Terror has a suitably slow-rolling and tepid name: Global Warming.
This is the perfect terrain for syntactical elaborationism.
It is dangerous. But we are errorists: We announce our error. In exchange we ask for liberty to practice being in time.

Durability is traction on change: Durability is a measure of how closely the momentum of a structure's change navigates the actual contours of reality as they unfold.
A genome undergoing natural selection is like a phrase constantly trying to name reality more accurately. 'Adaptation' can be understood as the successful inclusion of experiences into that range of reality to which a lineage of creatures can respond.

With the accumulation of shit, the structural residues/artificial depositions of life create evolutionary feedback, favoring the development of a materialism. Materialism's creature builds structures, and then adapts to them. The creature eventually comes to fit so perfectly to the built structure, that its success relies less upon the genetic evolution of its own body than upon the material elaboration of these built external organs.

Over time, new layers of structure are built upon the old. The older layers subside from direct experience to become the foundation for the next. The aqueducts have disappeared- we have faith in the subterranean pipes. Upon this faith we buy a house. Upon this faith we live in New Orleans. An evil experience for a structure is the same as for a living thing: the floods were outside of the range of experiences to which the structure could respond. The levee breaks. No hidden capacity: no preternatural burst of adrenaline allows the slipping deer to spring to a foothold, no particularly well-fashioned piece of levee exceeds its nominal strength and endures. No response. These two distinct syntaxes- genetic and materialist- must name reality faster than it changes. Otherwise, reality deletes them.

The mechanism of evolution, 'natural selection', can only 'select' from amongst the range of mutations that happen to occur. Another constraint is added by the mechanism of elaboration: a sequence of structural complexification driven by 'subsidence to foundational relevance'. The parasympathetic system, which regulates breathing, is ancient. It was tested over millions of years. Its functions subsided from first-hand activity to become a foundation for the development of higher functions. A durable response to the most deleterious experiences must be named first. From this foundation, the DNA or materialism can cantilever outwards and forwards to develop responses to more abstract aspects of reality.

KEEP THIS PAGE!

The relative durability of a creature, culture or culture-structure—or indeed the durability of all of Life itself-- the horsepower of its traction on change—the speed with which it advances into future experience—Life’s durability is a function of the efficiency of its experiential metabolism and the domain of its activity.

Life’s metabolism: The efficiency with which it translates an experience into a foundation for further experience. How quickly and how *absorbently*- to how many of its constituents. *To how much of itself can Life present the opportunity* to know an experience, develop a structural response, and then move that structure on down into the faith zone.

Life’s domain: the breadth and depth of matter to which and with which it can develop a response. How realistic is its picture of reality and how realistic is its materialism. Can we sculpt atoms, molecules, life forms, planets....just about.

In time, the materialism strings together a messy phrase: a piled-up foundation silhouetted against the sky. A bridge that supports procession forward in time, that supports a teetering errorist tapping on the noumenon. But its over-cantilevered foundation cannot support a response to the warming water below. Economic bubbles, sandbagging levees and subsidies for ethanol can be characterized as “thrashing about”- an attempt to surmount an evil experience by rampantly generating small proposals- in the hopes of developing a response. To make the great leap-- to organize the sky itself into art—we must first justify our faith in infrastructure.

Memorialisation or Demoralisation? **Memory, reconciliation and representation in the city of Cape Town, South Africa.**

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©Roderick Sauls, 2006

I am a ... liberated ... ambivalent ... diverse ... being on the outskirts of the city. Here I experience the moment to love, the moment to hate, the moment to remember, and the moment to forget. Cityscape! Ghetto land! Should I remember? Dare I forget? Just for a brief moment, I though I was a South African. Not a coloured... a citizen. Not a slave... a human. Not a native... a foreigner. An injured being, crawling from a township to the city, scavenging the street grids for hope... for vision... for reconciliation.

Awakening my soul, my seventh sense derailed to view my memory. Was not my birth here? I followed my surviving consciousness, seeking cognition, perception and sensation. My senses were scanning the web made of confusion, nervously discovering landmarks of guilt and frustration. Wondering in the city was still the same. No one saw me; no one knew me as I gathered the unhappy remains. An invisible being that once followed in the footsteps of those who reigned, those who gained and those with less pained. Leaving behind the other, who had never been part of the humanity game.

It was just a few years ago that mom, dad, my sister and I enjoyed doing window-shopping, while others had to leave the city. Some moved to well known places; some were forced to move to unknown spaces. Mom, dad and the family were forced to follow later. The remains of the churches, mosques and bulldozed tarmacs and cobbled roads were witnesses to what once existed in the city. No, these were not the only landmarks of history! The contemporary boulevard and Technikon might have something to say! These 'witnesses' bear the history of strangers who came from the sea; of neighbours who came from beyond the mountain, and of the regional natives. A journey down a lane that was once known as Hanover Street, passing the architectural landmarks such as the St Marks church, the Moravian Hill

chapel and getting a view of the Aspeling Street mosque, hinted at those who had once shared a city... a district... a moment.

Colonial powers! Indigenous savages! Christian crusaders! Malay slaves! Dutch settlers! Bushmen vermin! British Empire! Xhosa warriors! Segregation between European and African; between Afrikaner and coloured; between African and coloured; between British and Dutch; between European and Asian; between Moslem and Christian; between Malay and Jew; between black, white and coloured! Identities were tattooed into the mind and flesh as if humanity did not exist. The Cape became known as the Cape of Storms, and long before segregation ended, the Cape of Good Hope. The city... the mother, who fostered her orphans and gave birth to her colonial slaves. Her neighbour bore witness to lepers... slaves... freedom fighters... activists who fought against all forms of injustice

And then came... consciousness... memory... the past, as horrible or pleasant as it might be, to guide the present into a humane future. Conscious of being... of being a human... of being a native... of being a slave... of being a coloured... of being a South African... of being an African. This is my memory. This is my pride. This is my freedom.

(Sauls, 2004)¹

Memo(), demo() ... and mo()

They (victims) have waited long, too long for their reparations. As a nation we have a legal but, more importantly, a moral obligation to honour in paying reparations – Archbishop Desmond Tutu.

(Naidu, E. 2004)

Is the reconciliation of the past in a contemporary democracy only about healing? Or is it also about feeling? This is something that many of the citizens of the city of Cape Town, South Africa, have not even begun to deal with. Authorities are so concerned about changing the material status of the historically disenfranchised that they often overlook the fact that many of the communities are still struggling with their past experiences. Is there a need to change the many imbalances within our society? Need they be rectified? The majority of white citizens² have not experienced the traumas that the historically disenfranchised have encountered. How do they expect the 'survivors of apartheid' to heal, if many of them do not (or do not even attempt

to) understand the feelings of the 'survivors'? Charlotte Delbo enlightens about the terrible erasure of a capacity for feeling:

The survivor must undertake to regain his memory, regain what he possessed before, his experience, his childhood memories, his manual dexterity and his intellectual faculties, sensitivity, the capacity to dream, imagine, laugh.³

While Noor Nieftagodien, during an interview in 2003, commented on 'Black and White' reconciliation:

I think that black people in general have bent over backwards to reconcile, and I think that says a lot about South Africans ... I want to make this point again that symbolism can only play a very small part in solving our problems.⁴

In 2006, in the city of Cape Town in particular, the diverse cultural groups are still negotiating and constructing their identities. They are still in turmoil with issues of racism, power structures, community relationships and land ownership. There is still very little integration. There is the struggle of 'cultural' education, such as in the areas of language, religion and art, within teaching institutions. There still exists segregation, isolation, marginalisation and manipulation. There is a profusion of poverty stricken communities and a high rate of unemployment. There is a major problem with drugs and gangsterism among the youth. Many still need to negotiate their past in order to inscribe a collective history. These are some of the many upheavals the city's communities still have to face in a 'reconciling' democracy.

More than ten years ago, the question of apartheid public sculptures was at the forefront of debates in public forums, such as the press and broadcasting media. Concerns about the past were debated among academics at conferences such as 'Myths, Monuments, Museums'⁵. Politicians used the sensitive topic 'memory' as a 'tool' to generate political support and businessmen sought it as an opportunity for exposure. Memory, the negotiator, the mediator, the constructor, the informer, the presenter of a liberation struggle, transformed into a democratic contest.

"Concrete is easier to change than reality"

(Disgraced Monuments, 1994)

We buried them for what they were
our fallen heroes and our history ...

A monument in our hearts we shall mount – Sepamla
(Naidu, E. 2004)

During 2004 the councillors and other social welfare organisations of the city started debating the representation of the heritage of the historically disenfranchised communities still residing on the fringes (known as the Cape Flats⁶) of the city of Cape Town. There was deemed to be an urgency to represent the heritage of the 'poor'. The apartheid legacies of the marginalised sector were required to transform into public sculptures almost immediately. Statues were required to be erected on chosen sites, with plaques inscribing the histories of selected heroes and idols. Is there a need for the representation of selected heroism or is there a need for the research of a collective history? Bea Abrahams⁷ commented in an interview:

I think memory has been used very selectively ... yes, there are people who made a hell of a contribution to this country [and] to the liberation struggle, and it's not always possible to recognise everybody. But I believe there needs to be an attempt to do that.
(Naidu, E. 2004)

For example, why was there an urgency to memorialise the history of the victims of the Trojan horse⁸ and not the history of the first victim of the youth uprising who died on the Cape Flats? What about all the heroes of the colonial era, who fought and died for the liberation struggle after the first stranger came ashore? Who are or who will be the selectors of these historical events and artworks? Melvyn Minnaar, author of a newspaper article entitled "How the past is cast provides fodder for new debate" questioned participation "... But who will take part in such talks, and, more importantly, who will cast the voting decision?"⁹ (Minnaar 2005)

With this in mind, one needs to express the concerns of some of the black artists and academics when they talk about; "who controls and are controlled by the institutions/infrastructure that determine visual art productions" (Goniwe 2004). "It's [selection] not simply on the basis of talent and work – the art world is a social one as much as it's a business one ... who you know and who they know. It's a sphere of friends, patrons ... curators ... journalist ... lecturers ..." ¹⁰

Black politicians, on the other hand, want to implement changes to the landscape of the poor communities, to quote Nomaindia Mfeketo, the city's mayor during 2000 and 2005, at the unveiling of the memorials in the Cape Flats, "With these memorials the city wishes to recognise the commitment and sacrifice of these young people".

The question for many is how are these changes implemented? What do they mean to the poor in this present day? Do the poor want quick-fix solutions or long-term conditions? For Sauls, Hlati, and other artists from these poor communities, one of the questions is do the poor need representation entertainment or representation education?

This essay is not a discussion of the artists and their work or an unfolding of memorialisation, but an attempt to address and question some of the issues within the arts' and humanities' arenas, which are often not publicly debated and are often pushed aside as 'black anger'. To do this, the essay will look at two processes that occurred during the final stages of the selection of the artist(s) who were to be commissioned to produce public sculptures. The first process will briefly be discussed and then the writer will inform of his personal experience in the second process.

Jon Brunberg's analysis of the process of creating war memorials clearly highlights controversies as a necessary ingredient of the healing process. He states that "You could even argue that it is possible to determine how well a state manages to handle the aftermath of a conflict by analysing the public's reaction to a memorial."

On November 29, 2004 the artist Sipho Hlati¹¹ was invited by the City of Cape Town Heritage Project Manager Bridget O'Donoghue to serve on the adjudication panel for the proposed memorial sculpture project for the 'Gugulethu Seven'¹². It transpired on the adjudication committee¹³ that 'an artist was needed on board to complete the panel'.

The recommendation and endorsement of the artist were from visual artist, writer and poet Peter Clarke and the director of the Iziko National Gallery of South Africa Marilyn Martin, respectively. Clarke was invited as part of the adjudication panel, but after he declined the invitation, he recommended Hlati for the position. It is interesting that the recommendation from Clarke, an internationally acknowledged

local artist, was not enough for Hlati to be on the panel, that it first had to be endorsed by Martin. As Hlati recalls:

In my everyday practice of visual arts, power, authority, legislation, voice, agency, identity, history and representation in South Africa, Africa, and the world are issues I am preoccupied with and struggle to comprehend. Therefore, it is of utmost importance to me how and by whom I am invited. In the meeting I was told that the city council approached Martin because she is 'an expert in the field of art'. Based on her continuous enunciations of 'we in the arts', I asked myself whom was this white person representing?¹⁴

(Hlati 2006)

On 15 of December 2004, at the City of Cape Town's Civic Centre Tower Block, a panel of adjudicators convened to judge the artists'¹⁵ submissions¹⁶. The first meeting was for the 'adjudication of artists submissions for memorial sculpture' and the second one was for the panel to meet the artist or artists whose work had been chosen.

Hlati explained that according to the adjudicators' brief to the artists, the artist(s) whose work was chosen had to 'complete the work by 25 February 2005'. This was 'dictated by the requirement that the memorial be unveiled on the 19th anniversary of the killing of the Gugulethu Seven on 3 March 2005'. Minnaar in his article questioned the silent unveiling of the Gugulethu Seven artwork as follows:

Not one decent picture appears in any newspaper. No one is told who made the monument, paid for it or planned it. 'Context', that charming buzzword of postmodernism is avoided altogether. Let the memorial speak for itself. But can it, in this day and age?

(2005: 10)

On 13 April 2005 the Planning and Environment Section of the Cape Town City Council invited another group of artists¹⁷ from Cape Town to participate in a meeting to inform them of what memorial sites were chosen to erect two public sculptures. The two memorial sites chosen were Klipfontein Road, allocated for the Robbie Waterwich/Caroline Williams¹⁸ memorial, and Thornton Road for the Trojan Horse Ambush¹⁹. Both of these sites are situated in a residential area or 'township'²⁰ known as Athlone²¹.

The agenda consisted of the chairperson's announcing the background to the public sculpture competition; site descriptions and improvement proposals; competition requirements; the adjudication process; and implementation and budget. During this announcement, emphasis was placed on the importance of the completion dates for the two public sculptures set by the mayor's office. The proposals and marquette submission date was the 26 April 2005. The competition adjudication panel, which would consist of five members comprising members of the local authority, prominent art experts and a heritage professional, would meet on the 28 April 2005. The winner of the competition would have from the 29 April to the 8 June 2005 to manufacture the art piece. The installation of the work would have take place from the 9 June to the 13 June, to be ready for unveiling on the 16 June 2005 (Youth Day). The chosen artist(s) had two months to complete a representation of an event within the 'popular' memory²² of a historically disenfranchised community.

The artists were given an opportunity to ask questions after the important announcement of the public art competition. The artists Roderick Sauls²³ and Sipho Hlati immediately raised concerns about the urgency of the completion for the two public sculptures and queried the limited time given to create and install artworks of such a significant historical nature. Their reason for raising these concerns was that the day that would remain in the hearts and minds of many of the communities in the Cape Flats occurred on the 15 October 1985. Why not celebrate the unveiling on 16 June 2006 or on 15 October 2006? As Hlati suggested, a billboard announcing the erection of such a monument would have served the council's purpose as well.

Sauls and Hlati continued to place the emphasis on the importance of the historical event and its meaning in the struggle for liberation. They questioned the limited time for research and the need to get familiar with the site, environment, community, families and friends of the victims and the artist's own experiences and memories. Communities' concerns, initiatives and engagement to the procedure were highlighted as well. Answers to these questions were limited, and brief explanations, such as "The families approved" and "This was requested by the mayor and politicians" were given. The artists felt that survivors often need education about memorialisation, and they felt that the community members had little power to negotiate with government about these issues. Nieftagodien felt strongly that:

You have to go and say to people, “these are your options, these are the different approaches we can play [with]”, because people have not been involved in this kind of project; it’s new [to them].
(Naidu, E. 2004)

This discussion led to an explanation by the council representatives of the process used for the erection of the memorial to the martyred Seven in Gugulethu. The artist, Hlati, who was part of this process, questioned the fact that the process for both competitions was similar. He emphasised that those councillors and politicians involved did not learn anything from concerns raised during the previous process. During an interview Ciraj Rassool²⁴ emphasised the importance of education around the processes of memorialisation:

But government’s main role in this regard, in order for these to come in existence ... there needs to be this cadre of memory workers
(Naidu, E. 2004)

At the end of the meeting the chairperson felt that he had announced what the Mayor and her office had requested and that the competition would go ahead as planned. There was a desire among some of the artists that matters arising from the discussion should be reviewed with regard to what should be done next. The artists involved were e-mailed and a meeting at the Arts and Media Access Centre (AMAC)²⁵ was planned.

A week after the 13 April meeting, the Planning and Environment section contacted the individual artists that attended the first meeting to discuss the ‘new’ date agreed upon by the mayor’s office. Some artists felt that there was no need for further discussion and that the battle for an extension was won. Hlati and Sauls felt that the discussion had only begun. The debate about the city’s social history and art discourse between Sauls and Hlati, on the one hand, and the Council, on the other, grew and became intense. These artists’ concern was definitely more than just ‘limited time’. It was also about ‘limited feeling’.

The follow-up meeting was arranged, and the same artists and one other gathered at the City Council’s Planning and Environment section. The meeting started off on a note of joy about the extension given by the mayor’s office. The new date for the unveiling of the public sculptures was 24 September 2005. Anger got the better of the chairperson as Hlati once again questioned the importance of the

history. Sauls contributed by adding to this the disrespect shown to the artists – not only disrespect to the artists, but to the communities, to the significance of the historical event and to the families.

During the discussions about the Trojan Horse Memorial, the chairperson announced that the original memorial erected by the artist, Tyrone Appollis²⁶, would be demolished. Sauls immediately enquired whether Appollis was consulted. The chairperson said that Appollis was consulted and that he agreed to its destruction to allow for the creation of the new public sculpture.

The meeting ended with an adamant chairperson leaving and a continuation of heated debate between the remaining city council officials and Hlati and Sauls. Hlati and Sauls persisted with their views on the importance of the history of apartheid on the Cape Flats and the disrespect shown to artists from this area. For these artists, this was only the tip of the iceberg. For them, many questions were left unanswered.

... healing the feeling ... feeling the healing... in a democracy ...

We must deal effectively, penitently with our past or it will return to haunt our present and we won’t have a future to speak of.
(Archbishop Desmond Tutu)

The questions that came to mind were: Why were the artists of the city not part of the planning of the site and the selection of the historical events? Are they not part of the history? Are they not citizens who make contributions and pay taxes? Do many of them not spend years studying towards degrees? Are they not capable of doing research? Are they only crafters? Do they need healing? Do they have feelings?

Appollis, at a public meeting to debate ‘memory and representation’, held in June 2005, at the Cape Town City Hall, went and sat next to Sauls and expressed his feelings through his poetry:

BEAU –ROCK ---CRICITY
The day they broke my sculpture
My wife stitched my tattered soul
And redressed my shattered hope
She Rebuilt my courage to face

Skyscrapers of meaning

So I picked up my dented chisel
Walked along that cemented road
a vision engraved in my soul
relocating me behind a public toilet

Where vagrants parked their
Shopping trolley dreams
And stamped out barefoot prints
Against the pavement of hypocrisy

the group of hope lifted my spirit level
helped by the manager of a glue factory
we stuck together broken pieces
erecting a new monument for fallen heroes
sculpted hands washed in tears of joy

the mayor arrived with body guards
she fell flat on her burner
neatly picked up by the judges decision
to lift the moratorium on perception
allowing me freedom of beau- rock- cricity

copyright tyrone appollis
proudly african²⁷

The history of the marginalised communities of the Cape Flats was written by those outside its boundaries. For this reason, many of the 'truths' of apartheid's evils were ignored and disguised. The communities never had a fair opportunity to narrate their experiences of the apartheid onslaught. During the recent meeting of the public sculpture competitions, a brief history was handed to the artists. This was all they needed for the creation of a public sculpture for a 'coloured' community's history? Once again Minnaar commented:

In art, as in politics, power and influence, visibility and sweet talk, are the tools of the trade. It does not always deliver the historically durable, the publicly pleasing in matters such as monuments.

Is the assumption that artists from the Cape Flats do not research their subject matter? Or is it assumed that artists from the Cape Flats are amateur 'township' artists? They did not study fine art or never

studied any form of art making? Are they only good enough to cut linoleum blocks, use their hands and not their minds? Is there no respect for the artists from the Cape Flats in this city? Or for their history? Lungile Maninjwa²⁸, the artist who recreated the original 'modest memorial' (as described by a city council employer) of the Gugulethu Seven, shared his grief to Sauls and Hlati by recalling his words that were published in March, 2000:

The monument will be here permanently as a reminder of our past and the tragedy that occurred here.
(Kemp,Yunus:2000)²⁹

He continued:

They did not consult me about their plans to destroy my memory of the brothers who sacrificed their lives for me. They did not even have the decency to invite me to partake in the competition or to celebrate the unveiling of the new monument. I knew of nothing.

Many artists were born in the city and on the Cape Flats. Some experienced the onslaught of apartheid personally. For example, Sauls was born in District Six³⁰, and was forced to leave his home in the city to reside on the Cape Flats. His teenage years were spent in Bonteheuwel and Athlone, where he experienced the apartheid uprising. Hlati experience similar conditions in Gugulethu. Both studied visual art practice and theory at the University of Cape Town. History plays an integral part in their art works.

To them, the most important issue was that of educating the community about the legacies of apartheid and the building of a better society. They question whether it is not possible to allocate funding for scholarships and bursaries to our tertiary (art) students to research the importance of introducing memory projects and arts in our school systems; or to design a three dimensional walk-in public sculpture that could accommodate memorial lectures, exhibitions and general community educational projects. Could the millions not be allocated towards such an education or creation? Nieftagodien states his concern about the importance of symbolism and rehabilitative social constructs:

...Memorialisation is important in the same way that I think uncovering the past [is], making the past known to current

generations is an important project ... but I also think that it should be an area of contestation

(Naidu 2004)

There are other concerns such as employment for struggling artists from the city. Is this the form of job creation for the struggling artists in the city? In our city, who are these artists? Where are they from – the underprivileged Cape Flats or the privileged Southern and Northern suburbs? Is the toss up between education and proper housing for the poor and million-rand job creation for a few struggling artists? Is this the only form of job creation for the needy artists in the city? What about utilising artists as educators within the transforming education system? This is an integral part of the debate. Why was this not part of the public sculpture debate or on the city's agenda?

The urgency of creating public monuments among the 'poor' communities on the Cape Flats also needs to be questioned. Firstly, for many years the shortage of homes for the 'poor' was negotiated. Now, after many years, tiny 'single-unit' family homes have been erected on the outskirts of the apartheid 'townships'. Nkosinathi Biko³¹ felt that:

There's a need to balance the delivery on some of the social quandaries ... and the symbolic stuff that is taking place. In other words, it's well and good to take John Vorster bridge and rename it Steve Biko bridge ... and then we will put up a statue or something else the other week, but if there're no houses built that week, then its only a matter of time before the programme collapses

(Naidu 2004)

Why the urgent need to spend millions immediately on a few memorials? City councillors have years to investigate the recreation of homes for the poor, but only weeks to unveil a million rand public sculpture. During October 2006, the Friends of the South African National Gallery hosted an event for the 'rich citizens' of the city to visit the memorials on the Cape Flats³². Do these monuments provide the 'gateway' into the crime-ridden Cape Flats for the city's liberals?

Then there is the question of the time and funding allocated for 'outsiders'³³ to record and research the history of the historically disenfranchised cultures, regardless of whether the end results are flawed or not. Is it not possible to spend more time and funding to engage in more locally recorded oral and visual history research to

create a more meaningful discourse and erect more appropriate sites for the historically disenfranchised community's education?

Minnaar also reports the recent remark by a University of the Western Cape thinker, Tony Holiday, who felt strongly that the city's mayor should get rid of the Cecil John Rhodes bronze statue in the Company Gardens. This remark sparked the more than ten-year-old 'Boerassic Park'³⁴ debate. Minnaar repeats 'And the subject is terrifying those with a sense of civic aesthetics.' Is this the reason for the urgent creation of statues of apartheid heroes on the Cape Flats? Why do the politicians within a democratic structure live in the shadows of the colonial and apartheid politicians by continuing to use the arts as a form of representing power and authority, repeating what Nieftagodien has argued, 'replacing white men (*heroes*) with black men (*heroes*)'? What about memorialisation with (South) African criteria? Are there no other or more imaginary, meaningful and democratic uses for the arts?

Many citizens feel that the representations of the colonial and apartheid history in the cityscape should be demolished and dumped in the sea. Is this the solution to our city's monuments? Other citizens feel the need to have their history represented in the city, like the Trojan Horse Memorial in Adderley Street, a city thoroughfare. Are the Cape Flats' 'quick fix' memorials a solution to the healing process?

The writers conclusion to this is 'there will be very little healing, if there is very little feeling'. Reconciliation will occur if there is sharing, and in this perception, the writer was guided to some recommendations from research done at the Centre for the Study of Violence and Reconciliation (2004):

- Memorialisation as a form of symbolic reparation should be dealt with in a sustained and fundamental manner.
- The approach to memorialisation should be community and people driven rather than politically driven.
- To ensure that communities are able to initiate projects and effectively articulate their needs, information and education programs concerning memorialisation should precede all projects.
- The community, with advice and support from social and cultural activists, should lead the curation and creation of memorial spaces.
- Consultation processes should be aimed at ensuring the broad participation of all stakeholders and should focus on the range of needs that are a part of the memorialisation process.

- The state needs to shift its political focus around memorialisation in its honouring of great men and events. More sensitivity needs to be given to gender, race, class and cultural representations of history.
- Memorial sites should be conceptualised as living sites of heritage, education and memory.

The question, What is a memorial? within a, (South) African democracy remains. Is it an artwork, a landscape, a graveyard, an illusion, a home, a public space, a museum, an imagination, a native yard, a township, an experience, a school, a debate, a memory, a feeling?

Acknowledgements:

- My experiences at the meetings with the Cape Town City Council employees and fellow artists have been a learning one. The engagement with social and political debate has taught me so much, most importantly, the meaning of fellowship, comradeship and citizenship.
- Through this process I, once again, had the good fortune of meeting with Sipho Hlati, who despite his personal schedule, extended far more coordination than was expected and went out of his way to discuss, facilitate and research this project with me. Without his intellectual and personal support, this article would have been more difficult to write.
- During formal and informal meetings, the artists, Tyrone Appollis and Lungile Maninjwa shared the experiences and insights of their work, which contributed to the essence of this project.
- I am grateful to Rael Sauls for contributing to the research with photographic imagery.
- My thanks to John Reardon for inviting me to contribute towards the debate on art and democracy, which provided an opportunity to write about some of the 'upheavals' the many artists in Cape Town are experiencing within a 'young and fragile' democracy.

Biography of the artists:

Roderick Sauls ...

... was born in District Six, Cape Town and grew up on the Cape Flats. At the birth of South Africa's democracy he commenced studies towards a Fine Art degree at the University of South Africa (UNISA), transferring to the University of Cape Town (UCT) to complete his BAFA in 2000. In 2004 he received an MFA from UCT, where he also served as an assistant lecturer in drawing and printmaking from 2000 to 2005. Currently he teaches part-time at the Arts and Media Access Centre (AMAC), Cape Town. In 2005 he and other artists established an NPO, art@school.education.za. In 2006 he was selected as a Ford Foundation fellow to continue his studies towards a doctorate at the Sociology Dept, University of the Western Cape. Since 1992 he has participated in numerous national and international exhibitions and conferences.

Sipho Hlati ...

... started his art training at the Community Arts Project (now the Art and Media Access Centre) and thereafter continued to teach part-time at the centre. In 2000 he completed a Postgraduate Diploma in Fine Art at the University of Cape Town. He is co-founder of the NPO art@school.education.za, established in 2005. Since the 1980s he has held solo exhibitions and has been included in numerous national and international group shows.

Tyrone Appollis ...

... was born in 1957 in Cape Town. He started his career painting and sculpting, and since the 1970s, he has been an artist, musician and poet, later studying the visual arts at the Community Arts Project (now the Art and Media Access Centre) and the Foundation School of Art in Cape Town. He held solo and group exhibitions from 1988 to 2006 and has several works in public, corporate and private collections. He was commissioned to produce several public works in the city.

Lungile Maninjwa ...

... was born in 1964 in the Tygerberg district of Cape Town. In the mid-1980s he studied visual art, theatre, music and dance at the Community Arts Project (now the Art and Media Access Centre). At

present, he composes original music, sings and plays guitar and percussion, both on the streets of the city and at functions and festivals in Cape Town.

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Notes

- 1 Taken from a paper “Urban identity and memory: sharing vision within a reconciling democracy in the city of Cape Town, South Africa” presented at a conference “Art and the fragmentation of urban space” held at the University of San Diego, 2004.
- 2 For this paper I have chosen to use the terms ‘coloured’, ‘black’ and ‘white’ to express the racial diversities in relationship to the topic discussed. I am aware of the various discourses on the apartheid labels of the diverse cultures.
- 3 Delbo, C. 1995. Auschwitz and After, 255. Taken from Coombes, A. 2003. History after apartheid, 9.
- 4 In 2003, Nieftagodien, a researcher at the Wits History Project was interviewed by Naidu, a researcher at the Centre for the Study of Violence and Reconciliation.
- 5 The South African History Workshop hosted the conference “Myths, Monuments, Museums” in Johannesburg, July 1992.
- 6 This residential area stretches along the the east coast, from Table Bay to False Bay. After the apartheid Group Areas Act had been implemented, it became one of the biggest resettlement schemes for evicted coloureds, blacks and Indians.
- 7 Bea Abrahams, Africa Manager in 2002, Centre for the Study of Violence and Reconciliation
- 8 This was a planned operation by the security forces of the apartheid regime, who hid security force members in crates on a truck, and when the youth attacked it with stones, they opened fire. Three young people were killed and others were injured.
- 9 The article “How the past is cast provides fodder for new debate” was published in the Cape Times, 28 April 2005.
- 10 Taken from 10 Years 100 artists – art in a Democratic South Africa, edited by Sophie Perryer, 2004
- 11 Sipho Hlati lives and work in Cape Town
- 12 By noon on 3 March 1986 the Gugulethu, and other surrounding communities had learned by word-of-mouth of the killing of seven young black males by the apartheid regime’s security forces. Gugulethu is one of the ‘townships’ assigned to the black communities in Cape Town during apartheid.
- 13 The adjudication panel comprised Marilyn Martin, MEC Cultural Affairs; Sport and Recreation Minister Chris Stali; City of Cape Town Councilor Wilson Sidina; Brigitte O’Donoghue; and Sipho Hlati. The Planning and Environment Director, Basil Tommy, chaired the meetings held at The Cape Town Civic Centre.
- 14 Also refer to Prekel (1994); Manicom (2005); Reynold and Richards, ed. (2003) on the role of white women.
- 15 The artists invited were Tyrone Appollis, David Hlongwane, Willie Bester, Isaac Makeleni and Donovan Ward, and Ishmael Thyssen’s name was mentioned.
- 16 Only the artists Donovan Ward, David Hlongwane and Isaac Makeleni submitted proposals.
- 17 Seven artists were present: S. Hlati, T.Thyssen, A. Hess, S. November, R. Sauls, R. Borland, D. Hlongwana. Absent were L. Davis and G. Erasmus.
- 18 Youth activists whose bodies were discovered after a limpet mine detonated.
- 19 Three innocent youths were killed and many were injured by the apartheid regime in a planned operation to stop the youth demonstrations
- 20 The term ‘township’ is used to make reference to being different. The definition of ‘township’ - (in South Africa) is “a planned urban settlement of Black Africans or Coloureds” (The Collins Paperback English Dictionary, 1986: 917).

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- 21 Townships, such as Athlone, Bonteheuwel, Manenberg and many others were developed on the Cape Flats after the 1950s by the apartheid regime for the displacement of the coloured people under the Group Areas Act.
 - 22 In the post-apartheid era this is a phrase used in academia to emphasis a memory of a different kind. Similar phrases, such as ‘township’ art, were used to mean art of a ‘primitive’ culture.
 - 23 Roderick Sauls lives and works in Cape Town
 - 24 A professor in the History Department, University of the Western Cape, Cape Town.
 - 25 The Arts and Media Access Centre is a community arts organisation that was previously known as the Community Arts Project).
 - 26 Tyrone Appollis lives and works in Cape Town.
 - 27 At the same meeting, a representative of the Human Rights Media Centre, Shirley Gunn, told Appollis that the existing sculpture will not be demolished. A media release (22 September 2005) stated that the families of the victims did not have any objections to the removal of the artwork.
 - 28 Lungile Maninjwa lives and works in Cape Town
 - 29 Taken from an article “Monument marks fall of Gugulethu Seven”
 - 30 In 1966 the Nationalist Party assigned the district to the white community, enabling them to forcibly remove non-whites and demolish the urban ‘slum’ zone of the city.
 - 31 The chairperson of the Steve Biko Foundation
 - 32 Taken from the local newspapers, The Cape Towner and Vukani (October 2006)
 - 33 The term ‘outsider’ refers to those who had no affiliation to or experience of coloured or black culture within the South African context.
 - 34 In 1996 a cartoon entitled “Boerassic Park” by Zapiro appeared in the Mail and Guardian. It depicted the apartheid public monuments in a tourist park.

Trojan horse Memorial
2000
Artist: Tyrone Appollis



The initial memorial created by Tyrone Appollis in 2000.
(Photograph: The Cape Argus)



Detailed view of the memorial
(Photograph: The Cape Argus)

Images:
Gugulethu Seven Memorial
2000
Artist: Lungile Maninjwa



The artist, Lungile Maninjwa, during the construction of the Gugulethu Seven Memorial in 2000 (Photograph: The Cape Argus)



The artist and the discovered remains of the initial memorial created in 2000.
(photograph: Roderick Sauls)



The remains of parts of the unearth memorial discovered within an enclosed site behind the contemporary memorial.
(photograph: Roderick Sauls)

Images of the artists:



Tyrone Appollis, November 2006
(Photograph: Roderick Sauls)



Roderick Sauls, December 2006
(Photograph: Sipho Hlati)



Sipho Hlati, December 2006.
(Photograph: Roderick Sauls)



Lungile Maninjwa, December 2006.
(photograph: Roderick Sauls)

Images:
Gugulethu Seven Memorial
2005
Artists: Donovan Ward and Paul Hendricks
Photographic images by Rael Sauls, 2006.



1. View of the monument from the south (the pink shack behind the tree indicate the space where the massacre happened)



2. Frontal view of the monument



3. View of the monument from the north



4. Detailed view of the monument.



5. View from the rear of the monument.



6. Detailed view of one plaque of the monument.

Image of the Cecil John Rhodes Monument



Cecil John Rhodes Monument in Cape Town's Public Gardens, 2005.
(Photograph: Roderick Sauls)

Images:
Trojan Horse Memorial
2005
Artists: ACG Architects & Human Rights Media Centre

The photographic images show memorial within its environment

Photographic images by Rael Sauls, 2006.



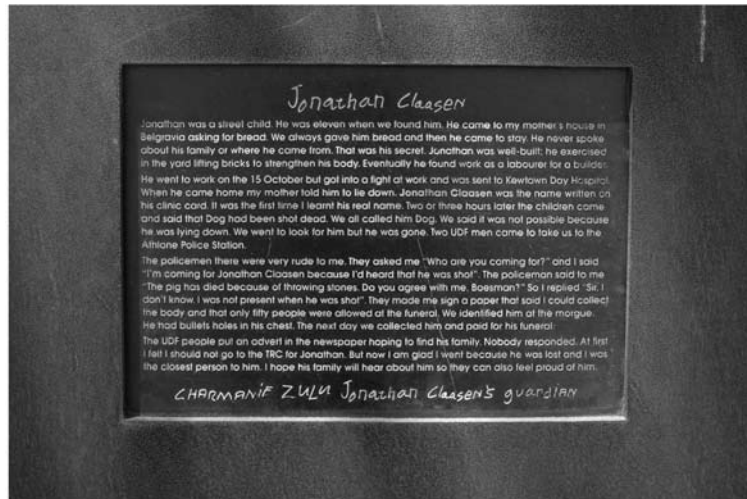
1. View of the memorial from the south.



2. Frontal view of the memorial. The graffiti was done after the erection of the artwork.



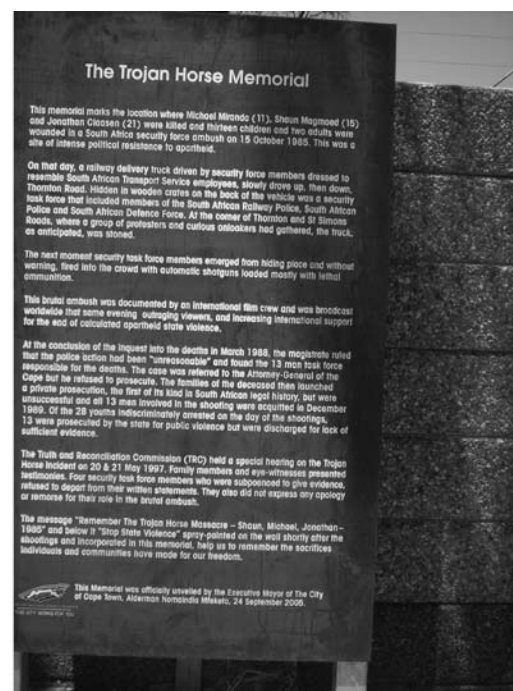
3. Detailed view of the memorial



4. Detailed view of the memorial.



5. A view of the road where the Trojan horse massacre occurred.



6. Detailed view of the memorial.

grassroots

NON - PROFIT COMMUNITY NEWSPAPER
THE PAPER ABOUT YOU Vol. 8 No. 8 October 1987 FREE



Families of detainees at a press conference at St. Georges Cathedral earlier this month

UNLOCK THE JAILS OF APARTHEID

THE detention of ordinary South African citizens, men and women, children and pensioners, workers, students and teachers - has become an everyday occurrence in our country. In the last two years, more than 50 000 people have been held for varying periods in apartheid prisons. These detentions have however, never gone unnoticed. In recent weeks num-

erous organisations have intensified the call for the release of all detainees. The UDF, NECC, Cosatu, UWC and other organisations condemned the system of detention at a recent press conference held at St Georges Cathedral in Cape Town. At the press conference UDF spokesperson Mr Joseph Marks announced that various organisations would be having programmes in which the

plight of detainees would be highlighted. These included panel discussion and detention programmes, and candle-light vigils in areas like Grassy Park, Mitchell's Plain, Bonteheuwel and Wynberg. The UDF said: "detention without trial is one of the most brutal forms of repression on human beings. We view detention as violence committed against individuals and their organisations."



Mrs P. Jacobs, mother of Section 29 detainee Peter Jacobs

I cannot explain in words what a terrible and horrifying experience it is. I don't know what his mental and physical condition is. Whether he is getting enough food. I think of him as a good young man, very promising, high ideals - what he did, he did for his fellow man.

'Trojan horse' victims remembered



An Athlone resident points to the spot where one of the young boys was killed two years ago

THOUSANDS of people remembered the tragic shooting of three youths who were shot dead in the "Trojan Horse" incident on October 15 1985. Although two years have passed since their deaths, the memory of their cold-blooded killing is still fresh in the minds of their families and the community. 1985 was a year when students, youths and communities took to the streets and were involved in running battles with the police and SADF. Athlone became a fierce battle ground and in one week more than eight people were killed and hundreds were injured. On October 15, at about 3.45 pm a SATS truck was seen cruising

slowly down Thornton Road. The back of the truck was empty. About 10 minutes later the same truck was seen driving towards Howat Training College. This time there were wooden crates at the back of the truck. As the truck neared St Simons Road, a group of youths stoned it. Bricks smashed through the windscreen and the driver who was wearing a brown overcoat, threw his arm in front of his face. A bystander, who was near St Simons Road when this happened said: "Suddenly, soldiers and policemen jumped out of the crates with shotguns in their hands and began shooting wildly". "When the smoke cleared,

we saw these two boys lying in pools of blood. One was lying on the lawn in front of a house and the other was lying face-down on the pavement". They were left there while the police chased after everyone who was standing in the vicinity". More than 20 people were arrested that day and charged with public violence. The charges against them were later withdrawn. However, no-one was charged with the murder of Shaun Maymood, 16, Jonathan Claasen, 15 and Michael Miranda, 12. The people who shot and killed them from the back of the SATS truck were never brought to court.



Mrs A. Forbes (in front) and Mrs B. Pandey, parents of Section 29 detainees Ashley Forbes and Yasmina Pandey

This newspaper has been censored in terms of the emergency regulations.

SECTION 29 IS BARBARIC

MRS ANDRINA Forbes, whose son Ashley has been held since May under Section 29 of the Internal Security Act recently addressed a panel discussion on detention. This is an extract of her speech which expresses the fears and anguish of a parent cut off from her son: "I speak on behalf of my son and Begum Pandey whose daughter Yasmina is also being held under Section 29. "Detention is harmful. Children see police vans, dogs and guns. They see their family and neighbours taken away handcuffed - never to return. "The chair at the table is empty, the jeans are folded up and packed away. "Parents minds, health and home are disrupted because one half of you is outside and the other in jail with the detainee. "Brothers and sisters cannot concentrate on their work at school, nor the father at the workbench. "Section 29 is barbaric. What it does to people inside and out is horrifying and unnatural.

"Parents minds, health and home are disrupted because one half of you is outside and the other half is in jail with the detainee."

"The detainee is held in a cell entirely alone with no-one to speak to, from minute to hour, day to day, to month in and month out. "The only people they see are their interrogators, who resort to every possible means to extract information. He is forced to speak in a way that only they are acquainted with. "The detainee is held behind closed doors where no parent, priest or lawyer is allowed access. Imagine being surrounded by family, friends and society all your life then suddenly plucked and placed in a square concrete and iron box of silence and loneliness. "What of the anguish and the uncertainty of all outside? No one knows where they are. How they are. "Are they sad? Are they sitting cross-legged, thinking, afraid, having nightmares, going crazy, tummy ache, headache? What? What? What? "Even their parcels of food, toiletries and clothes are refused. Before, at least they had this precious link with their parents. "For six weeks now our parcels were refused. We were checked, humiliated and had the door banged in our faces. We stood in the rain confined. We stood in the hot sun and sang the anthem. "Everything is so quiet. What is happening to the detainees, the prisoners, fugitives and exiles? Why are they in captivity, why on the run, why in exile? "For their beliefs and principles. For justice and equality. So that every human being can be free before heaven. Free."

Newspaper clipping of the massacre, 1987.

Images:

*Robbie Waterwich and Coline Williams Memorial
2005*

Artists: Guy du Toit

Photographic images by Rael Sauls, 2006.



1. The view of the monument from the north.



2. Frontal view of the monument.



3. A View from Athlone in the Cape Flats towards the city of Cape Town and its

Democracy Cutie

by Joe Scanlan

The place was hot,
the place was packed,
the noodles were cold,
the plates were stacked.
Democracy cutie, where do you belong?

We combed our hair,
and changed our looks,
and donned our glasses,
and picked up books.
Democracy cutie's glasses were oblong.

Democracy cutie
I'm so glad you came, you're coming on strong.
Democracy cutie,
I agree with what you say!
By the way—are you wearing a thong?

People came,
and people went,
and trust was shared,
and care was spent.
Democracy cutie, where'd you put that bong?

Walls were scaled,
and frames were broke,
and halls were trashed,
and joints were smoked.
Democracy cutie, don't you love this song?

Democracy cutie
I'm so glad you came, despite the mood of the throng.
Democracy cutie,
I agree with what you say!
Have you known it all along?

Plans were laid,
and plans were blown,
and shells were cracked,
and seeds were sewn.
Democracy cutie, why's your face so long?

claim a location:



8.00 external metabolics¹:

8.01 Phase 1. World Literacy re World Problems.
Problems-World Industrio-Economic Literacy and its design science
solution by dramatic educational tools for realization of the world
resources inventory of human trends and needs,-world’s people.
Together with dramatic indication of potential solution, by design
science upping of the overall performance of world resource units to
serve 100% instead of the present 44% of humanity.

- 8.02 Phase 2. Prime Movers² and Prime Metals
- 8.03 Phase 3. Tool Evolution
- 8.04 Phase 4. The Service
- 8.05 Phase 5. The Evoluting Contact

- 8.10 The social function of art is to have no function. (Adorno)
- 8.11 why arts function is not as simple as that.
 - 8.12 any and every function
 - 8.13 the desire for no function

¹ from the World Game, R. Buckminster Fuller 1971.

² World Domination (Risk 1980)

object of the game:
To conquer the world by occupying every territory on
the board, thus eliminating all your opponents.
setup:
Unlike most games, world domination demands careful
planning before you actually start to play. This Initial
Army Placement sets the stage for the battles you’ll
fight later on.



Saloon La Realidad Filiale Hasselbach.
Christoph Schäfer, Im Tal, 2008



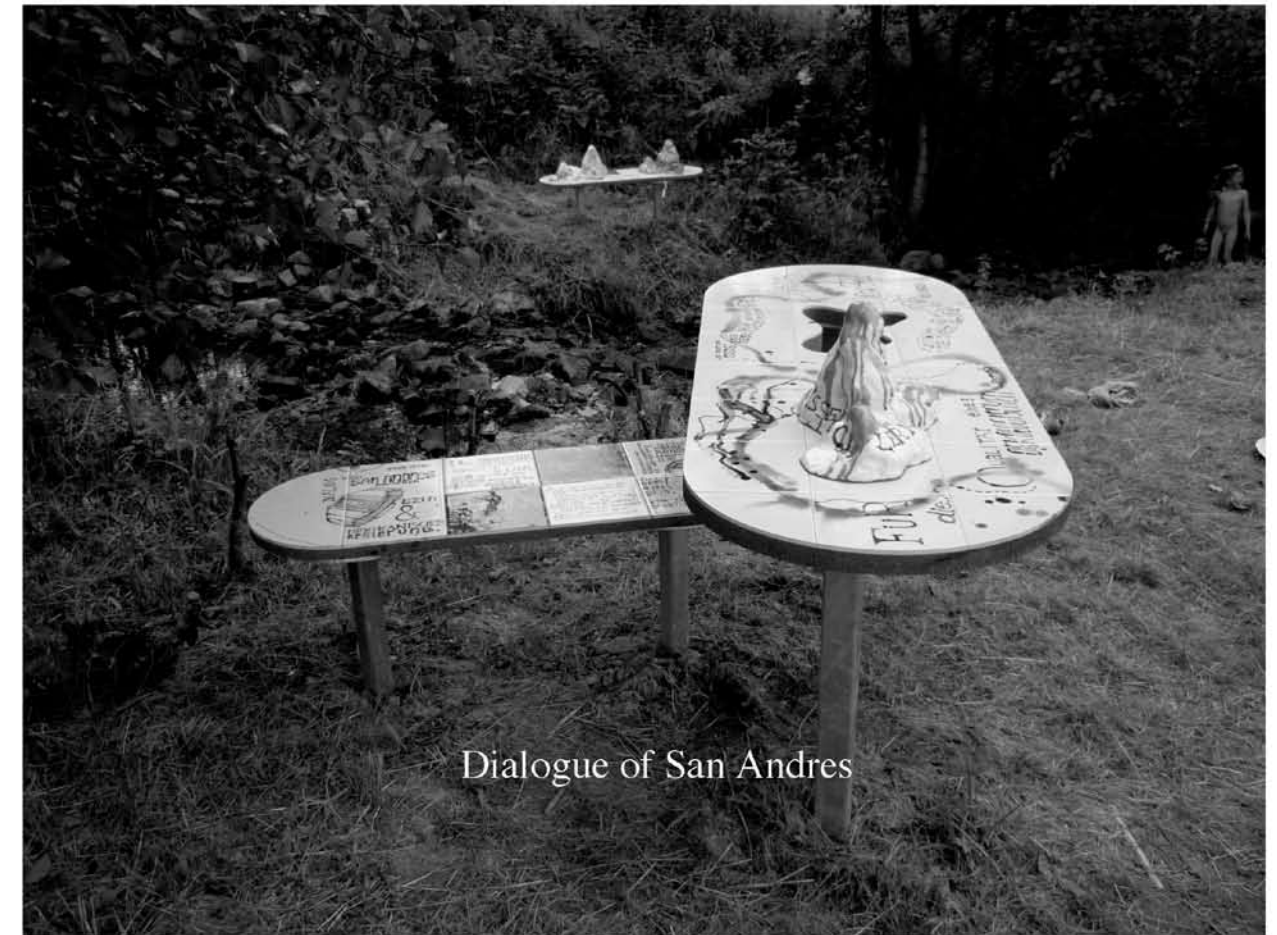
Hasselbach, June 2008



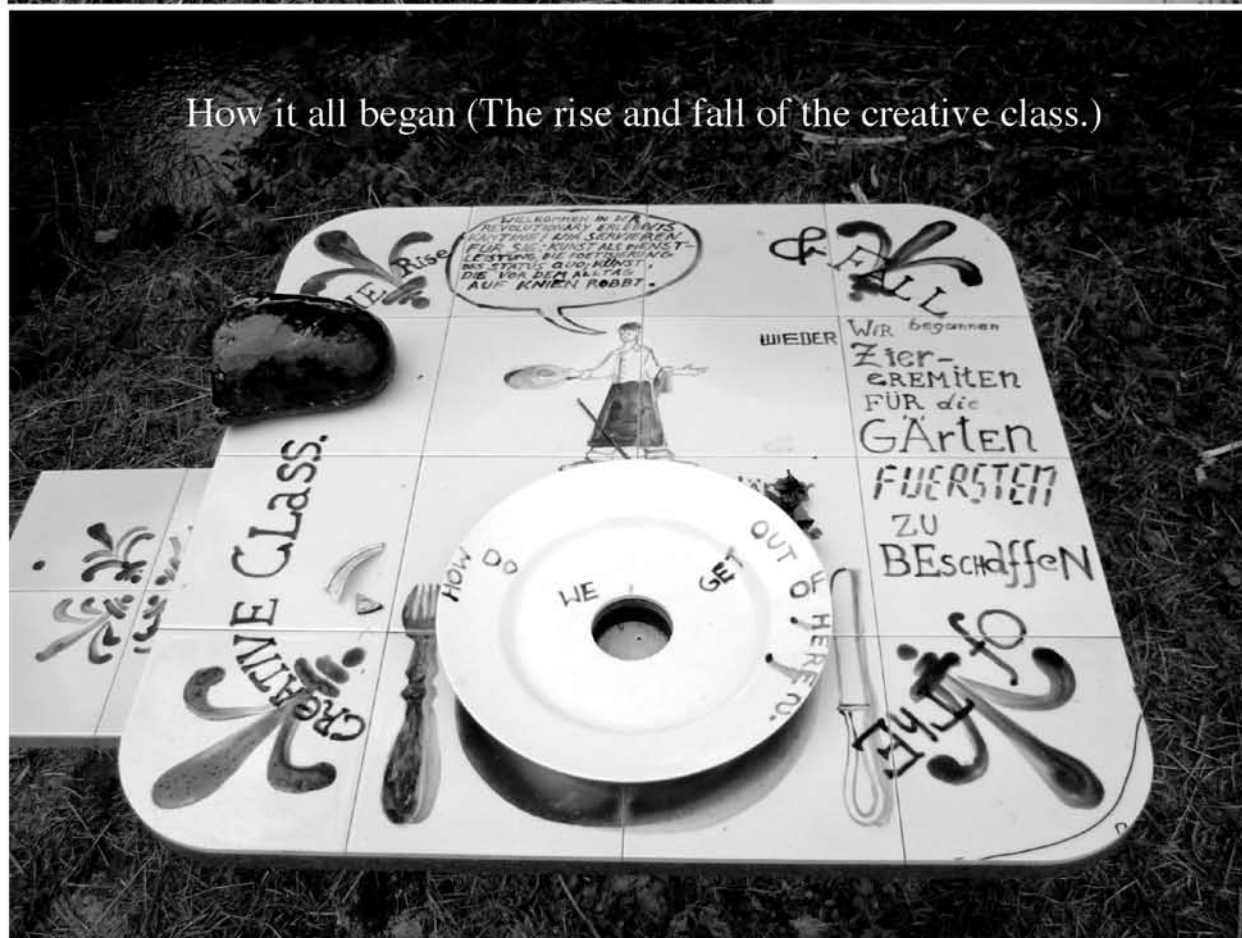
We have not come to seize the power.



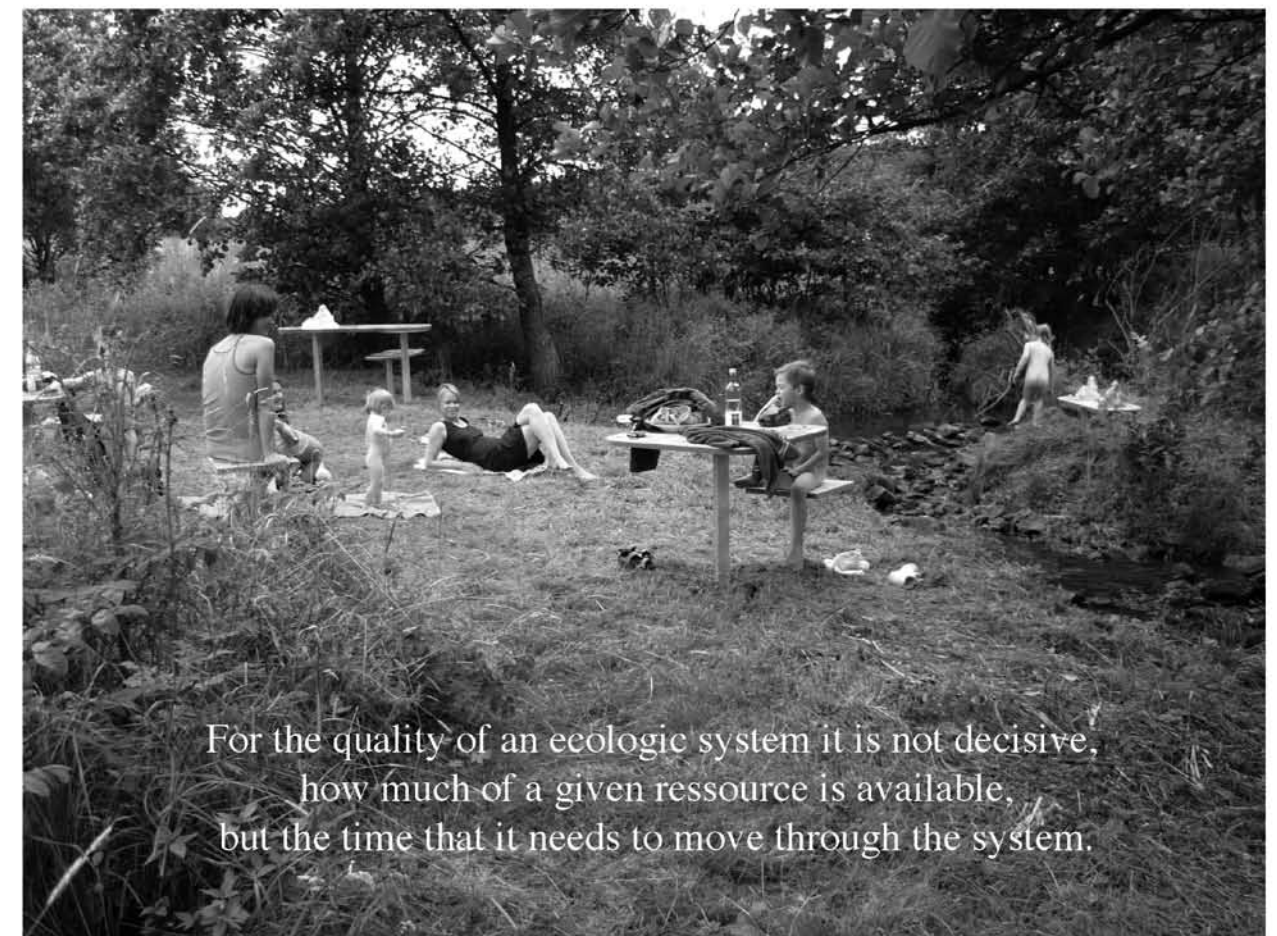
Sculpture of Mister Raiffeisen handing over a loaf of bread
to poor children.



Dialogue of San Andres



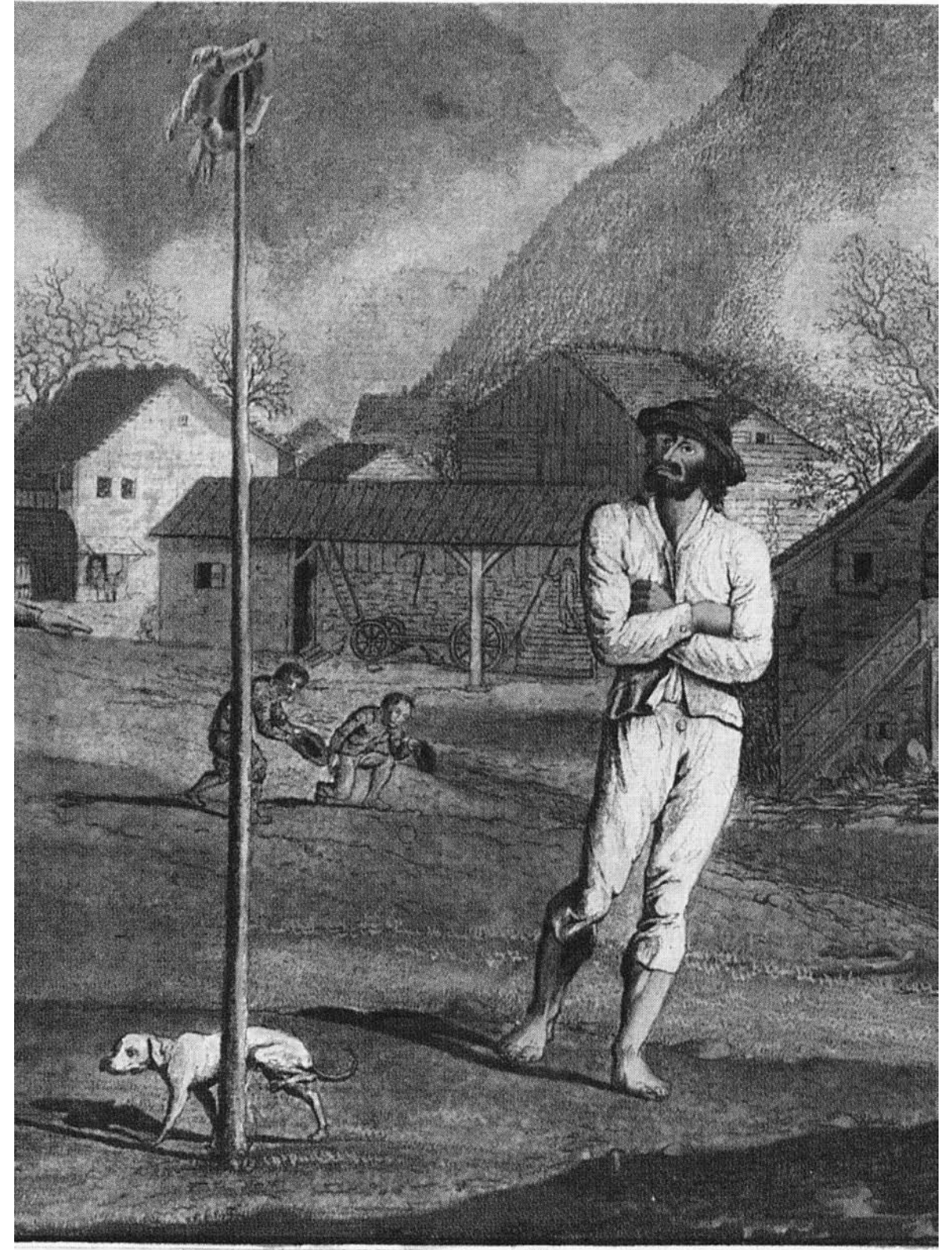
How it all began (The rise and fall of the creative class.)



For the quality of an ecologic system it is not decisive, how much of a given resource is available, but the time that it needs to move through the system.



An artist who
cannot speak English
well is no artist!





I LOVE DOGS! / MORITAT

(Moritat = picture sheed describing in verse or prose a murder or sensational event):

Performed on September 24th 2004 in Schwyz at the „Mythen Forum“ (Mythen is the name of two mountains in the canton Schwyz and the plural of myth), a symposium „The Myth TELL – Hero or Phantom?“

The words in capital letters are printed on A3 format papers, shown in the following order at the lecture and are one at a time subsequently dropped. Outfit: like a honest, middle-class politician

I LOVE DOGS (or the crux with the crossbow)

SCHIESS (Schiess means to shoot and is also my last name)

I was probably invited to this symposium because of my name. We used to be called „Müller“ (Miller). Since there were quite a few by this name, the „Miller“-families were further distinguished by their abilities. Our clan had exceptionally good marksmen. And so it came that we were called „Shoot-Millers“ (Schiess-Müller).

FAMILY CREST (picture)

This is our family crest – with a sack of flour, a millwheel and two crossbows. (Are there others with a crossbow in their family crest in this auditory?) Am I obliged to quality*? And what kind of quality I ask myself. (*The crossbow is symbol of Swiss Quality in the market)

VATER / FATHER

My father was an Appenzeller — and to the core republican. He lived up to our name; he was an excellent shot!

SCHÜTZE / MARKSMAN

...and left behind chests full of shooter's distinguishing marks.

MUTTER / MOTHER

My mother came from a German-Austrian family and loved playing the tango and wiener-waltz on the piano. She adored Emperor Franz Joseph or Rudolf von Habsburg. In such moments my father always had a ribald „Appenzeller“-joke in supply! — Yes, yes, — my parents were like day and night.

JÄGER / HUNTER

My father was very close to nature and went hunting. Those were his holidays. And this was the reason why we naturally always had a dog.

HUND / DOG

I like animals, — especially dogs. And I have again and again asked myself why.

There was for example:

WALDEMAR

Waldemar the strong black dachshund. He had the habit of tugging big long logs from the underbrush and carried them transversal through the paths in the woods. Walkers had to step over the log and consequently issued various statements. In this way Waldemar attained amazing muscles! And then there was...

ANJA

Anja, the beautiful Lucerne-Lady with the long ears.

When Father took her hunting, she preferred to wait sleeping under his car, until the hunt was finished.

She was a real pacifist, and my father was not very amused! – And then there was

FINA

Fina. She most certainly would have become a great hound. She caught mice like a cat. But she was a female and gave birth to five pups. They were called Rumba, Tango, Mambo, Calypso and Cha-cha-cha! I love to dance and often dream of South America...

But my current favourite dog is called EOS!

EOS

Eos — like the Greek goddess of dawn!

EOS (picture of head)

Eos herself is not Greek. Her Mother came from North-Africa and her Father was a real Corsican! Look at the picture – a white female dog with a pirate-eye-bandeau.

EOS (picture)

Eos is amazingly clever, very autonomous and virtually needs no leash — even if we roam the Niederdorf (narrow passages in the medieval part of Zurich's centre) together. Her favourite destinations are often the kitchens of different restaurants. Many a cook has weakened at her sight.

— But we are not here today to talk about dogs. I needed the detour to render feasible how TELL made me realise why I especially like dogs.

RECHERCHE / INVESTIGATION

As an artist I am also interested in images. Through my investigation of TELL images I discovered the following: in the majority of cases TELL is depicted either as marksman with crossbow or while shooting at the apple on Walterli's head. Sometimes he is shown taking the TELLen-Platte (flat rock at the lake, named after William Tell) by storm.

PRINT (image section, black and white, large print on canvas role)

Here you can see TELL and his true heroic deed! It is an engraving of the 18th century. There he stands — TELL. And how he stands! Elegant, as if he were a dancer — without crossbow! And there at the bottom one recognises a white dog! Looks just like EOS — don't you think so too? But as a matter of fact it is probably a male — the way it is going on. However this actually is irrelevant — whether male or female. The main issue is: IT'S GOING ON! When I saw this image it dawned upon me!

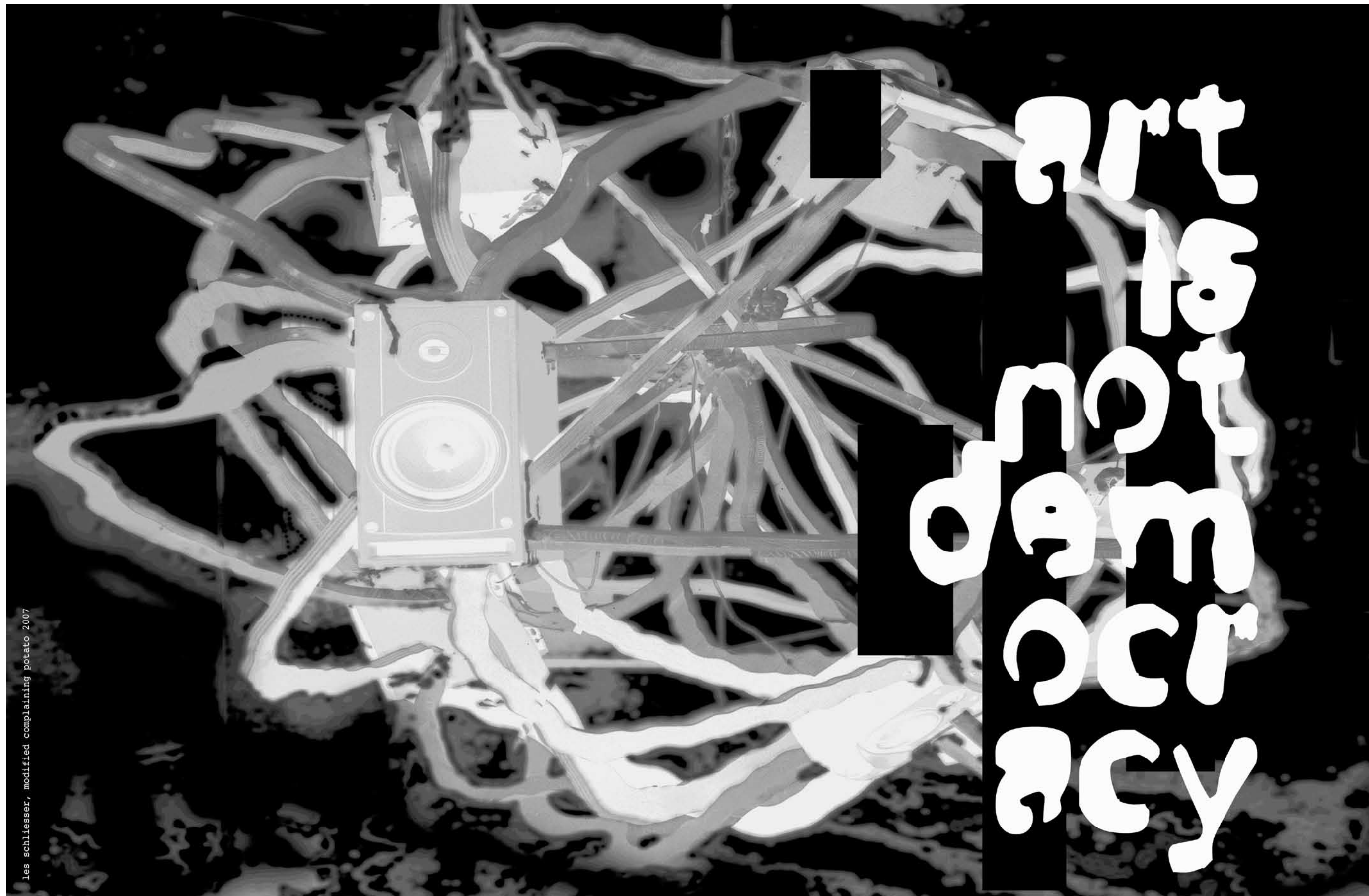
THE WHOLE PICTURE (Dia / colour)

And here you can see the whole picture. Something else struck me: Gessler is missing. Where is Gessler? Has he run off or gone into business? Does he established his own company and is not employed by the king anymore? In doing so he might not only rip off the people but also the state. Somehow this image appears quite modern to me.

Back to TELL. As I have stated. TELL stands as if he were a dancer. Was he perhaps an artist? Did the artist immortalise himself in a self-portrait as TELL? Many people ask themselves: did TELL really exist? Is this so important? The main issue is: The story of Tell WORKS! Otherwise we would not be gathered here today. Many stories have been written and told about TELL. And there are consistently new ones – up to children's comic-books.

This scene for example could have taken place in Schwyz instead of Altdorf. The city Schwyz is guarded by the mountains called myths. The myths once showed me that it is better to climb them with a pair of hiking boots than with trainers. That taught me the following: If the hiking boots have a good profile you needn't fear the myths. And when you arrive at the top it is like a poem!!!

Lisa Schiess
August 2004



les schliesser, modified complaining potato 2007

Picturing New Worlds: Propositional Aesthetics & Political Imaginaries



Anna Madelska, *Cosmopoeisis: World-Making*, 2004-2005 (table drawing & blackboard with spitball universe).

"We need aesthetic ideas, inspirational ideas." In a recent public lecture at *The Birkbeck Institute for the Humanities*, visiting scholar Drucilla Cornell spoke of the urgent political necessity to picture new worlds that can function both as representations of an ethical ideal as well as acts of critical reflection. Socialism she argued is a representation of just such an ethical ideal.¹ "In a higher phase of communist society. . . only then can the narrow horizon of bourgeois right be fully left behind and society inscribe on its banners: from each according to his ability, to each according to his needs."²

Each political programme is first and foremost an image-making machine in the sense that it forwards a set of propositional aesthetics that function as triggers to activate our collective political imaginary. These 'newly' deposited representations, if convincing as pictures of the possible, are channelled into new forms of political organisation whose capacities for action are regulated by image-flows between pictures sent and received. For example, the exploitation and alienation of labour under emergent capitalism produced a series of troubling representations scrupulously recorded by Karl Marx in *Capital* vols. 1-3. The goal of a socialist revolution was shaped in part by an "optics of crisis" whereby the oppressive conditions of the working class was documented and made public through Marx's exhaustive descriptions. The potential for radical politics was

pictorially conjoined to the multiple narratives of capitalist domination and machinic enslavement of the worker, which in turn produced a representational feedback loop between the image of actual subjugation and the virtual image of self-determination. *Capital* is in fact a voluminous "picture book" in which its programme of revolt and economic reform turns on its aesthetic capacities to both represent and imagine, thus inaugurating a new ethico-political future.

In the 2008 US Presidential primaries, Barack Obama's successful campaign to become the Democratic representative focused exclusively upon one image, that of change. "It's about time. It's about change." Political pundits and critics remarked upon his inspiring aural dexterity and ability to stay on message. But these competencies are de facto image-making skills in as much as they are modes of verbal articulation that paint a picture in someone's mind of an imaginary world or "better tomorrow" to quote Obama. Of course this is stating the obvious as the aesthetic domain has long been mediated by the conversion of its visual semiotics into linguistic signifiers. Not only do such discursive alignments tend to counteract the materiality of the image as an embodiment of political thought. But they also recast what can be "pictured" as a new political reality in terms of a threshold condition—namely what can be said at any given moment. The manufactured sound-bites that characterize much contemporary political rhetoric are mere screen-captures whose aim is not to propose radically new worlds but to simulate the "new" within the familiar tropes of the known. In this regard, neither Obama nor Hilary Clinton have dared to part ways with the *Washington Consensus* and its economic policy prescriptions (diminishing the role of the state, expanding global markets, eliminating protectionist tariffs to name but a few of its recommendations) even if the devastating effects of its neo-liberal reforms on developing countries provides much evidence to the contrary. These are not images of "change" that we can plunge into to find depth of meaning in the manner suggested by Cornell. As pictures, they cannot provide us with the adequate conceptual resources needed to conceive of new worlds, let alone begin to craft them.

How might we propose new representations when the means for comprehending—decoding—these pictures may not be available to us? How to understand an image that advances a radical new form of visibility as a kind of avisuality that is located within the registers of the political imaginary and may not conform to known pictorial conventions? In JL Austin's discussion of the "felicity conditions" of the "speech act" he stresses that the success of any act is entirely contingent upon the authority of the speaking subject. Only those who are appointed to carry out certain functions such as declaring the legal bonds of marriage or christening an ocean-liner can perform the speech act effectively even though others (low types) attempt to speak these self-same words. The efficacy of the speech act, according to Austin, requires an act of recognition between transmitter and receiver that is limited to forms of intelligibility already in place. Both Judith Butler and Thomas Keenan in their re-reading of Austin make the point that the speech act can indeed be subverted and made to testify in favour of those who have not been "authorised" to speak if we are willing to re-adjust our hearing and tune-out the dominant clamour that obfuscates our airwaves.

Judith Butler argues that “the conditions of intelligibility [for utterances] are themselves formulated in and by power, and this normative exercise of power is rarely acknowledged as an operation of power at all. This means that a certain operation of censorship determines who will be a subject depending on whether the speech of such a candidate for subjecthood obeys certain norms governing what is speakable and what is not. To move outside the domain of speakability is to risk one’s status as a subject. To embody the norms that govern speakability is to consummate one’s status as a subject of speech. ‘Impossible speech’ would be precisely the ramblings of the asocial, the rantings of the ‘psychotic’ that the rules that govern the domain of speakability produce, and by which they are continually haunted.”³

Extending this discussion to the realm of the image would likewise suggest that we are preemptively inclined towards ‘reading’ pictures in delimited ways based on prior agreed upon criteria such as rules of perspective, compositional balance, intentional framing etc. Art, however, is a mode of practice that [at its most useful] engenders new points of view, engineers alternate access points, creates new conceptual and perceptual experiences, and raises complex questions about the relationship between ideas and their embodiment within representational domains. Arguably this proactive dimension is not central to all artistic endeavours, many of which are entirely focused upon fast-tracking their way to success within our hypertrophic commodity culture. The task of art, to ventriloquise Butler, is to ensure that its performative utterances and schizoid harangues trouble power through polyphonic articulations of critical resistance. As a creative enterprise art must invent the potential image-reserves that others will need to draw upon in times to come. Sometimes these critical resources will only be ontologically present to the practice itself and thus may not be immediately available as epistemological assets for application by a desiring subject as art only retroactively performs itself as knowledge.⁴

As a form of ontological dark matter, art harbours many latent virtualities any one of which may be brought into actualisation by the needs of a particular situation. It is art’s capacity for acting on and in the world that forges its links to the ethical project. While “ethics” is a branch of knowledge that deals with general principles of practice—a set of actions in relation to the world—the ethical contextualizes these principles in human systems of morality figured as an image of the “good”.⁵ Cornell’s insistence upon the aesthetic dimensions of the political as the modality for evolving new and inspirational ideas is never exempt from its ethical obligations, in that political representations cannot be drafted without considerations for their context, the theatre of operations in which they will be mobilised. The space in which images and ideas are produced is always charged with power; it is not a neutral ground where meanings can be remade with impunity.⁶ We must [says Cornell] have an awareness of the pictures produced by any propositional aesthetic, a demand that involves knowing the propositional context of our imagination.

Today the critical purchase of art is daily evacuated by its overuse as a placeholder to designate any number of activities carried out in its name. Barbara Kruger’s contract with luxury high-street retailer *Selfridges* teeters precisely on the edge of this precipice (see image on right). As someone whose career defining practice was synonymous with the “aesthetics of politics” this now unapologetic migration into the heart of what was once the object of her searing critique seems slightly perverse and only mildly ironic. As a rather twisted intervention it relies upon our familiarity with the Russian Constructivist derived graphics of her previous artworks (see image on

left) to activate its subtext. Has she sold out or are we the dupes who are slyly being berated for buying into the consumptive fantasy she extols?



Barbara Kruger, *Selfridges January Sale*, London, UK, 2006.

Source: Gregor Claude.

To channel a recent provocation forwarded by Boris Groys in *Art/Power* (2008). . . “Does art have its own territory that is worthy of being defended?”⁷ The interdisciplinarity of cultural practices and their study has been vehemently debated during the past two decades, with the verdict that specialist enclaves of knowledge are no longer usefully productive when narrowly conceived. Art history has been retooled as visual culture, museum studies as curatorial knowledges, and theatre as performance studies to name but a few. How then can art as a practical form of research and proposition making be the “source of any resistance whatsoever” without staking out an explicit terrain and space of potential action? As an instrument of critical deployment, art’s agency [suggests Groys] is constituted through the particularity of its modes of enunciation which allow certain things to come together in particular ways. In the making and doing of art, something happens that precedes the “knowing” of what has happened.⁸ Art should therefore not be directed towards the transformation of knowledge says critical theorist Suhail Malik, but towards its fundamental corrosion as even alternative knowledge formations are inadequate to the task of countering the long-term effects of political domination. Only attention to arts specificities will enable us to make strategic use of them, which is to say, that its difference in kind to other practices is what enables it to intervene and unsettle existing relationships. Art is a conceptual frame that makes possible certain theoretical and analytical manoeuvres. For Groys art’s autonomy as a bounded set of practices becomes the constitutive space for evolving these critical tools.

Jacques Rancière posits a related territorial argument that brings the political and aesthetic into the contact zone of our current discussion. He suggests that art as a mode of political action can only take place at the borders of a community where it can cut into its consensual flows. Politics for Rancière refers to a reframing of commonality in which the conditions for inclusion and exclusion are disarticulated. Art he contends does not become political through its proximal relationship to that which has already been defined as the political, the space of known polemics. Kruger’s *Selfridges*’s commission is a case in point. In redirecting the critical attentions of an

earlier work she produces a form of autocritique in which the question "what is political about political art" is patently raised. Art's politicization as such emerges when it disrupts that which is collectively understood as being held in common. The political aspirations of art must reshape what it means to be in common with others.⁹ For Rancière the bounded space of commonality or consensus is the problem that art must tackle as its defining political project, whereas for Groys it is within such delimited spaces that art's capacities as a political agent are spawned. In both of their formulations the territory of the political vis à vis the aesthetical is understood as operating from a position of "difference" rather than sameness.

When Cornell states, "we need new aesthetic ideas" the point that she is ultimately making is that it is not enough to simply picture the world, but that we must use the full chromatic range and force of our aesthetic strategies to *picture it differently*.

Notes

¹ Drucilla Cornell, "Decolonizing Critical Theory: The Challenge of Black Existentialism," The Birkbeck Institute for the Humanities (London, UK: Birkbeck, University of London, 2008), vol.

² Karl Marx, "Critique of the Gotha Programme (1875)," Karl Marx and Frederick Engels: Selected Works Vol 1-2 (Moscow: Foreign Languages Publishing House, 1962).

³ See Judith Butler, Excitable Speech: A Politics of the Performative (London: Routledge, 1997). See also Thomas Keenan in Thomas Keenan, "Drift: Politics and the Simulation of Real Life," Conference in Honor of Jacques Derrida (Cardozo Law School and New York University: 2005), vol. P. 133-4.

⁴ Both Suhail Malik and Irit Rogoff have made similar points in discussions about the nature of various practice-based research programmes at Goldsmiths, University of London.

⁵ These comments are culled from a lecture on the computer as an ethic but not ontology. Alexander Galloway, Media Matters: Friedrich Kittler and Technoculture (London, UK: Tate Modern, 2008), vol.

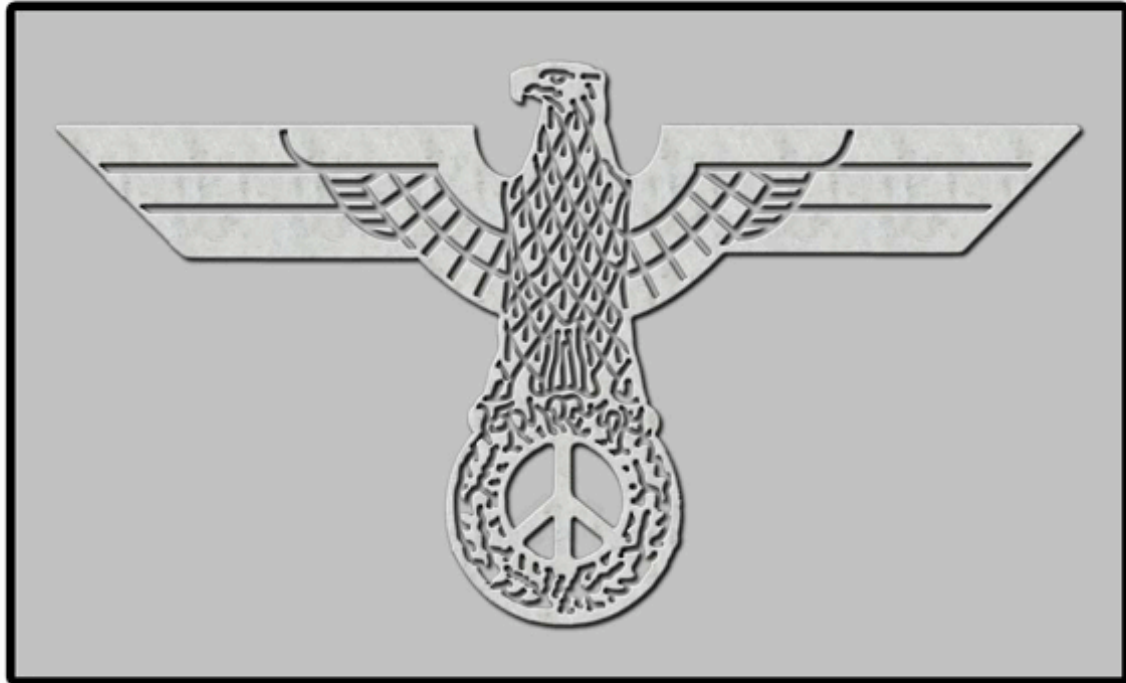
⁶ Paraphrased from a point made by Laura U. Marks, The Skin of Film: Intercultural Cinema, Embodiment and the Senses (London: Duke University Press, 2000). P. 89.

⁷ Boris Groys, Art/Power (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2008). P. 13.

⁸ Suhail Malik in conversation with the Roundtable in Research Architecture, Goldsmiths, University of London, 2007.

⁹ Ibid.

Nebojsa Shoba Seric



Democracy doesn't have strict rules or come with a manual – it is an easily manipulated tangle of unwritten postulates. The majority of people on this planet do not have the opportunity to enjoy democracy, or to even know how democracy can change their lives. Most people believe democracy equals freedom: to choose which pair of shoes to buy, to move unhindered around the country where they live. For some, democracy is sacred, like a highly valued piece of real estate, and they are willing to sacrifice everything, even their own lives to preserve it.

Art, on the other hand, is a spiritual, expressive activity. Though art may not have the power to change the world per se, it can generate strong emotions that have impacted history in many different ways. Most of art history contains representations of battles, bloody religious sacrifices, portraits of aristocracy, etc. Symbols have been widely used – and misused – throughout art's history as well.

Art is often manipulated by various negative political movements in the world. The Swastika, for example, is an ancient world symbol which was abused by the Nazis; appropriated as a symbol of "Aryan" identity and white supremacy, racism and world domination.

I have always been intrigued by the visual interpretations of democratic societies. World democracies are often represented by aggressive symbols, many of which, though inherited from brutal medieval times, conjure images among us of a heroic past rather than the present time or future. For example, the current English flag is a red cross on a white background, commonly called the St. George's Cross, which was adopted after the crusades. This cross could easily be interpreted as a very aggressive symbol by some people, a vivid reminder of a bloody, even shameful time in English history. Are the people of England still driven by the ideologies of the crusaders today? I don't think so. Yet the St. George's Cross is still on England's flag, and most likely it will stay there, as a symbol of the fight for higher causes.

There have been other interesting developments of democratic symbols all over the world. The first proposal for a symbol of the USA, for instance, was the "thanksgiving" turkey. But, after much debate, it was decided the turkey would be an embarrassing reminder of the slaughter of the Native Americans who'd been gracious enough to share the bounty of the American soil with these new settlers. Eventually they voted for a bald eagle instead, though not everyone was convinced: In January of 1784, Benjamin Franklin showed his own disapproval of the eagle as the American national bird when he stated, "The bald eagle...is a bird of bad moral character; like those among men who live by sharpening and robbing, he is generally poor, and often very lousy. The turkey is a much more respectable bird and withal a true original native of America."

The bald eagle, on the edge of extinction in nature, lives on as one of the most exploited icons of all, used by numerous countries and cultures as a metaphor of their aggression and strength. The eagle flies high and proud, symbolically speaking, close to the spirit, the heavens, to God. From his high-flying position, an eagle can see very far so, symbolically speaking, the eagle sees the big picture, doesn't become distracted by the smaller, less important details. But because of his perfect vision, he spots his prey from a great distance, sees trouble coming from many miles away...

On the other hand, there are many peaceful visual/artistic representations of democracy too. The opposite of an eagle is the white dove, a traditional symbol of love and peace in both the Christian and Jewish faiths. According to the bible, Noah released a dove after the flood in order to find land; it came back carrying an olive branch, telling Noah that, somewhere, there was land. A dove with an olive branch has since come to symbolize peace.

The main contemporary symbol of peace is the CND (Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament) logo designed in 1958 by Gerald Holtom; it is recognized worldwide as "the" peace symbol.

After all, perhaps art does have strong ties with democracy and visa versa. Politically engaged art is present in every country in the world. The question is, how much power does art have to help people find democratic solutions.

Distribute ideas far and wide through a dizzying range of practices

—David Reinfurt

Andreas Siekmann

Trickle down

Public Space in the Age of its Privatisation

Glossary

Trickle Down

Public Space in the Age of its Privatisation

Glossary

This glossary pertains to the drawings that are partially recognisable on the sphere made of destroyed figures, to the signs on the container (these are the destroyed figures), to the print-outs that have been affixed to the wall of the Erbdrostenhof, and to the plaques in the foyer. Collectively, these drawings and signs present a narrative – an analysis of the current privatisation of the public sphere and the role that the fibre-glass-reinforced plastic figures play in this process, which we have been witnessing for some years now. Part of the so-called ‘urban art’ of the various metropolitan departments of city marketing, these figures are usually in the form of animals and appear in city centres after having been painted by artists and funded by sponsors, entrepreneurs, or business people. By now, around 600 cities and municipalities have been furnished with these event sculptures, which are promoted at parades, events, gala evenings, and charity auctions. They can be put to use anywhere – not to narrate a city’s present history and historical past, but to make a brand out of them.

The following figures were selected for the project: an elephant from Hamm, a cyclist from Pforzheim, a swan from Neumünster, a bear from Berlin, another bear from Freising, a water carrier from Hamburg, a golden rider from Dresden, a rat from Hameln, a horse from Aachen (and Niedersachsen), a lion from Munich (and Leipzig), a rhinoceros with wings from Dortmund, a pig from Bühl (and Seattle), and, lastly, a cow from Zurich (this was the prototype for the entire urban beautification movement and has since appeared in several cities worldwide). The figures were painted with scenes related to their form of organisation: to the event marketing operations that installed them the city, and to the social procedures, repression techniques, and images of a new society that are associated with each event.

The figures also appear on the ties and lapel pins worn by the representatives who negotiate the most important deals when selling off cities and their public institutions. They are, in effect, the mute audience of an economic transformation that began in the 1980s, evolved into a polemical ideological campaign of the neoliberal movement during the 1990s, and reached its present form over the past ten years. Discussions of art in the public sphere have run parallel to this development and are now being monopolised by these figures. The following glossary will serve to define some of the key terms in the visual narratives that are devoted to this process of transformation.

Basel I + II

Basel I and II are the names of the international Basel accords reached by the members of the Basel Committee on Banking Supervision (central bank governors, the G-10 countries, and the IMF) as standards and guidelines for best practice in banking supervision. These accords govern and control the worldwide credit system. Basel II has been in effect in the EU since the beginning of 2007 (in the USA not until 2009) and requires that banks be more risk-sensitive in their allocation of capital to debtors. For cities, this means that they will be able to allocate greater amounts of wealth in order to obtain credit.

Consulting and accounting firms

‘The consultancies that we are speaking of here can be divided into three groups. In the first group are the more established consulting firms, the best-known of which is McKinsey. Then come the slightly lesser-known accounting firms, such as the “Big Four”, which dominate the world market in accounting: KPMG, Pricewaterhouse / Coopers (PWC), Ernst & Young (EY), and Deloitte Touche Tohmatsu (DTT). Third come the larger law and commercial law firms. One thing that the consultants all have in common is that in the US they are trained as constitutive elements of the American economy. It is also significant that these consultancies are active on a global scale – they are firms with hundreds of thousands of employees. For decades they provided their services only to private businesses. It was only recently (in Germany, ever since the Treuhand [i.e. the agency that, following the fall of the Berlin wall, privatised East German enterprises that had been owned as public property]) that they began to provide their services to the state as well. Yet they never gave up their primary clientele – private concerns – but, rather, continued to consult in the private sector and have retained their obligations therein. Thus we notice a phenomenon occurring that is in fact a violation of German law for attorneys. No attorney may be employed by both sides at the same time. This is called violation of attorney-client privilege, which has become quite common in the consulting sector.’

From an interview with Werner Rügemer, 13 March 2007*

Shell corporations

These are companies that have nothing more than a mailbox at their statutory addresses, while the business administration exists at a different location (i.e. the administrative centre). For reasons of anonymity and legal immunity, many companies are registered in so-called tax havens.

Business improvement district

‘Much of what we still perceive as public property has long-since ceased to be public. The so-called “business improvement districts” represent an intensification of this process; in various cities, business owners from better shopping streets join together to form alliances that collect dues, employ their own security forces, and enter into contracts with their city councils to assure that these streets are subject to private restrictions.’

From an interview with Werner Rügemer, 13 March 2007*

Cross-border leasing contract

‘In cross-border leasing situations, two banks safeguard each other; one lends money and the other borrows, but in reality these two banks are one and the same. Today’s investors hardly have any equity capital – rather, they raise most of what they need in order to buy apartments, public services, etc., by borrowing it. Therefore, very high-earning banks are brought into these contracts to grant loans if they are able to lend the majority of a billion-dollar purchase price, say, for a large apartment complex to investors over the course of twenty to thirty years. Then, to expand the enterprise, another bank is engaged to settle the thirty-year repayment of credit. Thus, on the basis of what seems to be a real enterprise, channels of money are created that take on much larger dimensions than the public is able to perceive.’

From an interview with Werner Rügemer, 13 March 2007*

Direct privatisation of public property

The amortisation of urban institutions and supply facilities that have been established with public funds.

Dortmund Project

The Dortmund Project arose from a report on industrial restructuring that the city of Dortmund commissioned from the consulting firm McKinsey. The report suggested that it was necessary to eliminate 80,000 jobs and recommended creating 17,000 jobs in the IT sector – a sort of ‘Silicon Valley’ in the Ruhr region. A relict of the project is the logo of the Dortmund Philharmonic Orchestra, a rhinoceros with wings.

Forfeiting

‘Non-recourse forfeiting of instalments is today’s common practice of selling contracts and bills of exchange. If, for example, a construction firm has signed a thirty-year contract with a city – e.g. for the construction of a city hall – and the city rents its city hall for thirty years, the construction firm can sell the contract to a bank, which then pays the entire rent that would accrue over this thirty-year period as a lump sum. This kind of lump-sum payment is precisely what forfeiting means. “Forfait” means lump sum in French. The lump-sum rent compensation is paid out to the construction firm on the first day of the contract’s thirty-year term; this kind of contract thus entails significant generation of cash. In addition, the city must commit to a non-recourse clause. This means that I forego my usual rights as a tenant, I cannot claim a rent reduction if, for example, the investor is late in fulfilling his contractual obligations – for example, those requiring him to repair, in a punctual manner, the windows or heating in the school that he built and runs.’

From an interview with Werner Rügemer, 13 March 2007*

‘Get the Activist Kid’

This is a component of the ‘Table of Free Voices’ Campaign – it belongs to the covert language and style of anti-globalisation activism. ‘Get the Activist Kid’ was sponsored by the alliance.

Property outsourcing

‘Currently, the federal government is drafting an additional legal measure to facilitate the creation of new corporations out of existing apartment complexes that have been purchased collectively. These are so-called REITs, Real Estate Investment Trusts – real estate corporations listed on the stock exchange, which, according to a bill introduced in February 2007, and likely to be passed by a majority in Parliament, will be tax exempt.’

From an interview with Werner Rügemer, 13 March 2007*

International commercial and corporate law firms

These entities are charged with the task of making privatisation contracts internationally negotiable. What results are monopoly structures, because cities rely upon the expertise of these firms when creating their contracts. The commercial law firms then recommend consulting firms and vice versa.

Investment banks

Special banks for large investors – e.g. Goldman Sachs, Morgan Stanley, Citigroup, Merrill Lynch, Lehman Brothers – whose tasks are mostly wealth management and trading securities. These banks are capable of granting billions of dollars worth of credit in a very short amount of time. They have a great influence over industry and politics. A current example: the wave of layoffs at Airbus is based on a Goldman Sachs document.

Investment companies

Capital investment companies that influence the value of portfolios through investment funds, security holdings, real estate, etc. There are even companies whose investors have initial investment values of five million euros.

Communications agencies

These agencies play a decisive role in promoting political decisions, reducing these decisions – e.g. cutbacks in social guarantees – to a mere matter of communication. In past years, the allocation for advertising and communication in public budgets has grown dramatically.

Merchandising and the international division of labour

Sale of the plastic figures as garden furniture, table sculptures, and key rings. These objects are produced in countries with cheap wages and under the worst labour conditions.

Aachen municipal refuse incinerator

‘Aachen sold its waste-burning facility to the German financial investor Aldi-Süd, a trust belonging to the business chain Aldi. Aldi-Süd then stipulated that Aachen operate the waste-burning facility in exactly the condition it was built in (i.e. without any modifications) – and this over a period of several decades. This gave Aldi-Süd a tax advantage whose burden falls upon the treasury of the Federal Republic of Germany.’

From an interview with Werner Rügemer, 13 March 2007*

Nation branding

A marketing concept developed by agencies with the intent of promoting country-specific values and characteristics – i.e. the identity of a country domestically and internationally – as a brand and a way to excel when competing against other countries and regions. (Cf. ‘Walk of Ideas’)

New financial products

‘Today’s movers in the financial arena – banks, and even private banks such as Oppenheim – have been very creative in generating new so-called financial products. Cross-border leasing, i.e. the transborder purchase and sale of public property, is one example. We encounter these inventors then creating new products later on. Among them are the accountants who determine the value of what is being sold, such as apartment complexes, public services, and the waste-burning facility. Other agents are the American law firms that evaluate and adjust international legal and tax situations. And then come the agents – usually banks – involved in bringing together the various actors in the whole process: the banks, the credit institutions, the investors, the accountants, and the law firms. And last comes the investor, who acquires the property.’

From an interview with Werner Rügemer, 13 March 2007*

Remapping of cities

The various zones of a city are partitioned and then funded exclusively based on their image and economic appeal. Problem zones are considered damaging to a city’s image.

Crime prevention councils

Committees composed of constituents from individual businesses, private security services, the police, and city councils that attempt to prevent crime in the public sphere through an increased police and security force presence, even though the crime rate is actually decreasing.

Private partner

Business initiatives to partition the public sphere according to business interests in the city – in effect, the goal is to have the city put the public sphere at the disposal of businesses.

Private public partner

A reversal of the term ‘Public Private Partnership’. The term suggests that the private side of the equation outweighs the public side in importance.

Public enemy (video surveillance of public spaces)

The discourse on security that has been taking place for more than ten years now has led to the video surveillance of public spaces, which usually entails the illegal storage of personal data. Given this perceived security necessity, surveillance equipment is one of the most common elements in neighbourhood improvement plans.

Public partner

Urban public relations departments that conceive of the city as a brand and a business.

Government campaigns

The government compensates for the loss of sovereignty in economic affairs with costly media campaigns. It promotes laws using the appeal of market products.

Guarantee on returns

‘Guarantees on returns with risk premiums assure that the private investor does not really take on any risk during privatisations, as the theory of market economics says. On the contrary, the investor insists upon a certain guarantee or risk premium in his contract. For example, the Berlin Waterworks offers its investors a base guarantee in the form of a long-term federal bond, to which the risk premium is allotted, which in this case is determined to be two percent. The risk premium, however, is enshrouded in clauses that drive it upwards.’

From an interview with Werner Rügemer, 13 March 2007*

Legally binding non-disclosure agreements

‘With all these new financial products, an extensive nondisclosure trend has been introduced. This is true not only in commerce, but also when the public hand is in the mix. None of these new business ventures are subject to disclosure obligations, as corporations typically are. Shareholder information, disclosure of the incomes of the directors and managers, etc. Disclosure obligations are, of course, particularly important when the public hand is involved in contracts for cross-border leasing, for example, which are now subject to absolute nondisclosure agreement, which are enforceable by penalty. Even members of the city council are barred from knowing so much as the wording of these contracts.’

From an interview with Werner Rügemer, 13 March 2007*

‘Table of Free Voices’ 9 September 2006

An event that took place on 9 September 2006 at Berlin’s Bebelplatz. 111 international figures from politics, business, and culture sat at a giant round table, each in front of a camera. They answered 100 questions selected from a pool created by 10,000 internet users. Each had three minutes per question. One question, for example, was, ‘Are brands more important than states?’

The Big Four

The firms that dominate the world market in accounting: KPMG, Pricewaterhouse / Coopers (PWC), Ernst & Young (EY), and Deloitte Touche Tohmatsu (DIT).

The Digital Bridge

A television programme in London where private citizens can watch the recordings of a surveillance camera from their own homes and report suspicious events directly to the police through a hotline.

Toll Collect

The Toll Collect company was commissioned by the government to develop, run, and calculate a highway toll-collection system. ‘Toll Collect’s contract for assessing toll fees on German highways has still not yet been disclosed to Parliament, even after repeated inquiries into the secrecy of operations. This principle of absolute nondisclosure exists throughout the entire private sector.’
From an interview with Werner Rügemer, 13 March 2007*

Trickle Down

The Trickle-down effect is an economic theory based on a description by Bernhard de Mandeville in his book *The Grumbling Hive*, written in 1733. Here he makes the claim that when a large amount of wealth has accumulated, prosperity reaches all by trickling down through the different levels of society. The theory has experienced a renaissance since the early 1980s, fuelled largely by Margaret Thatcher and Ronald Reagan. The theory has also been sarcastically termed the ‘horse and sparrow’ theory.

Trickle down of marketing

The application of the most important marketing concepts developed by consulting and communications firms in the public relations departments of local administrations.

Contract signing in New York

For tax purposes, contracts are often signed in New York, especially in cases of cross-border leasing, in part because it is illegal to sell public property in Germany (???).

Four pillars approach

The marketing concept employed by the firms that offer the plastic figures to cities: 1. Corporate sponsoring, 2. Image networking, 3. Social marketing, 4. Professional outlays (economisation of advertising costs through selective advertising).

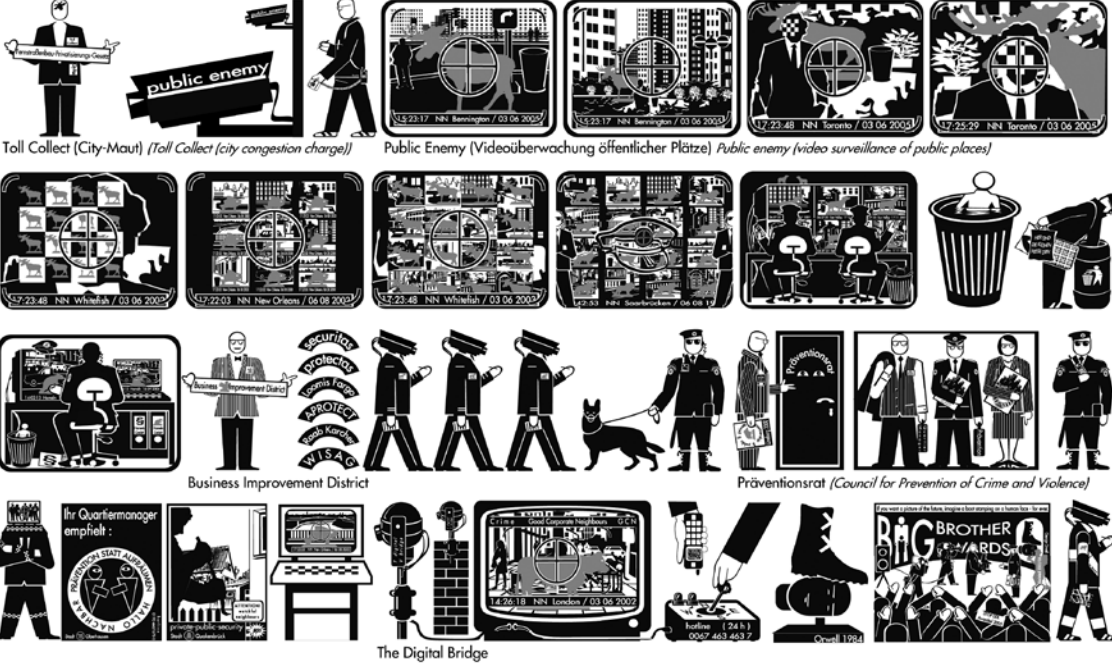
‘Walk of Ideas’

A nationwide government campaign in 2006 that promoted Germany as the ‘Country of Ideas’. While cities marketed themselves with the plastic figures, the communications firm FC Deutschland acquired a boulevard of large-scale sculptures for Berlin as a sort of national theme park, which also incorporated topics from industry: a pain-relief pill from Bayer near the Parliament building, a tower of books at Bebelplatz, Adidas shoes at the main train station, $E=mc^2$ at the Nationalgalerie.

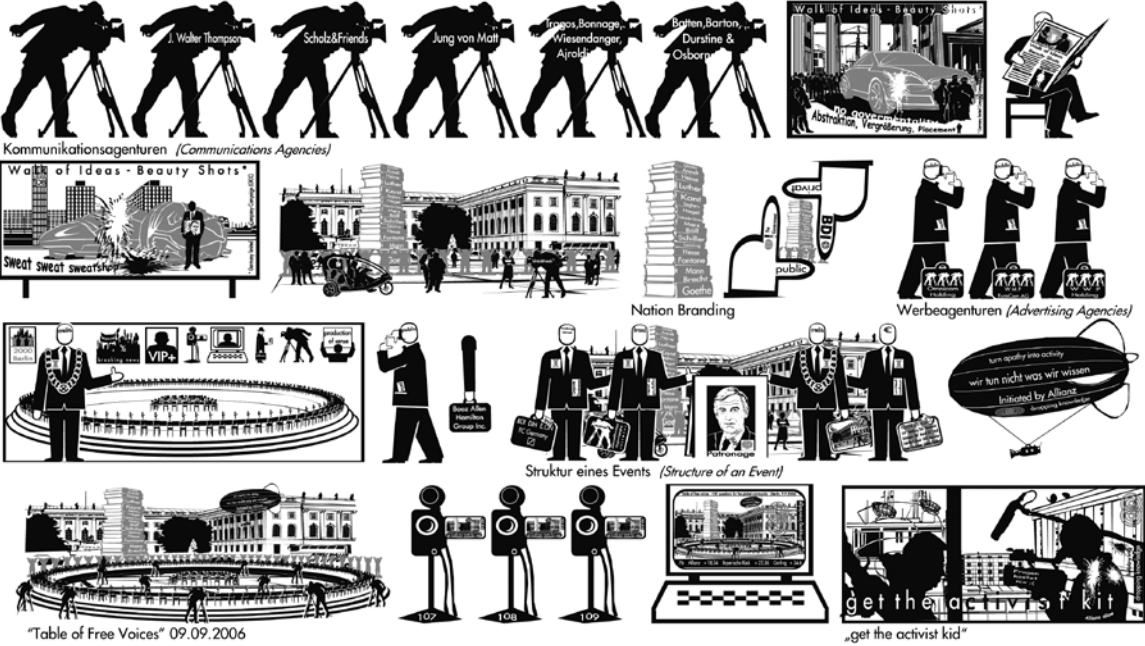
**Werner Rügemer*

Werner Rügemer (born in 1941 in Cologne) is a freelance journalist, a member of Business Crime Control e.V., Transparency International, the Interessengemeinschaft Dezentrale Abwasserentsorgung, the International Gramsci Society and the Deutscher Schriftstellerverband. The philosopher works as a lecturer in the School of Educational Sciences at the University of Cologne.

Public Enemy



Die Produktion von Sinn (The Production of Meaning)



The 'We' Between

Dr. Craig Smith
University of the Arts London

I am regularly engaged in dialogue with colleagues and students. When this dialogue turns to the practices (rather than research) of art, the collective term 'we' is regularly employed. "We experience shame in the Emily Jacir installation." Or "we are tempted into the hunger of the artist's soul as he/she plies away at social inequality." Ofcourse, the collective 'we' does not have to be so dramatic or tinged with social and political urgency. In recent discussions around ongoing installations of work by artists utilizing (or requiring) the participation of viewers, some critics claim that "we are embarrassed" when asked to help complete the work of art. This claim differs from the all-embracing, centralized and pedagogical 'we' of the museum docent or art critic. The crux of the 'we' in this statement puts forth the element of participation in many contemporary visual and spatial art practices where co-existence is implied, and even essential, to the material becoming of the artwork.

What the dialogue on the 'we' seems greatly enthusiastic about are artistic projects generated through a process of collective experience. This is not to say that 'we' are all engaged as 'one' in unity and towards a common goal. Instead, it is to say that 'we' are a constituent 'fact' of cultural production. The 'we' is an evocation of responsibility for the production and distribution of the artwork. The time-based, site-oriented and relational practices such an evocation draws upon have made claims that without participation, there is no artwork. (1) The 'we' required by the coexistence of artist and user in contemporary art is a 'we' that generates, disseminates and demonstrates. It is not an embarrassed, hungry, turned-on or tired 'we.' The 'we' of coexistence endures through and from the artwork. The 'we' of coexistence speaks only to act rather than to testify. This is a tough, fun and optimistic 'we.' A 'we' hatched from the broken circle of the passive spectator's habit and need.

In a recent project by a collaborative artist duo, a generative and demonstrative 'we' described above was presented. Artists Lilah Freedland and Craig Smith, working with Galerie Schuster Photo in Berlin (DE), performed with an afternoon crowd of local residents and gallery supporters alike. In a series of discussions and repetitive actions, Freedland and Smith arranged a durational premise for the artwork. Its co-production would be conducted in a space, time and format of a visual art exhibition. Freedland and Smith's performance, entitled: *High Five*, combined the use of dialog, followed by action, to materialize the generative and demonstrative potential of the 'we' in cultural production. The artists focused discussion on those persons already committed to an engagement 'in' rather than 'with' the work. The work moved through a process of dialog and action as one instance in a world of actions, threats and promises. *High Five* therefore existed before the actual 'work' of Freedland and Smith just as, through the 'we' the work's potential exceeded its enactment.

The dialog in *High Five* focused on the future goals or objectives of each participant: her career decisions, his family desires, her short-term social goals or his long-held dream of cultural placement. The initial question posed, in English and German, began with: "Do you want to get closer to something that you want?" Or, in a particular translation into German: Möchtest du dem nahe kommen was du dir wünschst? The initial question is therefore a positioning of open, albeit directed, dialogue as a medium in itself. Proposing the question, providing the time and space of the answer, and then continuing the dialogic exchange are the initial steps of the process of coexistence. (2) Dialog withstands the central command post of the 'we' as a *speaking for*, and in its place presents a code for being that is constituent and generative material in the world. (3) Dialog, as the material of co-existence, is thus considered a process of aesthetic production. It creates and substantiates the being of the 'we' as within and between the participating, material members of this process for production.

Following from the onset of dialogue, Freedland and Smith engaged in a further reciprocal process with each participant. This next step in their process turned from the dialog as a generative display to the use of action as a method of demonstration. The artists broke from the speaking with each participant to visually reveal a spherical object from an otherwise un-noticed bag sitting adjacent to the exhibition area. This object symbolically embodied the goals, dreams, desires and decisions voiced in distinct languages by every participant. The artists counted off, 1-2-3, and tossed the object to the participant. The object was thrown within an easy reach of the participant. The moment of the reach and the catch was photographed with instant film. The photograph was then developed and re-presented to the participant in exchange for the return of the object. The throwing, reaching, capture and exchange of material put the dialog of artist and participant into a temporary, material form made visual for the exhibition. Thus reaching, capture and return provided the process and machinic power of the performance.

Whether and how one is participating in such events is both a critical and a pragmatic concern. In a single artwork the registers of production, process and commitment on the part of the artist-user-participant exists in the evocation of responsibility. These elements are put on-view to onlookers in the form of dialog and action. In dialog, Freedland and Smith's *High Five* presents the generative 'we' of singular voices occupying spaces in-between distinct aesthetic and conceptual parameters for cultural production. Conversely, action demonstrates the plurality of 'we' used in determining the opinion and activity of a group action. The co-joining of singular voices to demonstrate plurality is an aesthetic and critical commitment by the artist-user-participant. Freedland and Smith perform the polished face of contemporary trends in art that 'we' understand only in the context of process and production. Importantly, the action in Berlin relies on the demonstration of the elemental aspects of contemporary, relational art through activity. Therefore the dialogue employed as constituent material in the artwork was not instructive, dogmatic or pedagogical. It was a material for dissemination. A vehicle. A link in a well oiled machine. Thus demonstration by action and dissemination with the material of dialogue were the co-productive parameters establishing not only the need of the 'we' but also the potential of the 'we' in their artwork.



Figure 1 and 2. *High Five* by Freedland and Smith. Photographs courtesy of the artists.



Figure 3 and 4. *High Five* by Freedland and Smith. Photographs courtesy of the artists.

The 'we' then is what might be called one of the constituent, material elements in relational art practices. Such practices, and those who put forth their contextual underpinnings, regularly endure great scrutiny for their dynamic aesthetic criteria and seemingly divergent critical objectives. The theorist Irit Rogoff has provided a depiction of a 'we' for these practices; a 'we' that is disconnected from any type of art collective or communitarian practice. It is further disassociated from the frontal association of viewer-ship and reportage in which the artwork and its document are authoritative forces in meaning production. Rogoff describes a model of the 'we' that is realised "on the fact that meaning is never produced in isolation or through isolating processes but rather through intricate webs of connectedness." (4) Rogoff proceeds on to a critique of collective subjectivity, redirecting what I would call the psychoanalytic haze of audience analysis into a concern for the production of meaning, which takes place "through relations with one another and through the temporality of the event of the exhibition or the display." (5) Thus the elemental aspect of art that connects the 'we' is a combination of single elements ensuring a pro-active, committed and responsible process of activated spectatorship.

Freedland and Smith's *High Five* coordinates this series of thoughts, sites and activated life with those individuals who come into contact with the work. These individuals operate between the work's conceptual parameters. They bond as constituent elements in the production. They are not among the productive capacities of the artwork but of a world in which this production is taking place. This application of the work issues visual and textual referents imbedded within its context and can negate any proposal for a collective action to make room for the inter-connected, in-between of the 'we.' This is an interconnectedness intended to classify the designation of spectators, viewers, attendants and artists as constituent, material elements in cultural production.

Perhaps *High Five* and the field of practices and research related to this artwork continues to pose critical and aesthetic curiosities. These are vagaries and divergent phenomena that create and destroy analytical criteria in a single, powerful blow. I would choose to direct the production of such criteria towards a series of questions and assumptions about who is represented by, contained by, responding to and completed through contemporary artworks. In short, who is the 'we' that is substantiating itself with the use of an artwork? The stricken, learner 'we' trailing the vagaries of art criticism with rented headphones on their head is a distant, but not unrelated, figure of the 'we' for relational practices. If the relational work of the 'we' can bring the outside into the museum, it does so in a theatrical display of a temporal, spatial world of events. This is now an aesthetic tradition of co-existence portrayed like a living history of parliamentary organization.

If 'we' believe that considering current practices can present some totalizing, representational capacity, then 'we' would find this system broken by the surging force of an artist's materializing of concepts. This is because the key elements of process, production, dialog, demonstration and responsibility can only be joined into partial wholes. Partial in that they can disseminate the artworks themselves but are never totalised by or through the engagement with any single set of participants. Thus the complete and equal distribution of engagement is no longer predicated by audience engagement. This is where and when the 'we,' as a material for the process of producing participatory inter-connectedness, requires particular degrees of commitment, responsibility and relation from all constituent material elements. The relational,

committed and participatory 'we' of contemporary art pulls the participant from a position among the crowd to a place in-between the structural concept of the artwork.

Notes

1. Conversation between the author and artist Rafael Lozano-Hemmer. March 2006, Goldsmiths College, London UK.
2. See Nancy, Jean-Luc. *Being Singular Plural*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2000. Pp. 83-5.
3. Ibid, p. 44
4. Rogoff, Irit. "We - Collectivities, Mutualities, Participations." <http://theater.kein.org/node/95>.
5. Ibid.





After months of street protests against Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra and his government, partly in response to the urging of some factions of protesters, partly to prevent an imminent outbreak of violence, the military seized power in a coup d'etat on 19 September 2006. They cited four reasons that necessitated their action: that PM Thaksin was fostering a dangerous split among Thais; that his government was corrupt and nepotistic; that he undermined independent watchdog organisations; that he disrespected the institution of the monarchy. After the coup,

many people, not just from Bangkok but also from the provinces, converged on the tanks around the Royal Plaza and the Marble Temple to offer flowers and to pose for photographs with soldiers. This created a celebratory carnival atmosphere, an unbelievable phenomenon in stark contrast to the people's reaction to other coups in the past. Foreign tourists also joined in, posing for pictures with soldiers and tanks along with the Thais.





[Oct 13] I'm sitting here at UCSD with a lovely view of La Jolla from the B.A.N.G. lab (at CALIT2) run by my dear friend and collaborator Ricardo Dominguez. We once did some work with Carmin Karasic and Stefan Wray, more inspired by the Zapatistas than on their behalf, but we nevertheless continue to feel a lot of joy for **their** accomplishments since 1994, which include water infrastructure, education and media projects in addition to their continual practices of autonomy and dialog. I teach at this university, and I am currently working on "walking software" for many reasons, but that might also serve as a safety tool when deployed to discarded mobile phones with GPS. I hear from John Reardon that the book is back on and I need to fit it all a single A4 page. Thus in the midst of economic turmoil not seen for some time in my US home, I have the chance to reflect on the question of art and democracy once again. Just as I did for this book in 2006, and on the empyre email list in 2004, a thread that at one time was to be my contribution to the book. Today, I don't feel like I have to say anything about art or democracy, other than I'm open to the activity of many blind-probe-heads exploring our state-space for better possibilities in which both might thrive again. Try things that have not been tried, and keep experimenting. And as regards the 5 pages that need to be boiled down to one? I'm sure you can find them if desired, as I leave you with only excerpts from times past:

The question "Does art have anything in particular to do with democracy?" may not have any answer in our particular historical circumstance... I can only speak to the experience of the recent past. At least since the beginning of the "War on Terror", it has been difficult for political artists "see around the corner"... most of the sign systems have been in the hands of the opposition... The streets are still real, of course, but also fully intersected by symbolic, panoptic, computational and brute-force manipulations of power. In the United States for example, "free speech zones" are kept far away from anyone who needs to hear... The truth on the ground in the United States is that the best hopes of the politically engaged activist-artist sadly lie primarily in the fact that our local fascists, though destructive and harmful to the nation, seem to be made of equal parts of incompetence (Katrina) to match their evil (Guantánamo).

This is certainly a pale kind of hope...

As artists, we continue to assume that there *is* something for us to do about any of this. And while I am in most ways an optimist, I continue to have questions about how blithely we have internalized the assumptions regarding our effectiveness, our role as communicators, or indeed even our cultural gravitas. Nothing new here, such concerns are often raised about "political art"... So instead of rehashing that, I will wander back in time a bit to 2004. The posts below are from the [-empyre-] email list, from a time when there was perhaps less hope, but also where the eternal issues regarding art, activism, and role of artists were once again gnawed on, this time with the help of an Australian group of artists and activists, the Boat People.

```
RE: [-empyre-] opening statement from boat-people.org
To: <sam@media.com.au>, "'soft skinned space'"
Subject: RE: [-empyre-] opening statement from boat-people.org
From: "Brett Stalbaum" <stalbaum@ucsd.edu>
Date: Thu, 3 Jun 2004 15:09:11 -0700
<-- clip quoting Boat People -->
"The boat-people crew rack our collective brains for ways to talk back to the miasma of mendacity
characterising public life here in australia; how to be antidotes to amnesia, how to illuminate
the lies & what they obscure, how to mobilise wit, passion & creativity to undermine the
empires' rule over us... and everything we come up with is gestural, symbolic, frail
at best. It blows away." <-- unquote -->
I did not say it any better below... The question seems to me today to be "How do
activists disrupt two lovers (the western militarist right wing and the Islamist
militarist right wing), who are so mutually committed and supportive of one another?"
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<-- The following was offered to the list as another example, from an email in which I explained why I had
-----Original Message-----                                nothing interesting to say-->
From: Brett Stalbaum [mailto:stalbaum@ucsd.edu]Sent: Thursday, February 05, 2004 2:56 PM
To: 'Eddan Katz' Subject: RE: Yale Cybercrime Conference
Dear Eddan,
I have been hard at work on the formulation of a paper
<-- clip -->
At best, I could characterize early hacktivism as a brief moment of hope inspired in part by a somewhat utopian
surge of interest by artists in the internet as a specific medium (roughly 1995 to 2000, sometimes identified
as the net art movement in new media arts discourses)...
<-- clip -->
I think of artists as people who have the cultural mandate to play with systems in order to emerge new models
(or functions of systems that were unintended by their designers)...
```

**Notes
on life
in the
failed
economy**

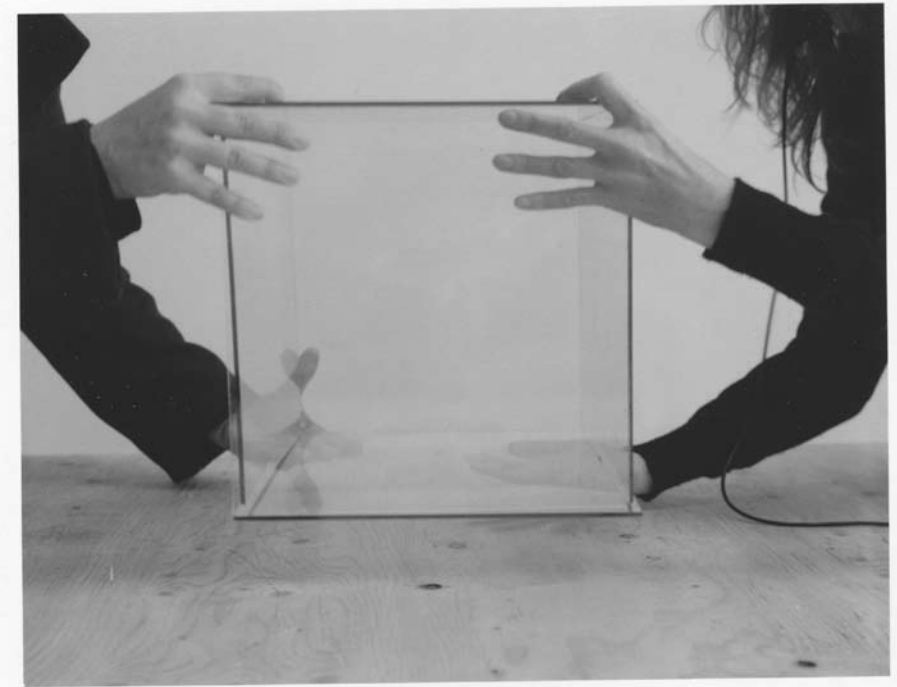
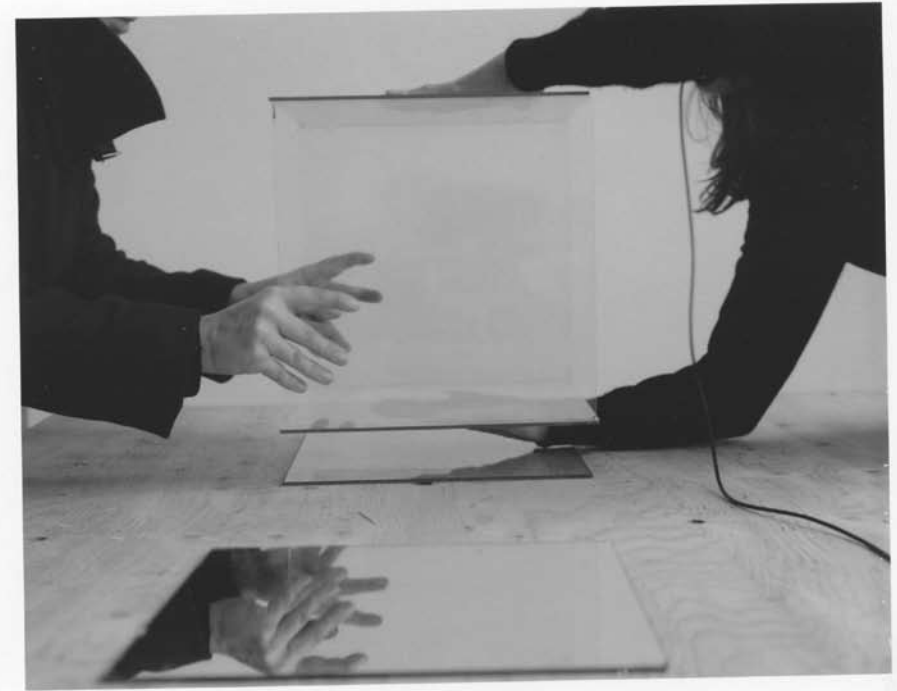
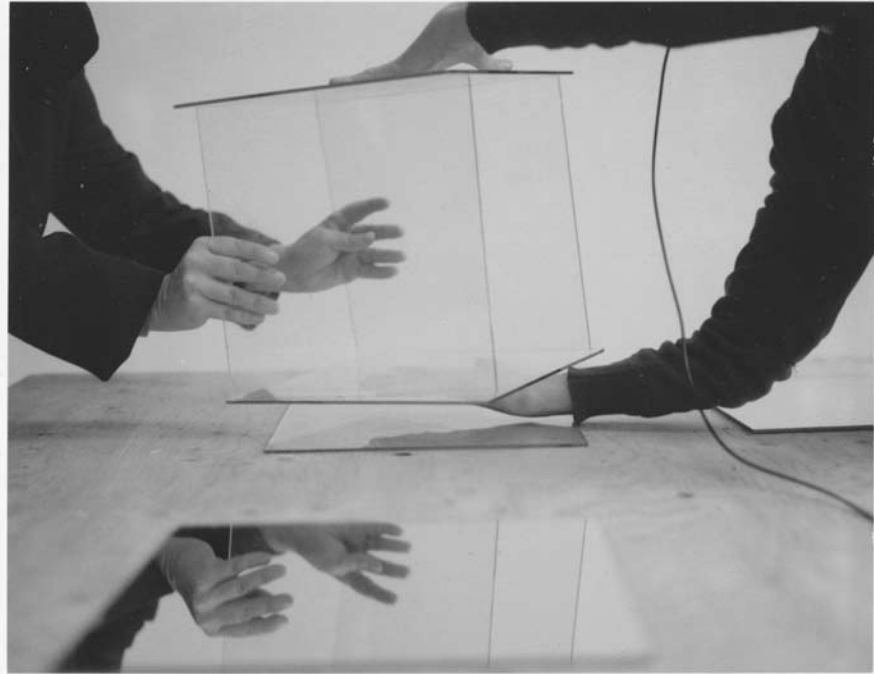
**(2008)
on life
in the
incompetent
empire**

**(2006)
and
thoughts
re:
[-empyre-]**

**(2004)
from
in retrospect
...
Brett
Stalbaum**

Imagining a different world does not equate to building a fictitious one

—Olivia Guaraldo



play a game¹:



9.00 downfall²:

9.01 protest. by all means protest your innocence, if you are making a declaration.
But if you are making a complaint or objection, you must protest against it.

9.02 collapse is not transitive. You may collapse, but you may not collapse
something.

9.03 Anarchy means the complete absence of law or government.
It may be harmonious or chaotic³.

9.10 setting up:

place the game between players so that neither player can see the
opponent's side. Set all the dials in the start position so that the
arrows on the dials line up with those on the frame.
Now you're ready to play!²

¹ call your game 'democracy'

² Downfall, the double sided strategy game with an
unpredictable twist on every corner!
1970 Western Publishing company
Components made in China.

³ from The Economist Style Book 2003.

COUNTER-HEGEMONY AS DEMOCRATISM OF ART

This paper contextualises, in new ways, current debates in this field – attending to a number of currently influential concepts such as ‘Relational Aesthetics’ and ‘Immaterial Labour’ – and suggests a countering argument to dominant positions within such debates. The direct purpose of this article is to indicate the direction of an alternative conception of critical dimension in art, understood in terms of its contribution to the construction of counter-hegemonic forms based on non-essentialist understanding of democratic politics and non-essentialist approach to an aesthetic experience and artistic practice.

What art has particularly to do with democracy? To answer this question we need to understand its starting point insofar as the subject of art's connection to democracy has recently become popular in both: art world and the world of politics. Although the issue of the relation between art and politics itself is hardly new - from Plato through German Romanticism to Wagner and Heidegger, the common root of art and politics has been theorised and challenged – its peculiar formulation in terms of a ‘democracy’ is somewhat a novelty. Such a formulation takes its place today for two the most obvious reasons. First is that democracy has been widely identified as the common denominator of all current emancipatory movements and as a ‘final solution’ to all social antagonisms. Second is that in Europe, certainly, rapidly growing and multiplying arts are increasingly seen as the promise of a pluralistic audience, fruitful participation, dissolution of a conflict; in short, a promise of a fulfilled democratic society.

This currently enthusiastically projected ‘love affair’ between art and democracy has been particularly induced by interpretations of Deleuze and some work of Hardt and Negri who argue that ‘The common currency that runs throughout so many struggles and movements for liberation across the world today - at local, regional, and global levels - is the desire for democracy... the only answer to the vexing questions of our day, the only way out of our state of perpetual conflict and war’¹. According to Hardt and Negri, ‘what makes democracy possible for the first time’, is the rise of the multitude in the heart of capitalism, - ‘multitude, [which] is finally able to rule itself’. Hence, they propose a vision of ‘absolute democracy’, understood as ‘the rule of everyone by everyone, a democracy without qualifiers, without ifs or buts’².

Given such a view, it is just logical that artistic practice is seen as one of possible embodiments of ‘absolute democracy’ since the figure of the artist has always been somewhat of a self-promoter, a ‘creator’, and the artistic practice itself stood for romantic ideas of unlimited freedom and self-

¹ Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, *Multitude*, New York: The Penguin Press, 2004: 45

² Ibid

construction; it is what has been seen as driven by the ‘desire’ and not the ‘reason’. Why, however, such artistic inspirations did not get us very far in the past? It is because, claim Hardt and Negri, previously the fruits of labour were material, contained by the form of private property while today production has moved towards the ‘general intellect’ when the products are no longer material objects, but new social (interpersonal) relations themselves, and this is what opens up a unique chance of ‘absolute democracy’. Hardt and Negri state, ‘What the multitude produces is not just goods or services; the multitude also and most importantly produces cooperation, communication, forms of life, and social relationships’³. Consequently, if we are no longer work but create and communicate, then the key worker is an artist. What follows is that the relationships artists produce would ultimately have a truly creative impact and will eventually lead to emancipation. In short, artistic or creative labour is envisaged as a new hegemonic figure, which eventually will lead us to a bright future.

In contrast with the avant-garde political project of negating and subverting the hegemonic order, today art's role in the relation to society seems to be envisaged in self-hegemonic terms when artistic practice does not respond to the state of our social relations but actively construct them itself in a desirable direction. The problem, in my view, that the vision of an ‘absolute democracy’ presupposes an absolute dissolution of power relations. The question of power would be the starting point of our discussion on the relevance of artistic practices to democracy.

Power Relations Today

If one wishes to talk about art and democracy, one cannot ignore the subject of power and artistic practice's position in relation to the latter. To begin to understand why today's artistic practice's contribution to politics is envisaged in terms of ‘democracy’ we need to outline the current political context in which contemporary art operates. French theorist Zaki Laidi argues that the post-Cold war political context manifests itself in ‘the gap between power and meaning’⁴. In his view the political subjectivity and ability to struggle for particular interests has been fundamentally problematised with the collapse of the ‘Iron Curtain’ and discreditation of the Marxist-Leninist project. We are now convinced that instead of thinking in terms of Left and Right, we should use so called ‘soft’ or ‘human’ approach of ‘right’ and ‘wrong’. Zaki Laidi, Jacques Rancière and others have observed an ‘ethical turn’ in political theory, as evidenced in the resurgence of interest in Emmanuel Levinas, in Giorgio Agamben, and in the idea of ‘radical evil’. According to Rancière, the explosion of communitarian discourse in the mid-1990s was underpinned by a desire to

³ Ibid

⁴ Laidi, Zaki, *A World Without Meaning: The Crisis of Meaning in International Politics*, Routledge 1998

promote a homogeneous and consensual view of society as 'ethical community', in which the issue of 'war of positions' was no longer valid. What informs the trajectory of political practice in, as Chantal Mouffe puts it, our 'post-political age', is the dissolution of Left and Right and submission of politics to moral judgments bearing on the validity of their principles and the consequences of their actions. Consequently, in the absence of a forward-looking political project, the projection of power lacks the dimension of its ultimate purpose; instead, the subjective factors are put above any collective trajectory. Laidi states, 'There is no longer any distance between what one does and what one aspires to. This confusion is of great concern because it appears to give states authority to be free of political perspective. Thus our societies claim that the urgency of problems forbids them from reflecting on a project, while in fact it is their total absence of perspective that makes them slaves of emergencies'⁵. Consequently, the power relations are understood and projected in terms of values rather than practical interests. Although it is still projected and exercised, power is theorized as an obstacle and a problem rather than the ultimate purpose. Without a future-oriented vision of society, power is envisaged in an increasingly individualistic pattern – it is no longer the party or an institution but the individuals themselves that should provide legitimacy of their actions. Laidi writes, 'Power – understood in its widest sense – is conceived and experienced less and less as a process of taking over responsibilities, and more as a game of avoidance. Social actors avoid taking on their own responsibilities or some responsibilities because, in the absence of a project of meaning, responsibilities are measured only in cost terms'.⁶ Without a sense of purpose or a future-oriented vision of society it is problematic to engage in politics. Power, which increasingly lacks a clear purpose, seeks to engage with the world idealistically rather than practically. In this way, artistic practice and creative potential are perceived as one of the possible attempts to fulfill 'the gap between power and meaning'.

Art as Politics

Practicing art today becomes not the means to achieve an objective but the most 'creative' way of finding one. Such a view, for instance, is reflected in Madeleine Bunting, former director of London based think-tank 'Demos' and activist's understanding of artistic practice as a substitute of vanishing politics. Bunting is convinced that 'Culture, not politics, is now

⁵ Ibid: 11

⁶ Ibid: 13

the heart of our public realm'⁷. Based on typical activities of a fashionable artistic group, sponsored by Arts Council England, Artangel, Bunting claims that the emphasis now should be put on arts and culture instead of traditional means of engaging with the politics. She writes, 'Politicians bred on GDP and productivity statistics need to take notice of how the arts inspire collective experience in a way that our political languages no longer can. In key areas such as identity, where emotions are raw and intense, culture of all kinds is a vital arena in which to defuse fears before the latter take violent or political form'.⁸ According to Bunting, art is capable of positively changing our behaviour, economically improving our habitus, permitting 'other' values to be played up in the artistic sphere, sharing and communicating: 'art is about opening up conversations and connections in a myriad of ways, even between strangers on the street who share their delight or contempt'⁹, - says Bunting.

Instead of thinking in terms of Left and Right, Bunting proposes to re-animate politics in terms of 'art-politics' because, in her view, art is much less offensive way to discuss our problems: first, it offers everyone a chance to participate, second, art 'engages people emotionally'. She argues, 'Art can never do the messy business of politics - the negotiation and compromise. But politicians are now grappling with a new politics about how to change the way people behave in their private lives: how they eat, travel, shop, exercise, drink. And art can open minds and change hearts in a way that our politics is singularly failing to do'.¹⁰

Thus, according to Bunting, 'the messy business of politics' should be left behind, meanwhile, art would give us plenty of opportunities to 'change hearts' and prevent conflicts. Instead of dealing with 'violent or political form', art, in Bunting's view is a perfect occasion to talk about our socio-political desires in non-offensive way. It is not a coincidence that the most articulated themes in contemporary art, which claim its political relevance, are the subject of the 'Other' or the subject of 'Identity'. Drawing on Antony Gormley's recent art event that took place in the English seaside town Margate, Bunting argues that this event has offered a solid base of addressing 'issues of identity and migration' that Margate 'tensely' copes with. In her view, the fact that 'everybody participated in this event' and that 'the real issues' were discussed, signify that 'art has broken its elitist leash to inspire democratic purpose'.¹¹

⁷ Bunting, Madeleine, 'Culture, not politics, is now the heart of our public realm', *The Guardian*, 3 October, 2006, <http://www.guardian.co.uk/Columnists/Column/0,,1886126,00.html>

⁸ Bunting, Madeleine, 'Culture, not politics, is now the heart of our public realm', *The Guardian*, 3 October, 2006,

⁹ Bunting, Madeline, 'Artists now taking the lead politicians have failed to give', *The Guardian*, May 21, 2007, <http://www.guardian.co.uk/commentisfree/2007/may/21/comment.politics>

¹⁰ Ibid

¹¹ Ibid

Such an odd rationalisation of artistic practice as practicing contemporary politics manifests how peculiar today's politics are understood. When 'new politics' are perceived not in terms of interests or struggle for power and exclusion but in terms of values, artistic practice seems to be particularly relevant as means of such peaceful and 'open' communication. Of course, this communication is not open but rather 'all-inclusive' since it wants to be affirmed by all – the 'art space' today can hardly be open as it has no outside, - 'all', claims Bunting, are 'invited to participate'. Consequently, the political action becomes identical with any artistic action without any need for an additional practice of aestheticisation. Such a trend could be seen not only in common perception of artistic practice as political activity in itself but also in the increasing number of claims where political moves and gestures are classified as 'art'. For example, a loyalist fanatic Michael Stone, who has attempted to slit the throats of Gerry Adams and Martin McGuinness in front of television cameras inside the Northern Ireland Assembly on 24 November 2006, described his actions in his defence to Belfast Crown Court as 'performance art'. The trial is still continuing and the Court admits they have difficulty in separating a crime from an artistic activity. Similarly, various media's representatives have repeatedly described Osama bin Laden as a 'video-artist of our times'. This increasingly popular way of comparing art and terrorism or art and war reflects the ongoing confusion of what politics are about and manifests an impossibility of engaging with our current predicament in a meaningful and constructive way.

Art Politics as Default

What informs the trajectory of artistic practice in, as Chantal Mouffe puts it, our 'post-political age', is first, the dissolution of Left and Right and an acceptance of the raw base of today capitalist's society as necessary reality. It is no longer the State or a particular ideology that dictates the rules of engagement but the capitalist market. Yves Michaud argues that we are living in a globalised society of consumerism where art is demanded as any other product: 'In our capitalist societies, aesthetic beauty has triumphed invading everything'¹². We consume beauty, there is a huge demand for it and so for artists, but art seems to dissolve becoming the 'air we breathe' (our aesthetic atmosphere). The problem for artists is then that 'what they do is already done in society', and their reaction usually is to try making the distinction between art and life precisely separating art from aesthetics. That is, in my view, one of the main reasons why since 1990s the 'social turn' (in some sources titled as 'Left Turn') in art is prevailing among any other forms. It is socially engaged, community-based, participatory, interventionist, research-based and collaborative user-driven art that has become a focus of cultural sphere. This kind of art always acts as art and something else. While the 'aesthetics' are sacrificed from the outset, the central

¹² Michaud, Yves, *Critères esthétiques et jugement de goût*, Jacqueline Chambon: 1999

criteria in evaluating artworks are informed by 'post-political' ethics. Instead of thinking in terms of 'aesthetics', which Rancière somehow eccentrically defines as the 'ability to think contradiction'¹³, today more and more artists are quitting this frame. While the avant-garde artist used to broaden the artworld frame further, today artist is looking for and experimenting with the possible exit strategies. Whereas avant-garde's classical semantics of negation, resistance, refusal and subversion were aimed at the recognition of 'equal aesthetical rights', today the equality is envisaged as abdicating of aesthetical rights altogether. Grant Kester argues that 'contemporary art functions through collaboration, discussion and dialogue with the audiences and not through subversion, shock and destruction'¹⁴. In other words, any dimension of an esthetical agreement or disagreement is removed in favor of ethical approach. However, this approach in no way manifests any clear political ambitions or motives on behalf of artists and art institutions. And this is where, in my view, the current confusion about 'Democracy' as political trajectory of contemporary art comes into full force.

This confusion, which is reflected in many recent publications including 'Frieze' magazine and 'Artforum', is transparent in Claire Bishop's article entitled 'The Social Turn: Collaboration and its Discontents'. (February 2006). Bishop argues that the logic behind socially engaged art is said to 're-humanise' a 'numb and fragmented' capitalist society. However, she emphasizes that she believes socially engaged art has fallen prey to circumscribed critical examinations. The discourse, she argues, has focused mainly on the artist's process and intentions, and not on aesthetics. Bishop writes, 'There can be no failed, unsuccessful, unresolved, or boring works of collaborative art because all are equally essential to the task of strengthening the social bond,' and continues, 'While I am broadly sympathetic to that ambition, I would argue that it is also crucial to discuss, analyze, and compare such work critically as art'. In other words, Bishop states that 'the aesthetic doesn't need to be sacrificed at the altar of social change, as it already inherently contains this ameliorative process'.¹⁵ The contradiction of Bishop's argument manifests itself in the fact that she agrees with the 'political' implications (as improving social bond) of so called 'engaged' art, meanwhile she wonders where the aesthetic gone? However, if the emphasis would be put on aesthetics, then art will no longer be in any position to 'strengthen the social bond', on the contrary, it would contribute to a more fragmented and conflicted society (as, to a certain extent, it was in the case of Russian avant-garde).

Aesthetic agreement or disagreement does not come from nowhere. We are likely to share our tastes with those that share the 'culture' that Wittgenstein saw behind every aesthetic judgment.

¹³ Rancière, Jacques, *The Politics of Aesthetics*, Continuum International Publishing Group; Pbk. Ed edition, 2006

¹⁴ Kester, Grant, *Conversation Pieces: Communication and Community in Modern Art*, University of California Press, Berkeley, CA, 2004

¹⁵ Bishop, Claire, 'The Social Turn: Collaboration and its Discontents', *Artforum*, February 2006

Informed by Wittgenstein's view on aesthetics, Michaud has shown how our taste is not innate, spontaneous, or natural, but is the result of a training process in different aesthetic 'language games' that shape it - the 'language games of evaluation that also are the 'language games' of perception and feeling'.¹⁶ Hence, standards of taste arise from convergent aesthetic appreciations. Inside what Michaud calls a 'community of evaluation which is articulated with a community of production' and about certain axiologically appreciated objects certain common culture is developed and it generates criteria that, given any aesthetic judgments, will allow us to assess them as correct or incorrect. Therefore, we can learn to identify and affectively react to certain qualities, which are the 'objective counterpart' but decided by convention.¹⁷ Aesthetic values are learnt inside particular 'language games', in fact, according to Michaud, we could not have the right experience without entering in a certain language game.

This, it could be seen that aesthetical judgment is not somewhat a neutral entity, as Bishop envisages it, and that it presupposes a certain 'language-game', a certain exclusion. Political identity of socially engaged art is problematic because it does not correspond to any political questions. What Bishop confuses are the cause-consequence relations. The 'Social turn' in contemporary art is the consequence of the capitalist logic, its reaction to continue to exist as a product, which manifests itself in making the distinction between art and life - that is separating art from aesthetics. Consequently, this sort of art appears to be 'politically' relevant but there is no aesthetical 'language-game' behind it to support or criticize any political standpoints. It is in this vacuum of meaning that the rhetoric of participation and social-relevance take over. What it manifests is impossibility of articulating differences, of Left and Right, based on the fact that the founding logic behind socio-political ambitious art is informed by the capitalist demands, and not by the desire of 'social change', as Bishop argues.

'What Art Can Do to Humanize Capitalism?' – The Question Determines the Answer

Thus, the unfortunate duo of 'hollow' hegemony and capitalist logic acts as a simulacrum of a 'political project' as it sets a false goal of resolving itself from within when politics are understood as somewhat flowing from dealing with capitalism. For example, Nicholas Bourriaud,¹⁸ who devised the term *Relational Aesthetics*, posits the question about democratic potentials in contemporary art precisely in relation to capitalism. 'What Art Can Do to Humanize Capitalism?',¹⁹

¹⁶ Michaud, Yves, *Critères esthétiques et jugement de goût*, Jacqueline Chambon: 1999

¹⁷ Ibid

¹⁸ Referring to French art critic and co-director of Palais de Tokyo in Paris Nicholas Bourriaud, who in his book *Relational Aesthetics* has described 'new engaged art' as a 'dialogical' and reflexive approach in an attempt to construct a democratic trajectory in the capitalist society', Bourriaud, Nicolas, *Relational Aesthetics*, Les presses du réel, 2002

¹⁹ Ibid

asks Bourriaud. Well, the question determines the answer. Bourriaud claims that the most striking feature of their [relational artists] works is 'first and foremost, the democratic concern that informs it'. In his view, intra-audience encounters catalysed within a relational art paradigm offer, in contrast with the capitalist system of exchange, affective resonances and revived social connection, which directly contribute to society's democratisation. The value of a relation is central to Bourriaud's understanding of critical functions of contemporary art. He claims that while our society is badly affected by capitalist relations of exchange (mechanisation of human affairs), Relational Art offers 'genuine relationships with the world' based on ongoing dialogue and openness.

In their *The New Spirit of Capitalism* Luc Boltanski and Eve Chiapello point out the emergence of new paradigm of social order, which they identify as the third spirit of capitalism. While the first and the second spirits were built on the industrial model where proprietors were seen as main holders of modern values such as family, state, wealth, the third spirit transforms the definition of a value. Boltanski and Chiapello meticulously explain a shift from the value of objects, work and people (efficiency and professionalism) towards the value of relations. They state that capitalism, which is characterised by endless abstract accumulation process and wage earning inevitably produces aggravation and exclusion because neither executives nor workers cannot be satisfied with the financial abstract or practical reasoning, therefore they ask for *meaning*. Following socialist movements in 60s and 70s, capitalism searched how to create new working conditions that satisfy artistic and social critic of the state apparatus as main force of domination and oppression, longing for autonomy and the flexibility. The third stage of capitalism or connexionist capitalism rejects hierarchy, planning, discipline and embraces mobility and flexibility. Words such as openness, team-working, dynamics and mobilisation, networking have become the new motto of human resources departments. Previously linked to the product, the value now integrates the relation and its effects. Boltanski and Chiapello write, 'Whereas, in a commercial world, the product is separated from persons and stabilized by conventions or standards guaranteeing its quality – this, in particular, is the role of brands – in a connexionist world the product, which circulates with difficulty when separated from persons, is transformed by the relation'.²⁰ While in the trade world, the transaction does not modify the product quality or the suppliers and demanders down the chain, '[i]n a connexionist world, by contrast, links are useful and enriching when they have the power to change the beings who enter into relations'.²¹ The opportunity to produce links or mobility thus becomes a source of profit. At this point oppression is easy and natural, - 'these who do not move around (or move less) contribute to the formation of the value

²⁰ Boltanski Luc, Chiapello, Eve, *The New Spirit of Capitalism*, Verso, 2005: 130-131

²¹ Ibid: 131

added of those who do (more)'.²² 'Some people's immobility is necessary for other people's mobility'²³ is what Boltanski and Chiapello identify as a new form of oppression, which is more severe. Whereas in the past a man was secure in poverty and it was understood that to escape it, one must risk everything, but if one did not gamble, he/she could not lose, now, '...those who do not gamble lose all the time, even more assuredly than those who do'.²⁴

This reveals how *Relational Aesthetic* is part of the transformation shift from the second spirit of capitalism to the third, by focusing on and installing relationship as the main value. The figure of the artist has become the exact model for a new leadership, - an operator, strong at networking, mobile and flexible. The consequence is that promoting network and its values such as connectivity, flexibility, mobility, openness now emerges as promoting the core ideology of the third capitalism which *Relational Aesthetic* claims it fights.

Bourriaud is certainly not alone in his perception of democratic potentials of art as practices, which are directly connected to possible resistance, improvement or overcoming of capitalism. To demonstrate this trend I will consider two following examples: one is somehow negative position of Boris Goys and the positive one, represented by Hard and Negri's theory of 'immaterial labour'.

In his latest book *Art Power* Boris Groys denounces any democratic potential of contemporary art, although he hesitantly points out the possibility of going in a more or less critical direction mostly based on retrieving the lost autonomy of art. Groys' sceptical position is informed by his separation of political potentials of art at the rigid state regime and the current - that is of 'free markets'. Groys draws somewhat a rough division of modern art created in the market sphere as a commodity, and art produced within the rigid State as a possible tool for political influence or propaganda, which he exclusively identifies with the art of Nazi Germany or Soviet Union. According to Groys, it is only under totalitarian regimes that political potentials of art could be actualised in a form of so called 'underground' or 'dissident' creative activities. For example, Groys argues that the 'dissident' or 'partisan' culture of Soviet Union during the 'Sozrealism' period of Soviet cultural history, which, in his view, has greatly contributed to the fall of the Soviet regime, is very much neglected by art historians and political theorists. Today, when the ideological structure has vanished and the State has no longer represents the clear boundaries and not directly oppressive, it is, according to Groys, not possible for artistic practice to have a visible political impact. He states that 'the dominating art discourse identifies art with art market and remains blind to any art that is produced and distributed by any mechanism other than the

²² Ibid: 362

²³ Ibid: 362

²⁴ Peguy, Charles quoted by Boltanski Luc, Chiapello, Eve, *The New Spirit of Capitalism*, Verso, 2005, Prologue

market'²⁵. This market art, according to Groys, 'is not one of a pluralism, but rather a logic of contradictions', - here Groys gives an example of art movements, which immediately would provoke counter-movements within art – thesis and antithesis summing zero. Consequently, no critique would ever follow form such 'zero sum games'. He continues that the substantial critique in contemporary art is impossible since commodified art practices are not capable of differentiating from other commodities and become self-critical. 'Self-critical commodity is a paradox itself'²⁶, concludes Groys, and as such it perfectly fits into dominating paradigm of modern and contemporary art and it also means that it cannot be truly political.

In short, Groys denounces any political notion of art created under the neo-liberal capitalist democracies of Western world. As an example of such impossibility he examines Islamist videos and posters functioning in the context of the international anti-globalist movement as works, which are produced outside the art market and overlooked by the institutions of this market. However, continues Groys, if art made under 'non-institutional' conditions, is really critical, then it becomes easily absorbed within the art institutions that tended to exclude it. This leads to further stabilisation of these institutions. In any case, maintains Groys, the internal critique of the art market can only improve bit not fundamentally change it. What prevails in the end is that today's art object is a 'paradox-object' since it accumulates a paradox: it is 'an image and a critique of this image at the same time'²⁷.

Groys further examines the question of autonomy of art as a precondition to autonomous power of resistance to what's there. He argues that art world cannot be observed in any significant sense as autonomous since it is regulated by rules and aesthetic value judgements which always reflect power structures and dominant social conventions. Given, Groys continues, that there is no immanent aesthetic value that art could be judged from, he suggests that the best we can do is at least 'establish the regime of equal aesthetic rights for all art works'²⁸. According to Groys, this is the only way to resist inequality between the images as imposed from the outside, which reflects social, cultural and subsequently political inequalities. It is in this 'aesthetical equality' that the potential for resistance as a precondition of any political engagement lays as envisaged by Groys.

There are three main points that I wish to address concerning Groys' understanding of relationship between art and power. First, that Groys envisages art's power only in the framework of potential resistance to what is given, whether is a particular ideology of the State or a capitalist

²⁵ Groys, Boris, *Art Power*, MIT Press: 2008

²⁶ Ibid

²⁷ Ibid

²⁸ Ibid

society. Second, Groys identifies the main obstacle to artistic practice fulfilling its critical potentials as all-inclusive art market, which prevents the emergence of self-critical arts and thus make it impossible for artistic practice to independently reflect on our society. Thus, his main problem with art's critical potentials is focused on capitalism as the overdetermining force, which neutralises any critical approaches. Groys suggests that the critical potentials of art could only be revived if artistic practice start going in the direction of autonomy, although he does not specify what is at stake in this autonomy, apart from its resistance to capitalist art sphere. Paradoxically, art's autonomy actually derives from the emergence of the art market sphere. The market here does not solely imply the mechanism of exchange (bought-sold) but the whole public sphere where artworks could be made, discussed and distributed in abstraction from the person or institutions commissioned them in the past. In his *Theory of the Avant-Garde* Peter Burger has brilliantly argued that, 'The abstraction from the person who commissions a work and the work being commissioned, an abstraction which the market made possible, was the precondition for artistic abstraction, the interest in techniques of composition and colouring'²⁹. Thus, Groys's attempt to think about art's critical potentials only in relation to its possible abstraction of the capitalist market is at least unrealistic given that the most radical art works of our times has been produced because and not despite of the market system. Furthermore, although capitalism today represents the powerful paradigm – as Ernesto Laclau points out that 'We can no longer understand capitalism as a purely economic reality, but as a complex in which economic, political, military, technological and other determinations – each endowed with its own logic and a certain autonomy – enter into the determination of the movement as the whole'³⁰, - it certainly does not mean that it is the only way of articulating and thinking through our current predicament. Laclau reminds that capitalism per se is not an overwhelming reality but the most fixed moment in our articulations of social relations. Further, if Groys is convinced that there is no way to deal with capitalism all-penetrating character, then even an abstraction from the market in terms of art production would not significantly alter this 'outside' produced art's reception. What kind of critique could flow from art's reception, recipients of which still operate with the given aesthetic value judgements that, according to Groys, tend to reflect power structures and dominant social conventions? Perhaps, this kind of art would not be recognised as art in the first place. The third and most important point, which I have the most difficulty with, is Groys' overall understanding of 'political art' as the creative practice that entirely transforms the society. In this way, Groys did not go far from the romantic image of intersection between art and revolution. 'Political art' for Groys is the art that resists the given context or attempts to break it down. As we will see, such an understanding of political intervention is rather simplistic one. After all, is the new-liberal universe, where the rules of discourse somehow are separated from the discourse itself; is the only way to

²⁹ Burger, Peter, *Theory of the Avant-Garde*, University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis, 1987

³⁰ Laclau, Ernesto, *On Populist Reason*, Verso, London & New York, 2005: 230

approach artistic and any other possible critical interventions? What Groys insists that 'self-critical commodity is a paradox'³¹, that capitalist regime rules all discourses and colours all affairs and thus make it impossible for art to have a political impact. Groysian 'gordian' knot of 'political art' could be seen residing in this uncertainty: does art always end up stabilising the model criticised? In my view, Groys' evaluation says more about his odd understanding of politics rather than reflects on the state of political relevance of artistic practice. While all artistic practices, in words of Chantal Mouffe, have a political dimension - whether they resist, affirm the dominant order or just service entirely themselves - the criticality, in my view, only emerges when the situation, following Laclau, is re-born in a new context. Ernesto Laclau writes, 'A true political intervention is never merely oppositional; it is rather one that displaces the terms of the debate, that rearticulates the situation in a new configuration'³².

In contrast with Groys, Hardt and Negri and other representatives of current Italian 'Left' occupy an optimistic position about our current predicament. They also view capitalism as the main problem, however, also the only solution to itself. In their view, critical breakthrough is to emerge exclusively from within the forms of capitalist progression itself. In their *Empire* Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri identified the transition from a post-industrial or post-Fordist economy to the 'cultural-informational economy' and proposed the theory of intellectual and affective work or what was called 'immaterial labour' as the new hegemonic figure, thus, resurrecting Marx's notion of the proletariat as the key actor of world history. According to Hardt and Negri, the self-organizing capacities of 'cognitariat' could no longer be kept outside the sphere of decision-making by coercive or disciplinary procedures, but instead could only be channelled or controlled by the maintenance of conceptual categories, figures of identity, hierarchies of value etc. *Empire* addresses the 'multitude' as the virtual political subject of the wide-open potential represented by the self-organizing capacities of 'immaterial labour'. It invites people to 're-appropriate' the productive energies that they were already putting into operation through their salaried or freelance cooperation, and asserts that the self-organizing multitude should be capable of directly producing the immanent forms of exchange, of governing its own production, and in this way superseding the sterile and divisive forms of coordination that structure and rule the world market. Hardt and Negri state, 'Certainly, there must be a moment when re-appropriation and self-organization reach a threshold and configure a real event. This is when the political is really affirmed - when the genesis is complete and self-valorisation, the cooperative convergence of subjects, and the proletarian management of production become a constituent power.... The only

³¹ Groys, Boris, *Art Power*, MIT Press: 2008

³² Laclau, Ernesto, 'The Main Task of Radical Politics', *Critical Inquiry*, Summer 2006: 678

event that we are still awaiting is the construction, or rather the insurgence, of a powerful organization³³.

Thus, if Groys argues that capitalist market prevents art's autonomy and obscures critical self-reflection, Hardt and Negri believe that the true autonomy would eventually evolve from within the capitalist itself. What seems not to be present in both articulations is the question of politics. In my view, such positions are informed by the bizarre understanding of politics and the political subject. On one hand, Groys, Hardt and Negri argue that the solution to capitalist apathy could be uprising of autonomies – in case of Groys it is specifically art's autonomy and the latter stands for the multitude of autonomous agents – on the other hand, they tend to ignore the fact that the capitalism itself is a social relations and that it mobilises and function so effectively precisely because it is based on the network on autonomous agents. It was already Marx who emphasized how material production is always also the re-production of the social relations within which it occurs. The possibility of critical engagement and emancipation, in my view, is located within the positioning not exclusively 'in relations to capitalist society' but in relation to all real conflicts and demands, all these antagonisms, which have not simply vanished into the latter. I am convinced that between Groys's political propaganda and Hardt and Negri's fundamental evolution of the multitude there could be a wiser choice. This choice, however, fundamentally depends on how one views political subject and power relations. Is this not the blindness of our neo-liberal universe, which operates within the limited vocabulary of markets, the State and all-inclusive 'democracy' that prevents us from the serious critical engagement on the basis of an alternative vision of our society? Undoubtedly, capitalism is a powerful and canning condition, meanwhile, unrequited politics take ugly shapes – from with the growing popularity of right wing parties to the steady progression of Al Quaida and other similar forms of terror-based activities. Is Al Quaida's struggle directly informed by the capitalist logic? Is Tibetan resurgence against China or Chechen resistance against Russia are the direct consequences of capitalism development?

I have chosen to examine Bourriaud, Hard and Negri and Groys positions because, in my view, they illustrate well that today's trajectory of liberal thought, as Chantal Mouffe indicates, is not able to understand the specificity of the political, that the political project today is understood in terms of capitalism whether it is about latter's 'humanisation', overcoming or simply surrendering. The question of 'What art has particularly to do with democracy?' should be read as 'What art has to do with capitalism' since the mental image of democratic politics in our current predicament does not go beyond capitalist paradigm. What follows is that all 'politics' that result from such a situation appeal to an abstract notion of democracy, which, in turn, is envisaged as the solution to the 'problem' of capitalist domination. However, this is, in my view, not a solution but a perfect

³³ Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, *Multitude*, New York: The Penguin Press, 2004

description of a problem – that is of our post-political subjectivity, which, having finally lost all faith in the subject itself, put all hopes into subjects' relations and communications. It is not a coincidence that Bourriaud's describes Relational Aesthetics is a *theory of form* rather than a *theory of art*. Art presupposes aesthetical agreement and disagreement behind which there are conflicting language-games and positions, while a form is a neutral entity. Why would someone agree or disagree with the mere form?

Political Politics

Where does it leave us with our question on art's relation to democracy? I have to start from the outset that what we need is both: politics and art. However, Mouffe writes, 'But what is specific to the political always eludes liberal thought. I consider this as a serious shortcoming because to be able to act in politics one needs to understand what is the dynamic of the political. ...I insist that the dimension of the political is something that is linked to the dimension of conflict that exists in human societies, the ever-present possibility of antagonism: an antagonism that is ineradicable. This means that a consensus without exclusion – a form of consensus beyond hegemony, beyond sovereignty will always be unavailable'.

As the very existence of this social order implies exclusion, it is impossible to overcome we/them distinction and reach a final consensus. Mouffe states, 'What is crucial in the hegemonic struggle is to be able to think in a political way and this requires relinquishing a lot of illusions, for instance the idea that there is a necessary direction to history, which would lead to a final reconciliation, or the idea that we could reach a stage beyond politics, where antagonism would be eliminated and a perfect democracy realised'.³⁴ While a perfect democracy is simply unforeseeable, the aim of democratic politics consists in transformation of the existing power relations and subsequently establishing a new hegemony. She states that '[t]he fundamental difference between the 'dialogical' and the 'agonistic' (relations between adversaries but not enemies) perspectives (of democracy) is that the aim of the latter is a profound transformation of the existing power relations and the establishment of a new hegemony'.³⁵ In *On the Political*, Chantal Mouffe points out inability of mainstream liberalism to grasp the impossibility of overcoming dialectical opposition, which drives the social. While 'a democratic society requires a debate about possible alternatives and it must provide political forms of collective identifications around clearly differentiated democratic positions'³⁶, what we are witnessing now is an unchallenged triumph of neo-capitalism where politics are originate from and within the latter.

³⁴ Mouffe, Chantal, "Which Democracy in a Post-Political Age", available on line at http://darkmarkets.t0.or.at/materials/abstract_mouffe.htm

³⁵ Ibid: 52

³⁶ Mouffe, Chantal, *On the Political*, Routledge, London and New York, 2005: 31

Democratism of Art

It is precisely within the dimension of the political, not politics that I envisage democratism of art. From Plato through German Romanticism to Wagner and Heidegger, the common root of art and politics has been theorised and challenged. Boris Groys summarises this common destiny rather well: 'Art and politics are connected at least in one fundamental respect: both are realms in which a struggle for recognition is being waged'. According to Alexandre Kojève, this struggle bypasses the usual fight for the distribution of material goods and the satisfaction of various desires and, instead, is aimed at the recognition of all artistic forms and practices as socially legitimate. As various political movements fought and fight for recognition, so did artists of the historical avant-garde, who struggled for equality of aesthetical forms – from primitive imaginary to abstract images and 'ready-mades' - all these practices and objects have finally acquired the social recognition, which once used to be granted only to privileged images. Does this mean that this struggle for aesthetic equality has been finally won? Arthur Danto, for example, argues that the 'pluralistic contemporary art has today arrived to the point when it can serve as the harbinger of political things to come'. Certainly, all images are now formally accepted, however, only some of them are promoted, distributed and iconised by the general public. Paraphrasing George Orwell, all images are equal but some of them are more equal than others. While a condition of total equality could never be attained, neither in the political, nor in the artistic realms, what unites these struggles is their ambition towards power and, more specifically, towards, in words of Dmitry Prigov³⁷, 'creation of power from nothing'. Prigov argues that what fundamentally links artistic practice to the political is not just a struggle for recognition but a struggle for construction of new forms of symbolic power. Prigov writes, 'the eternal debate here is the problematic relationship between artists and current order when artists fight for their own symbolic space and power.' The task of the artists is to test all discourses, including the one of social legitimacy. In this way, artistic practice not only resists or affirms the current hegemony but also fundamentally questions the whole issue of social legitimacy, creating new ways of understanding, evaluating and constructing the social.

While politics are concerned with certain action on the basis of their various interests, artistic practice belongs to the field of imagination; it can act on behalf of the interests we are not aware of or even interests we yet do not have. Thus, it can challenge the current hegemony and, of

³⁷ Dimitri Prigov (1940-2007), the Russian poet and co-founder of Russian conceptualism, one of the most important poets of the late and post-Soviet era, publishing numerous books and regularly causing sensation with his live appearances. Prigov was among the few Russian artists to have been around both before and after the end of the Soviet Union. Consequently, the relationship between art and hegemony was one of his constant subjects

course, is constantly challenged by it. It is on this basis that artistic practice is closer to the dimension of the political rather than politics as such. Similarly to the dimension of the political, the artistic dimension manifests a struggle in the impossible terrain of the gap between formality and actuality. According to Bloch, the aesthetic dimension is intrinsically bound up with the notion of utopia and the possibility that things could be otherwise despite the fact that they cannot. However, despite the fact that all suffering and death cannot be eradicated, art, nevertheless, holds on to the spirit of utopia, described by Bloch as an 'invariant longing, completely without consideration at all for content'. Of course, all politics have an utopian dimension but they cannot exercise it as freely as artistic practice can, furthermore, 'contentless longing' can point in any disastrous political direction but artistic practice reserves the privilege of vision without direct action. We all need a house and we also need a representation of the house, however, at least but not the last, we would like to be able to imagine the alternative house, which does not look like the house, which is free from, in words of artist Richard Hamilton, 'the tyranny of doors and windows'. It is the specific role of the artist to imagine that kind of house, to show that things exactly could be otherwise. At one point in the *Philosophical Investigations* Wittgenstein remarks that 'it is clear that one can want to speak without speaking. Just as one can want to dance without dancing. And when we think about this, we grasp at the image of dancing, speaking, etc.'³⁸ If we continue Wittgenstein's thought and add 'painting', 'imagining' etc, then we can place ourselves at potentially illuminating intersection between construction of the social and art. What does it mean to imagine something without an image? Can artistic practice today imagine anything beyond the discourse of capitalism and all-inclusive democracy?

What Aesthetics for Democratic Politics?

Only inside history can a work exist as a value capable of being discussed and judged. Nothing seems to me worse for art than to fall outside its own history, for it is a fall into the chaos where aesthetic value can no longer be perceived'

Milan Kundera cited in Emma Bedford Contemporary South African Art 1985-1995, the National Gallery of Art, Cape Town

What kind of role artistic practice can play at the age of political apathy, at times when 'the hollow hegemony' seems to dissolve all boundaries and obscure any possible goals? Is it possible for art

³⁸ Wittgenstein, Ludwig, *Philosophical Investigations*, 3rd edition, Macmillan, New York, 1958: sec. 338

to move forward and offer a model, or metaphor, for the organisation of society, which aspires to human equality? These questions cannot be separated from our current socio-political conditions. To begin to answer this question one needs to acknowledge what kind of effect on production and understanding of contemporary art this 'hollow hegemony' has. When politics are deprived of the political dimension itself, then artistic practice becomes a toll of searching for an objective, for a meaning and not the means of achieving one. In short, art increasingly becomes a 'thing in itself'. It is precisely, 'an in-between space', the space between 'hollow hegemony' and capitalism, which operates in the framework of individuals doing their own individual things. For example, Liam Gillick's ideas of a 'functional utopia', which demand for exotica or controversy seem to me trapped in an art-centric framework where the artist alone has total control over the definition what art is. Subsequently, when the artist completes the project, even collaboratively, the whole thing ends with him and becomes closed. What we are then left with is a reified commodity in the form of art documentation for the museums and art books. What we instead require is something continually sustainable, something that is carried further in process by the energy and imagination of the people themselves. 'A personal choice' insofar clever and controversial it is, cannot objectively represent and deal with our socio-political condition. I agree with Groys that the driving force behind artistic practice today is, of course, the art market, but it does not alone determine, control and legitimise the production of what reaches its premises. There are other factors, which have to do with what continues to be perceived as innovatively modern and its function in society, and how it is received not only by individuals but, most importantly, by the art institution that legitimises it.

Where do we go from now? On one hand, we need a new articulation of democratic politics, the one that is based on recognition of all conflictual goals and interests and at the same time is aimed at establishing a new hegemony. These are the politics, which do not attempt to improve, destroy or fundamentally transform capitalism but envisage alternative mediums – from institutions to various practices – for constructive expression of disagreements. What we need is a political intervention as a new form of conception on the Left, which unites conflicting standpoints from various movements, practices and parties under, for example, alter-globalisation movement's slogan 'another world is possible'. Artistic practice can help us thinking in these terms. In my view, the potential democratism of art lies precisely within counter-hegemonic position not only to what's there but also to what is envisaged and proposed.

Barry Schwabsky argues that the 'democratic thrust of art emerges where artist and public engage on equal terms'.³⁹ Consequently, I envisage the equality of terms as belonging to the

³⁹ Schwabsky, Barry is quoted by Cunningham, David 'Answering the question: What is to be done? (education)', *Radical Philosophy*, 141, December 2007

same political project. The tension between the language-games on the renewed Left and artistic practices, which contest this discourse with, often, an unpredictable outcome could be, in my view, the basis for a democratic trajectory. The role of the aesthetical dimension then is crucial in such an encounter. As we already argued, different aesthetics correspond to different language-games. For example, Relational Aesthetics function within the capitalist paradigm. Its all-inclusive participatory tendency remain a paragon of non-democratic interaction since the goal here is the relation itself, which merely mirrors the social relation of capitalism – to conquer new territories and make more productive and visible connections. Bourriaud's idea of contemporary artistic practice as 'sharing' or a friendship' does not presuppose any disagreements on what art and aesthetics are about. He states, '...I try to show that artists' intuitive relationship with art history is now going beyond what we call 'the art of appropriation'. Which naturally infers an ideology of ownership, and moving towards a culture of use of forms, a culture of constant activity of signs based on a collective ideal: sharing'⁴⁰.

The question is what is meant by the 'art history' and 'artists' intuitive relationship?' Wittgenstein has repeatedly argued against aesthetic reductionism whatever form it takes – from 'use of forms' to art as a 'constant activity of signs'. For him culturally emergent properties such as design, representations, style etc are dependant upon aesthetic perception, what he calls 'a field of conceptual enquiry', and exists beyond what the physical object or practice does. Wittgenstein argues that aesthetic utterance corresponds to human capacity to become engage within a *particular* situation – to create a mental image and then work through it via inseparable duo of perception and description. This mental image, however, would be different according to all different 'language-games' that direct our expressions. Wittgenstein discusses our aesthetic reactions to subtle differences between differently drawn faces, and our equally subtle reactions to the height or design of a door (he is known to have had the ceiling in an entire room of the house in Vienna he designed for his sister moved only a few inches when the builders failed to realize his plan with sufficient exactitude). The enormous subtlety, and the enormous complexity, of these reactions, are a part of - and as complicated as - our natural history. He gives as an example the error, or the crudeness, of someone responding to a complaint concerning the depiction of a human smile (specifically, that the smile did not seem genuine), with the reply that, after all, the lips are only parted one one-thousandths of an inch too much: such differences,

⁴⁰ Bourriaud, Nicolas, *Postproduction*, Lukas & Sternberg, New York, 2002: 9

however small in measure, matter enormously as each time they would be bound up with the particular mental image. Aesthetical experience, for Wittgenstein does not start with a presumption that there is somehow the central task to work through the determinant properties that are named by aesthetic predicates whether it is 'use of forms' or 'constant activity of signs' but rather with a full-blooded consideration of all the activities of aesthetic life. The field of aesthetics itself is considered by Wittgenstein not as the physical outward symbol of a possible meaning but the field, which generates the need and possibilities to escape from these very categories. Thus, new formulations of our mental image are often the consequences not of human interaction or self-reflection but of aesthetic experiences.

Thus, if we are, on one hand, to follow Wittgenstein's understanding of aesthetics as an investigation into our own language games of perception and expression, as a form of engagement not with appearances but with the construction of our reality, and, on the other hand, accept that democracy is about 'things can be otherwise', it is about establishing new hegemonies and transforming existing power relations into new power relations; then we can come into potentially illuminating intersection between artistic practice and democratic politics.

Democratism of art, perhaps, then could be envisaged as the capacity of re-articulating a situation into a new configuration – counter-hegemonic articulation. However, this re-articulation cannot take place in the absence of aesthetical judgements on 'what is art?' in particular situations, in the absence of the variety of *situations* themselves. This question is not on the agenda today since the articulation of reality does not go beyond identifying capitalism as a problem and democracy as a solution. What follows is that, in the absence of a political debate about possible alternatives, aesthetic value itself cannot be perceived and consequently agreed or disagreed with.

What could be suggested is to begin thinking in the direction, which involves non-essentialist understanding of democracy as particular politics that provide political forms of collective identifications around clearly differentiated standpoints, and non-essentialist understanding of *art* as not a mere 'image' or critique of this very image but the inquiry into what the 'image' today is and what it could be tomorrow. However, art cannot do it on its own. What is needed are different situations, where politics as a contest for power takes place, and artistic practice, which forever question what power is about. Today, alas, we are facing a difficult conceptual cul-de-sac, which, in my view, Wittgenstein expresses rather well. 'A picture held us captive, and we could not get outside it, for it lay in our language and language seemed to repeat it to us inexorably'. In order to 'get outside the picture', one needs to create more situations, to understand that the struggle and

antagonism do not stop with capitalism and its problems, that to converge different struggles into a democratic unity.

Artistic practice cannot fulfil the 'gap between power and meaning'. However, it can provide us with the imaginary that challenges the meaning of power, the hegemonic order and consequently contributes to the creation of a new hegemony. Such an intervention, through, is only possible when politics are properly understood, when the 'political' is not suppressed and when aesthetics have the 'room on their own' – not searching but questioning the very meaning of contradictory positions.

András Szántó

DOES ART HAVE ANYTHING IN PARTICULAR TO DO WITH DEMOCRACY?

Looking strictly at the historical evidence, the answer is no. Art is not a necessary condition of a democracy and democratic arrangements are not required for art. Renaissance Florence wasn't a democracy. Athens was by no means a democracy, as we understand the term today. Museums are filled with fabulous art created for despots and tyrants. In one-party socialism (the regime in which I grew up), there was plenty of art, no democracy. Political systems come and go. Art soldiers on.

On closer inspection, one can pinpoint various crossover-effects between art and democracy. This, surely, is what the question above is probing. For while it is evidential that art can exist in the absence of democracy, and at least thinkable (though highly improbable) that a democracy could exist without art, only a fool would assume there to be no link whatsoever between the absence or presence of democracy and the emergence, under such disparate conditions, of one or another kind of art.

Let's assume that by *democracy* we mean a social system based on free elections, free markets, the rule of law, and universal voting rights—what we find, more or less, in Europe and North America. A commonplace assumption is that such conditions are on the whole fruitful and nurturing for art. But again, history does not necessarily bear this out.

No question, it's easier to be an artist in a democracy. Even the most outspoken painters and sculptors can carry on without the fear of being threatened with violence or jail time. Avenues into the art professions are broad and accessible. There is a robust market for reasonably good work. Democracy poses no obstacle to a pluralism of styles. There are no *a priori* limits on what art can or ought to be, no codified dogma about what purposes, other than the purposes of art itself, art ought to serve.

Democracy, coupled with open markets, does tend to push artists toward fierce and fanciful extremes, and depending on your view, this can be a good thing. Freedom and the need to be discernible in the midst of information density give rise to a kind of *fauve* intensity and self-promoting eagerness. Art in a democracy is *look-at-me* art—borne out of confidence and overstatement that are the opposites of self-censorship. Polished execution, earnest professionalism, and branded consistency are the hallmarks of art made by free artists for free markets. Big statements, shrewd moves, intense colors, vast objects, costly materials—all this, placed in the service of testing boundaries and capturing a fickle, over-entertained public's attention.

Does democracy make art better or, in some way, more important? Again the answer is no. The visual artist in a contemporary democracy is just another culture producer and information manipulator—and hardly the most privileged kind. He enjoys no special treatment or access to power. If he is talented and lucky, he may attain a sybaritic lifestyle.

Das zur Herrschaft
gelangte Publikum
urteilt durchs Auge,
nicht den Verstand;
denn es urteilt über
Darstellungskünste,
nicht über den
dargestellten Gehalt.

But the better-equipped, better-financed, and better-promoted purveyors of popular culture will always overshadow his achievements. Democracy may make it easier to be an artist, but also harder to be noticed.

All of which calls to mind an exhibition I co-organized in Budapest, Hungary, in 1993, not long after the Wall fell. It was titled *Polyphony: Social Commentary in Contemporary Hungarian Art*, and it devoted itself to the question of why there had been so little political art in the wake of the epic changes of 1989? Political art was all the rage in the West at the time (peaking with the famous “political biennial” at the Whitney Museum). Yet, all around Eastern Europe, artists seemed to be willfully oblivious the tumult unfolding around them. Did they really have nothing to say?

In the exhibition catalog essay, I attempted to outline some characteristics of art produced inside a manifestly non-democratic society. The publication is out of print and obscure, so I hope I will be forgiven for quoting it at some length. Its conclusions about the relationship of art and democracy—or the absence of democracy, as the case may be—still strike me as valid today:

*

“What constitutes a political gesture? The shifting response to this question lies at the heart of our problem. People in the West have difficulty relating to the experience of a friend of mine who barely escaped arrest in 1970 in Budapest for wearing a certain type of jacket. The jacket was made of a light, paper-like material that was in vogue at the time, and it was decorated with the colors red, white, and blue, evoking the design of the Star Spangled Banner. With its oblique but enthusiastic reference to America, the jacket was interpreted by the authorities as an expression of dissent.

In a society lacking a governing rationale in the marketplace, and where the main ordering dimension to life was an ideological one, even a trivial item of clothing could be patently political. Such innocuous expressions of ideological conviction were by no means restricted to conventional signifiers like hair or clothing. Frequenting certain places, among them some but not all the public baths of Budapest, and participating in selected activities, including, for instance, tennis and skiing but not hunting and chess, similarly amounted to covert forms of resistance. The coded vocabulary of political protest was as far-flung and fine-grained as that of subcultural rebellion in the West. Moreover, in another parallel to Western subcultures, what was said mattered less than how, where, and from what source the given expression issued. The frame of the gesture was more important than its substance, partly because the substance, if at all controversial, was excluded from open communication. People not only wrote fiction and journalism, but also lived their lives and made their art, so to speak, between the lines. Thus it should come as no surprise that merely to paint in a certain style, or indeed to paint at all, sufficed to label an artist ‘political.’ The expanded field of subversive gestures was commensurate with the massive ideological saturation of socialist society. Even the most prosaic themes and rhetorical flourishes came to be laden with political overtones understood and appreciated by all in the know.

The well-known restrictions on critical dialogue and the ample repertoire of symbolic strategies available to express one’s ideological orientation shifted the political emphasis in

art away from concrete subject matter toward suggestive or metaphorical expressions and, in most cases, to outside the confines of the art world proper. The banalities of state-commissioned *Politikunst* notwithstanding, the ‘political’ in political art was catapulted from the art gallery to the broader realm of social interaction. The legitimacy of certain progressive art works as vessels for political ideas emerged, for the most part, from the private practices and the public reputations of the people who made them.

Lacking the option to show political works, artists *lived* their political art. This is not to suggest that their life was their art—far from it. They made paintings and sculptures in a traditional mold. But they occupied spaces in society and behaved in certain ways that made it clear that their creations, no matter how abstract or devoid of innuendo, were metaphors of their dissident views. On the surface the works might have been exercises in technique or narratives of subjective, thus politically irrelevant, private worlds. But their very refusal to delve into anything but the most antiseptic or neutral subject matter signaled their unwillingness to compromise.

In this, artists mimicked the long-standing cultural cliché of passive resistance to despised political arrangements. Firmly rooted in the public consciousness of Eastern Europe, the same pattern could be found among scientists and writers, who would often gravitate toward esoteric disciplines and arcane prose *in lieu* of applying their brainpower to more political matters. This curious form of engagement, expressed in a tight-fisted reluctance to engage, is an important element of the political tool-kit of Eastern European artists and intellectuals, much like heroic suicides, and perhaps it is not too outrageous or apologetic to maintain that artists too committed a kind of dignified aesthetic suicide by abstaining from overtly political subjects.

There is no need, however, to frame this roundabout rebellion in such melodramatic terms. In numerous ways, counter-cultural, or rather, counter-political strategies were easier to accomplish in Eastern Europe than on the other side of the Iron Curtain. The social position of the artist in socialism was radically different than in the West. In the absence of a market for art, the sole avenue for cooptation into the system was to engage in blatant propaganda, or worse, to report on one’s friend and enemies, and consequently artists were relatively isolated from the dilemma of ‘selling out.’ While integrity was relatively easy to conserve, an antagonistic role was readily attainable. In a society so resolutely opposed to individual differences, artists qualified as adversaries almost by definition. Since social deviance was equated with political deviance, there was no particular need to prove the point in one’s art. It was enough to remain silent, to be sarcastic, to play with words and images, perhaps to throw in a dose of irony and humor, and artists could rest safely in the knowledge that no one would mistake them for philistines or Party men. They were also forgiven for playing into the official system of art patronage, which required them to churn out a predictable amount of safe and boring art in return for state concessions like access to materials, teaching jobs, and studios. No one, save an unremitting fringe of die-hard dissidents, almost none of whom were artists, was immune to this compromise. It was the very foundation of redistributive socialism. To take what one could get from the state made sense, and it was not objectionable or corrupt in the eyes of the public.

Thus, when it came to expressing political ideas, the options were at once drastically narrow and ironically liberating. The strategies of silence that enveloped political discourse in art,

which gained legitimacy on extra-aesthetic grounds, were accompanied by a palette of indirect devices that functioned through analogy and association, pushing barely visible buttons in the minds of viewers. A given gesture may have appeared devoid of polemic if judged by the standard of the Western avant-garde, but it qualified as a political expression within the insular canon of local art. For example, a derivative painting achieved in the manner of the New York School might have appeared trivial in the context of an international aesthetic in the 1960s or 1970s, but at home in Eastern Europe it insinuated a meaningful association to a Western, worse, American movement, and was thus upgraded to a kind of political *double entendre*. By extension, even academism contained a grain of dissent, since to ally oneself with the academy, an institution with old links to a suspicious web of ideas and contacts, was also to abandon the ideological mainstream. Given this narrow field of play, political gestures were almost impossible to make—but they were also almost impossible to avoid.

The lynch pin of this conspiratorial art was a tight-knit public that shared inside information on the artists and was able to determine the legitimacy of their enterprise. It was also adept at deciphering the camouflaged meanings nesting in the art works. This public included lots of artists, of course, firmly allied with intellectuals in a characteristically Eastern European arrangement, but it also preserved many traits of the traditional middle-class audience, the loss of which has been long lamented in the West by authors ranging from Irving Howe to Jürgen Habermas. Without such a loyal and knowledgeable public, any exercise in a silent political art that was confirmed non-aesthetically and clandestinely would have been futile.

The restrictive atmosphere of socialism acted like a kind of amber in which a public with high stakes in the culture game was preserved in almost pristine condition. In freezing the cultural markets and narrowing all channels of communication, socialism provided a solid and simple cognitive map for artists and audience alike. The rules were easy to learn, and because of the scarcity of cultural goods, guaranteed by the threat of censorship and the dearth of market incentives, ‘consumers’ of art focused more attention on what was available and were willing to pay higher prices in the currency of emotional and intellectual commitment. Like other sectors of high culture, art received a boost from its status as a rare arena in which educated people, excluded from political and economic participation, could express and discover themselves. Together with writers and academics, artists profited from the charismatic semi-opposition roles in which they found themselves, and also because the public’s imagination was never diverted by a robust popular or mass culture. Despite their undeniable hardships, artists enjoyed the respect of an artificially enlarged and aroused mass of followers. The extreme sensitivity of this public permitted the vocabulary of subterfuge that communicated political themes to audiences while fooling the censors and the uninitiated.”ⁱ

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Back here in the West, the art world is churning furiously. In New York, the city where I live, an artist really has to do something scary or nutty, maybe involving firearms or live animals, to be persecuted by the authorities. Thousands of young men and women graduate with M.F.A. degrees each year and enter the competition for public recognition under circumstances that are, generally speaking, free and democratic. These young artists can take democracy for granted. Their adversary is not any lack of freedom, but the superficiality of

attention. Democracy lets them do what they like when they like and how they like it. But it also forces them to shout louder, and makes it less likely that they will ultimately be heard.

ⁱ “From Silence to Polyphony.” In: *Polyphony: Social Commentary in Contemporary Hungarian Art*. Soros Center for Contemporary Arts, Budapest, Annual Exhibition 1993.

byby

Being the founder of an arts organization , that has a major fine art collection, that encompasses the works of Tom of Finland whose work resides in some of the most prestigious-MUSEUMS OF THE WORLD I POSE THIS QUESTION ON HOW TO MOVE FORWARD... NO COMPROMISES...

Dear John. In choosing an image that would be the focus of the piece we want to know the following.to what level can the work be I am including three areas for consideration. This issue is exactly the issue that I pose to you. What is acceptable to the book publisher?.in a country such as England and its laws, its workers opinions and so lets get down to it.

What is acceptable to the book publisher?

We at the Finland House have over the years had printers refuse to print our art books, or if we got them to a printer then the bindery would refuse them.per that, their workers were Christians and refused to work on homosexual subject matter. Or the distributors refused to carry the book for in their states that they sell books its a a criminal offense to have oral copulation, or anal probing, or defamation of religious figures represented in books either visually or via words.

. So the question is does democracy permit one to accept or to refuse and how does government intervene and or interfere in such cases. So here are three different image scenarios with three different histories.

Now for this book please tell me if all are acceptable , none are acceptable or one or two are acceptable..

1) Is religion and how the foundation has dealt with it in the past for in this issue with the winner of one of our past emerging erotic artists contests was a very controversial work and how we the manner in which we dealt with it. promoted it and all the ramifications of that. Over 500 letters from irate Christians, members who cancelled their memberships, bomb threats, our judges being harassed by government officials within their countries of operation. . It's called

[Image: ""]



2) The issue of Tom of Finland's earlier works in his career and how he had to deal with the legal issues related to it as there were scenes that were officially banned in the United States and how we should present such works. This one was in the possession of The Robert Mapplethorpe Foundation and sold at Christies Auction House and now is owned by the Judith Rothschild Foundation and is planned to be donated to MOMA in New York at some time in the Future. Fisting

has been legally classified by most police forces as OBSCENE. and the rulings in regards to such behavior is that it's illegal to show this in films or books and so this subject matter has walked a very delicate line in the world of works in print. Yet this work has been classified as a MasterWORK by art critics for example the director of the Judith Rothschild Foundation Harvey Shipley Miller proclaimed Tom as being one of the five most influential artists of the twentieth century.... So there you have this one.

SWEET HEARTS OF THE ROUGHEST KIND

[Image: ""] 3) Works that have crossed the public lines on what has been acceptable to be used in publications that service the general public and in regards to the works of Tom of Finland one of those being the color barrier. So Tom was crossing that over in the early sixties. under wrap as they would definitely been found by the customs as being unacceptable if not illegal. Her [motoaki@home](mailto:motoaki@home.com) <a">mshono@home.com>a are Three that would go side side. In being problematic [Image: ""] TEACHING A LESSON FOR A HORNY HARD ON .. WHICH ONE IS POLITICALLY CORRECT? [Image: ""] [Image: ""] So thbbyere you have this issue.

----- Original Message -----

From: sss01jor@gold.ac.uk

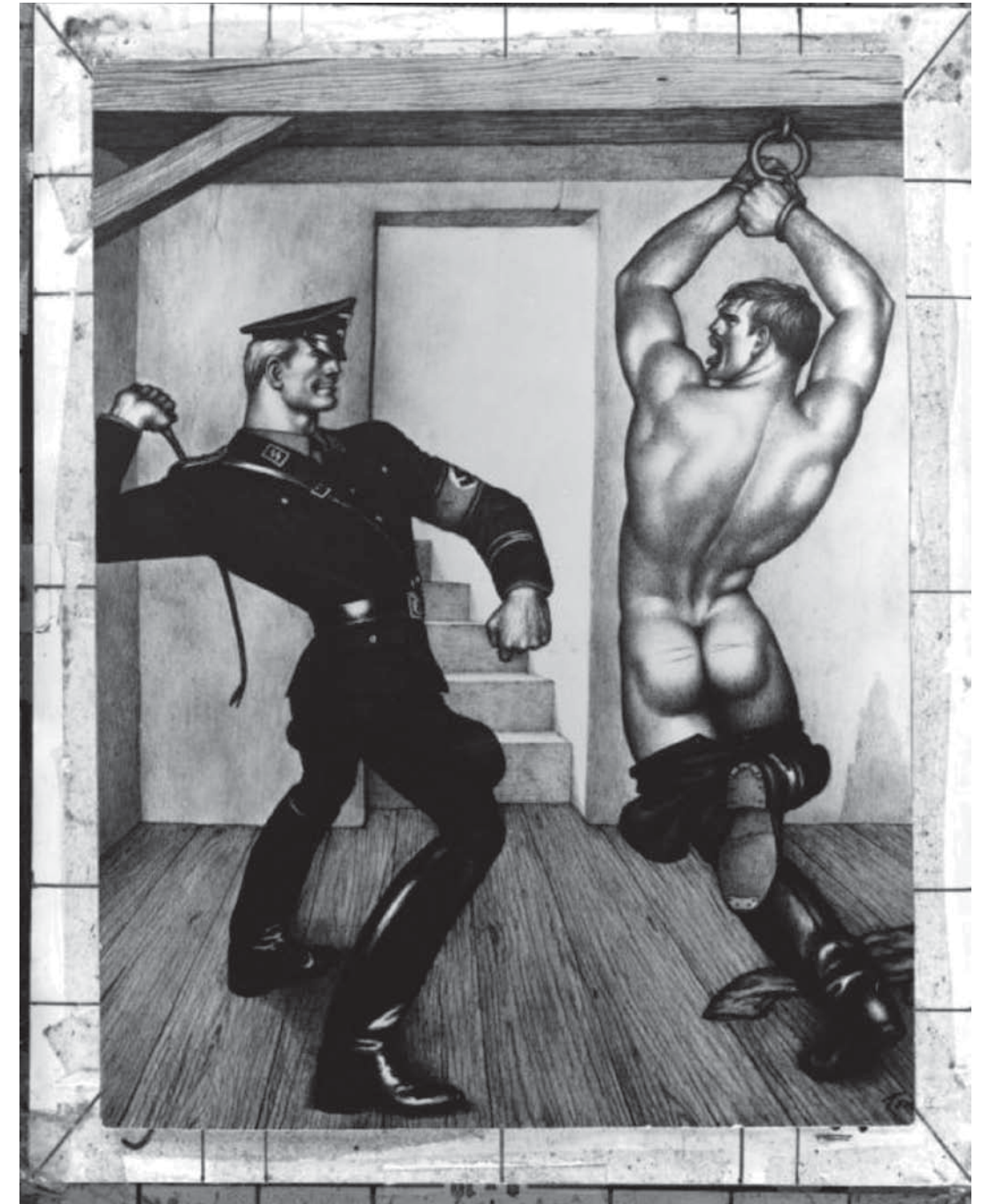
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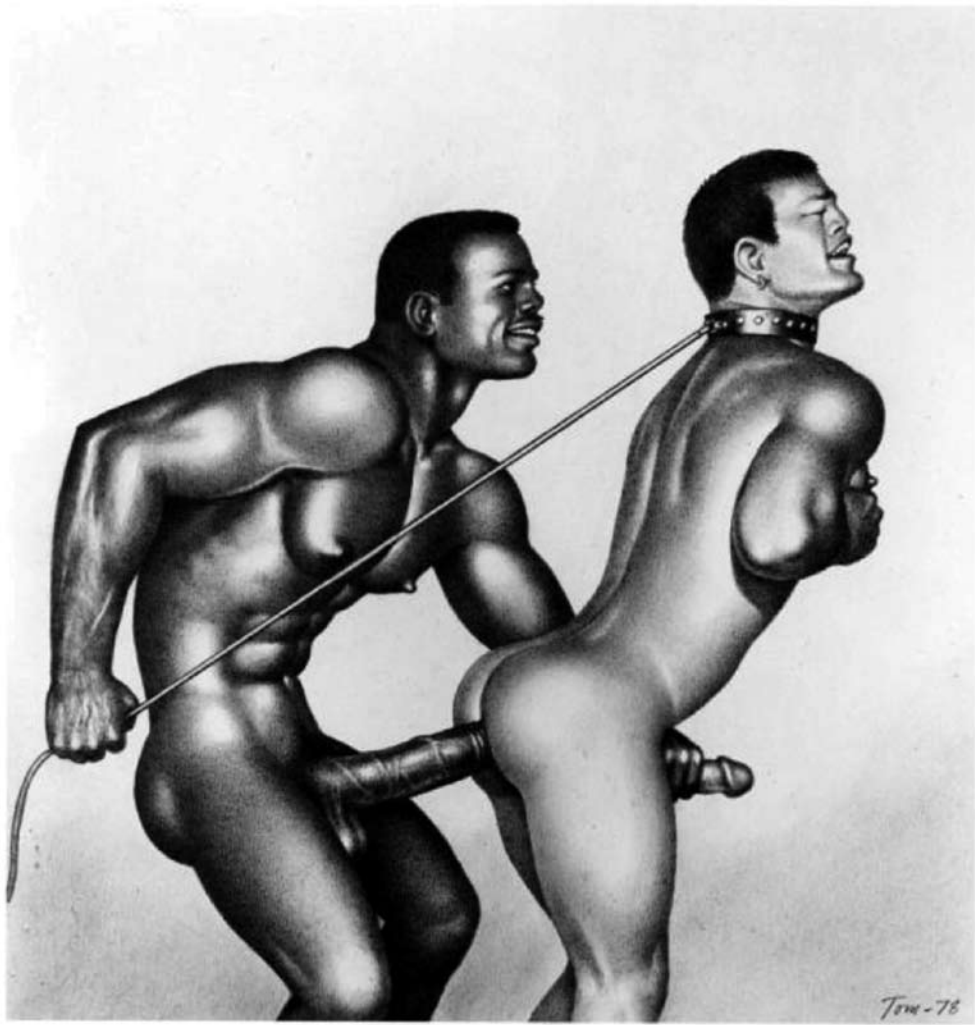
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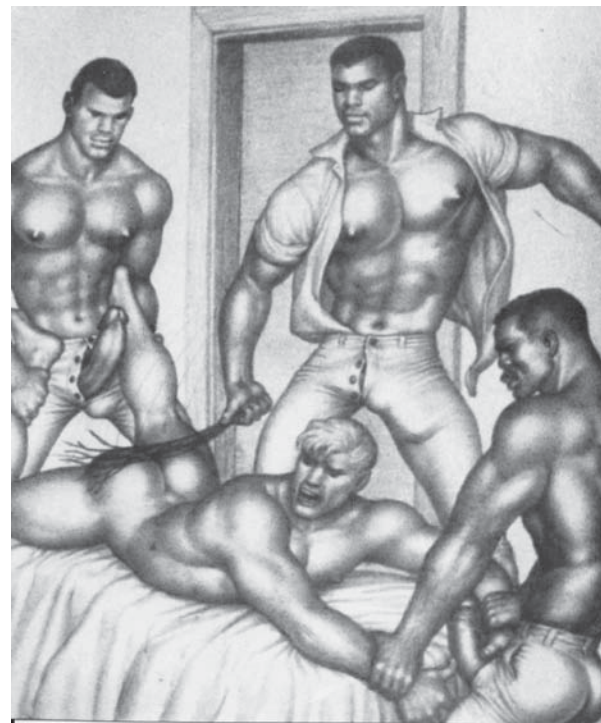
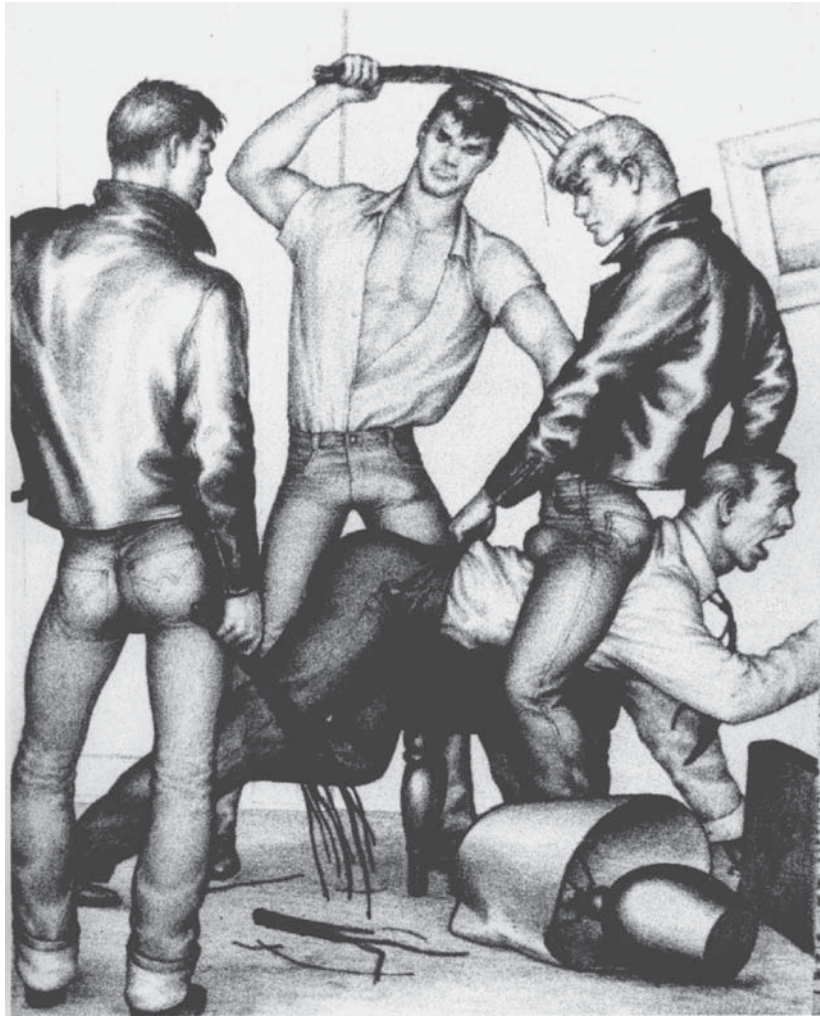
Subject: art & democracy

Thanks Durk

John [motoaki@home](mailto:motoaki@home.com) <mshono@home.com>







The Art of... Politics in Art (The Manifesta 6 Paradigm)

In 414 B.C Aristophanes in his comedy “The Birds” sent Euelpides and Peisthetairos to the Realm of the Birds in the sky. The two elderly Athenians, resentful of the political intolerance, sycophancy and bureaucracy of Athens decided to abandon Attica.

On meeting the hoopoe, the King of the Realm of the Birds, they suggest the creation of the ideal state, Nephelococcygia, a city between heaven and earth, free of human discord. Built amongst the clouds, Nephelococcygia would capture the smoke of mankind’s sacrifices and prevent it from reaching the Gods. Exhausted by hunger the Gods would submit to the birds’ demands and this city would thus have global supremacy over Gods and mankind - absolute power.

Although in danger at first of being mauled by the birds, the two eventually convince the council, and construction begins on Nephelococcygia. Meanwhile, various charlatans from earth begin to arrive and suggest ways in which the system should work: a priest, a poet, a mathematician, a judge. All are dismissed, each being worse than the next. In the end the exhausted Gods submit to the demands of the birds and agree to give Peisthetairos, Basilia’s (Sovereignty’s), Zeus’ maid, hand in marriage. Aristophanes’ comedy ends with the marriage celebrations...

Mankind has always sought Utopia. Mankind has always sought a New World, devoid of anything ugly, complicated and disturbing. Art, through its portrayal of illusion, has always functioned as the principle means in this quest.

According to Baudrillard’s “The Conspiracy of Art”, this situation has ceased in contemporary art, as it has lost the desire for illusion in the same way that pornography has dismissed the illusion of desire. Art now “administrates banality, the leftovers of everyday life, exorcising abjection, the unwanted part. Art is trying to manage a domain where imagination no longer exists” (Baudrillard: 2005: 77). He goes on to say that the moral law of art has disappeared.

Is it possible, I wonder, to create Nephelococcygia in the year 2006? Can contemporary art and its workings realize the roles which they mediate and preach? Is there something so substantial and so real beneath the surface as to justify all this splendour that is attributable to its role? To what extent can art and politics co-exist? Perhaps, as asserted by Baudrillard, intellectuals as much as politicians have lost their identity and are trying to substitute one another in an attempt to reactivate the political engine?

In September 2006, Manifesta 6, the “nomadic” biennial of contemporary art was to take place in Nicosia. The team of three curators that was chosen had suggested the creation of a school of art inspired by the Blackmountain College for this edition. The Project would have had a bi-communal character and thus a substantial number of Greek-Cypriot and Turkish-Cypriot participants. The school of Manifesta 6 would have been based in the Nicosia Municipal Arts Centre, with various events organised throughout the City. The Project was scrubbed because of the insistence by one of the curators that the most visible

department of the School of Manifesta 6 be established and exclusively operated in occupied Nicosia, thus violating all existing agreements and the initial concept as well as the basic principles of international law. This demand, which was supported to the full by the other two curators and the biennial's coorganizer, the International Foundation Manifesta, could never be implemented given that it was in conflict with issues of international law due to the continuing occupation of part of Cyprus by Turkish troops following the latter's invasion in 1974. This created insurmountable problems for the local organizer, Nicosia for Art, which belongs to the Municipality of Nicosia. The issue ended up in both Dutch and Cypriot courts, creating a commotion within the world of contemporary art.

Our own story has different parameters from those of Aristophanes' "Birds". In our case, one would say that Attica is replaced by the "cultured" world of the West, the Realm of the Birds is found somewhere to the East (the Middle East is the new hot zone of interest) and Nephelococcygia between East and West, the new paradise of contemporary art and more.

The weariness over Attica felt by the two protagonists of the Aristophanian comedy reflects as much boredom as saturation in the West and the need for expansion, the search for a "new product" that would replace already replete and ageing institutions. Of course expansion is also political, economic and cultural. Given that in the 80's and 90's the reserves of the Balkans were exhausted, the magnifying glass is now turned towards the Eastern Mediterranean, the doorway to Asia.

Circumstances today are very different from the colonial bartering of gold and diamonds for colourful glass beads and little mirrors, or to the manic annihilation by the Conquistadors of the New World. In today's civilised world the avaricious Cross of the Crusaders has been replaced by the democratic values of Western society. Even the bloodiest and most devastating of interventions are carried out in the name of restoring democracy. Guantanamo's purpose is the "rehabilitation" of terrorists, the absolute enemies of the system. In order to prevent even the slightest whiff of contamination of home ground this is located in Cuba, hence highlighting the irony of the situation...

Today's cultural invasion is not brought about by air bombardment, or by commando parachute troops. The principle, however, remains the same: wherever war exists there is commercial opportunity; wherever there is conflict, art contrives a reason to exist. To be fair, nothing happens without the consent of the subjects. Maybe the gold or the diamonds were worth thousands of mirrors, but the desire to see one's own reflection for the first time is worth many times any monetary value. One could assert that the trade was fair. On the one hand the saturated centre finds new sources of energy and replenishes the system, on the other hand the periphery obtains access to the centre and agonizing efforts are rewarded as a new speck is added to the imperium of art.

Our story's end did not entail a happy marriage of the protagonists, nor the creation of Nephelococcygia. Utopia remains as such on paper, and to the contrary has brought to the fore emotion and hate, vinegar and bile, and has created what appears to be unbridgeable

distance. Of course, as was to be expected, the mechanisms of protection functioned effectively and with precision. The collapse of the plan, litigation, and all that followed could not be left to their own fate.

The King should not have appeared naked. That which took place in the Middle Ages and among the secret Brotherhoods was resurrected, except that now it wore a different cloak: that of the weak and unprotected knight-curator and the small benevolent Foundation before the threat of dissolution. All of this from a country and a city under occupation, rent asunder by a no man's land.

This particular tale is an oxymoron in that this small country was cast in the role of the villain, the persecutor of unselfish art, the supposed oppressor of the supposedly weak (who, as it happens, live in the Turkish occupied area of the small country), demonized in the eyes of all. The same small country and city which spent vast amounts of energy and finance to implement the innovative inspiration of the biennial-school, so that in the end it could witness this drama unfolding before their eyes like a tragic comedy.

All the mechanisms operated simultaneously and automatically, presenting an entirely one-sided view, distorting the facts, twisting the truth, protecting with zeal its offspring from the enemy conspiracy. As became apparent, greater significance was given to winning the war of sensationalism through the Mass Media, smearing the country and certain individuals, than to saving the Project, even at the eleventh hour, by mutual compromise.

Even the splitting up of the School, in contradiction with the initial concept, into three autonomous, independent departments was presented as a result of mature thought and serious cooperation. Whereas in actual fact it was the unfortunate outcome of a Homeric dispute between the three protagonist-curators, which resulted in complete lack of communication, inability to co-operate, and a final departmental division in order to enable the Project to survive. Simultaneously and moved perhaps by a sub-conscious feeling of guilt over the substantial indifference towards the local environment, they began their ruthless war against the City and their co-organizers. The division of the School evoked a sudden and superficial reconciliation. Suddenly the local organizers become the enemy-target and arrogance becomes the main weapon in the game of defamation; defamation, which took on a variety of forms, with blows below the belt, that unfortunately do not characterise jousts of knightly calibre.

Of course, politics becomes the essential tool of argument, justifying weakness in the understanding of sensitive local parameters in an area with many problems, which the heroes of the story choose to ignore by burying their heads in the sand and pretending that their vision surpasses the small local community. A community, particularly the artistic, made to feel intimidated and belittled by this arrogance. Whilst the artists of this community had until then participated in many ambitious attempts to create networks and collaborations, they felt suddenly disoriented by the presence of the biennial and began to lose interest and enthusiasm.

The main misfortune in this case is how this small team, through its internal disputes, its plotting and its conflicts, brought about exactly that which it was supposed to cure: division and politicization. All rhetoric concerning equal participation, fraternity and cooperation evaporated through an overwhelming insistence that was so overwhelming it could be construed as dissent. This insistence, combined with ignorance and inability to appreciate local parameters as well as orchestrated dissidence, resulted in the regrettable conditions for total breakdown.

Again we turn to Baudrillard's assertion that "maybe we are just acting out the comedy of art" (Baudrillard: 2005: 26), as other societies have "acted out the comedy of ideology... [or] of power" (ibid).

In order to justify this polemic on a mass scale one must, of course, enlist conspiracy theory. The argument is that raw and open meddling by the political leadership, the policy of isolation and oppression of the "weaker" community, that is the Turkish-Cypriots, led to the break-up. The rhetoric goes back to the referendum; the comedy's setting is perfect. The situation starts to become extremely attractive to local intellectuals. It seems to be the perfect opportunity. That which has been agreed, undertaken and promised is forgotten, as if by magic. The detestable government, the puppet organisers who hide and obey superior commands, the heroic intellectual-rebels who dare to face up to such atrocious regimes. Suddenly a new setting, the cancellation, the non-materialisation of the event, seems more heroic than its undertaking. While the other side toils silently to find and propose solutions to the deadlocks, the heroic side revels in the grandeur of failure.

It is patently obvious that these people will spend the rest of their lives lauding their accomplishments, just like the troubadours of the Middle Ages, at global networks, fora and round tables. Solidarity from the comrades is taken for granted; evil always has the same detestable and merciless face, "good and truth" will triumph.

If we stop for a moment and go back to the geographical coordinates of the issue we will see that things are not so comical or thrilling. Bombastic pronouncements may be alluring for the international media, the "fighting spirit" may yet stir art idealists, but the reality after the departure of the "foreigners" is unfortunately unsatisfactory and disappointing. The coming of the biennial may have been very promising for the country, its passing, however, proved to be a whirlwind of destruction and discord. Therefore, there where, with considerable effort and hard work, the struggle for rapprochement and mutual understanding was given, there where we tried to find some common points of contact and create an essential common language, this tornado left the scene in ruins and the scenery torn to shreds by the wind.

The point of discord is clear. Complete violation of the agreements made, ignorance of local reality and the status quo, and inability to co-operate in order to find the right solutions that would have enabled things to actually move forward.

Suddenly, the actual, mutually, long-hoped-for meeting through art was transformed into distrust, distance and indifference. Where once sincere cells of communication had begun to develop, not foreign contrivances and extraneous paranoid attempts, there is now debris and separation; a bombed landscape without anyone really knowing the reason why.

The distinctive feature in this case is that the political game was played out very well as much at home as abroad, in that everyone used the event for their own purposes. The audience that observed the evolution of the issue gave it mythical extensions. Perhaps the expectations were far greater than was to be expected and that is justified. The interaction of the public with an alternative biennial was until now almost negligible. Many people expected exhibitions of traditional, valuable paintings. This fact raised the popularity of the issue, a fact that was also used for distortion, mainly within the local framework.

Of course, what we had all hoped for when we began this Project, indeed with its alternative form of school-biennial, was that it would have a long-term and beneficial effect on the local as well as the wider region. For a moment, we all believed that the transformation would be strong, turning the country into a hub, a true raft in the Mediterranean, a hospitable reception centre to welcome ideas and people from surrounding countries who are troubled or even politically persecuted. We had all hoped that the biennial would have had the courage to face all the political issues that concern our region. In spite of the fact that it had been declared from the outset that Manifesta would not be a political biennial, nevertheless knowing the interests of contemporary art today as well as the problems of the participants, we were almost sure or at least, deep down, we hoped that all of these issues would form an epicentre for a significant intervention of art on the socio-political scene. As for the local situation, we all hoped that the bi-communal context within which Manifesta was to operate would provide solutions and suggest models that could be used in all aspects of the problem. The success of Manifesta Coffee Break showed that many obstacles could be overcome. Cyprus, Lebanon, Israel, Iran and Egypt: essentially a window of opportunity had been opened.

The outcome however was very different. It was as if the success of their own child engendered in them tremendous jealousy and envy with unalterable outcomes. There, where all the signs pointed in the same direction, the greatest paranoia was expressed. Ultimately, rather than the politicization of the content of the biennial, the process itself was politicized. Unfortunately, the significance of Coffee Break was not understood by some. Appearance held dominion over substance. It was not of importance what the School would negotiate, and in which bold and novel ways it would succeed, but rather its stance of indifference regarding the complex consequences that such an action would have on the country and the organizers.

Unfortunately, it was more important for one side that Caesar's wife should appear honourable but not that she should be so. Suddenly, the epicentre of the dispute became the wrapper and not the contents, the shell and not the yolk, the peel and not the fruit.

This of course drew in political exploitation from many sides. I would not like to think that there was provocation: that all this occurred to particular schemes and designs.

Unfortunately, the artistic community of both Turkish-Cypriots as well as Greek-Cypriots were drawn into this rhetoric. Once again, instead of dealing with the substance of the matter, the wrapper was dealt with. We witnessed the artists being used, involuntarily and voluntarily, in convoluted political rhetoric that re-enacted and expanded the problems of rift, division and polarisation, instead of converging on the fundamental confrontation of the issues.

The very recent events in Lebanon have shown that the reality of weapons and of international policy is merciless. The game of art and the game of politics sometimes converge, sometimes interchange, and at other times mutually destruct. Ultimately, what does art want to propagate and aspire to, and how can it do this? Are the intellectuals of contemporary Western society in a position to participate and become seriously involved in areas rife with political and other conflicts? Can contemporary art play the part of missionary in areas charged with chronic disputes and conflicts? And with what objective purpose? To spread Western spirit? To confront reality? To play the role of saviour? To play the role of the United Nations? Can contemporary curators and artists take on the role of politicians? Can they propose solutions? Do they know the actual problems of the countries that they visit? Do they indulge in the local sensitivities, truths and realities in depth? Or perhaps all of this is undertaken for the enrichment of CV's; for the search for new meanings of life, for, as we said at the beginning, the bloated Western world?

One should also ask what are our responsibilities as local communities who receive and host these events? Does it merely concern bad agreements; is it about the infringement of undertakings, or of raw political interference? Or, the inability to get in touch with the contemporary way of thinking and to confront issues, over which the civilised West has clear superiority?

In order to be able to answer all of these questions we must examine the local reality. In hindsight, and following initial confusion, anger, paranoia, desperation and distress all legitimate emotions, although with serious consequences. We each reflect and, logically, must draw our own conclusions from, the whole procedure. Each of us must seek out his/her responsibilities. Did anything positive come out of this experience?

It is probably the first time following the referenda that opportunity has been given to that sector of the population that is involved with art, and more generally with culture, to become involved proactively and examine the political texture of events that concern and is appropriately given the opportunity to react.

The indisputable fact is that thoughts and feelings have surfaced. The local community has for years felt the weight of xenophobia. This is not connected with racism, but is a feeling of inferiority in the face of the superiority of foreigners vis-à-vis international artistic arenas.

Another fact was that the participation of Cypriots, organized intellectuals, artists and others in the various debates was disappointing. Surely this fact is a challenge for the future. In spite of the fact that most had already developed a personal opinion about the issues, it was nevertheless not possible for them to communicate it effectively to the international networks.

The organizers have been accused, defamed and slandered for many things, by many, both at home and abroad. The tremendous responsibility of the judicial process did not leave time and scope for information and enlightenment. This, in combination with the distortion of the truth by the other side, created great confusion amongst the public.

The question before us is to what extent we can shape our intellectual persona and communicate this to our most immediate neighbours without the need for foreign apprentice magicians. From Disney's Fantasia to Harry Potter this prospect has always allured Western popular culture. However, does contemporary art need apprentice magicians? Does politics need them, I wonder? Finally the other question must be raised: Does politics need art, or does art need politics?

The international map changes especially with regard to art. The new centres are the peripheries and the new colonies are created in the centre. Can we do something to prevent cultural colonialism and curatorial terrorism?

In times of such difficult crises we must be able to activate the process which transforms a negative experience into a positive one. The fact is clear: we must develop our cooperation with the surrounding region and wider a field, we must incorporate ourselves into a well organized and informed support network. The examples of other countries are very important. Turkey, in spite its multiple political and social problems, has managed to include itself in such international cultural alliances, which are certainly not independent of the political alliances which are formed.

Of course, we must reinforce our own cultural output on all levels: from the state through to that of the curators, the artists, and the theoreticians. As we speak, the country does not have a Ministry of Culture or even a Museum of Contemporary Art, but neither a School of Fine Arts. The curators that are preparing the Cypriot entry for the Venice Biennial are also from abroad.

How can our country be culturally prepared if it does not reinforce its own front? In the "civilised" world, politics uses art. This was the case in Manifesta. In this instance, one of the curators took on the role of protector of the "oppressed" Turkish-Cypriot community against the Greek-Cypriot oppressors of the European Union.

Is it perhaps indispensable to carve out a cultural policy? Given that big events are organized on a state level, would this determine the parameters of our own goals and objectives? Thus, reinforcing at the same time international collaboration whether they be state, on the level of organized specialists, non-government organizations or individuals.

In the case of Manifesta we are at the epicentre of the drama. We must now, in a positive spirit and avoiding egocentric powers take refuge in those with a pluralistic nature which will help turn denial into positive energy.

Finally we must not forget that we find ourselves at the centre of a long-term, unpleasant and multi-faceted problem. We should be very careful when faced with self-appointed aspiring saviours. Perhaps we must be conscious that we have the main responsibility for our space and thus perhaps we should act with more energy in this area and at all levels.

In conclusion, and in light of Manifesta 6 we must accept that in the real world not everything has a happy ending. For the most part, culture manages to digress from the rough paths and finally finds a way to cover or overcome difficult and unpleasant situations.

However, when culture clearly invades foreign grounds and, indeed, problems that for decades have seemed insurmountable, in areas that are continually theatres of conflict, then reality is hard and relentless and must be handled with care, sensitivity and imagination. Furthermore, when the host-guest relationship is violated and a neo-colonial environment is created, then matters slip off the level of healthy collaboration.

It is not possible to wear our thickest shoes and prance without a care through mine fields in the world. The explosions do not only tear us apart, but the shrapnel travels far and wide in the direction of civilians... and more often than not, the reconstruction of destroyed locations - and especially bridges - is very hard and time-consuming. Furthermore, we must not expect the big multinationals (even the cultural ones) to lavishly spend their millions in order to “rehabilitate” us.

The questions are many and contemporary reality complicated and most times merciless. Through such experiences the only thing that is certain is the beginning of the inevitable acquisition of maturity. On the one hand we cease to put on the cap of the permanently wronged hick and we seek out our place, and on the other, we seek appropriate treatment from others.

The fact that everyday we live through a long-running political problem makes the situation particularly complex. Unfortunately we find ourselves at that point in history where the aspirations of the two communities do not seem to be common, especially at home. This creates the circumstances for exploitation, even of art, in the service of politicians. How, I wonder, would we avoid this without at the same time creating distance and distrust?

For myself, one solution would be meeting, discussion and cooperation on real foundations, independent of location or status. It is here that boldness and free spirit are required, so that we may truly confront the internal realities without having to play roles in the theatre of politics or art. Certainly, this effort must begin locally, by us, the natives. Perhaps with Manifesta we had hoped for too much, believing that everybody would understand each other, or that everybody perceived local experiences and sensitivities.

Normally, if the environment was “pure and unpolluted” it should have been done. However, this was not so for all the reasons mentioned above and for others that we will perhaps never know. What we must not allow to happen is for art to play the role of politics: instead of sponsoring unity and understanding, it promotes division, polarisation and distance. It is in this matter that we must intervene as much at home as abroad. Albeit, avoiding by any means replacing the politicians. It is here that art must re-invent its true role. Otherwise the outcome would be tragic and very, very unpleasant.

Yiannis Toumazis

10

evaluate your tools:

10.01 reserve and capture pieces

10.02 strategy hints no.5¹: towards the end of the game, sometimes it is wise to try to concentrate on amassing reserve pieces rather than attacking an opponent. Reserve pieces are valuable pieces to own and can help you to win the game in the end.

10.021 score

10.03 civil disorder³:

if you leave the game, or otherwise fail to submit orders on a given Spring or Fall turn, it is assumed that your government has collapsed. Your units all hold in position, but do not support each other. If they are dislodged, they are disbanded. No new units are raised for the country.

¹ from Domination 1962.
Capital:
for a shorter world domination game
Read the complete World Domination rules first.

² "this game has been published in cooperation with the Office of Public Information of the United Nations. With four exceptions all of the countries appearing on the board were members of the United Nations as of July 31, 1960. The four exceptions are two German Republics (both appear on the same square), Switzerland, and the Peoples Republic of China. These important land areas are essential to the play of this game, Switzerland, incidentally, contains the European headquarters of the United Nations."
from the World Flag Game about the United Nations, Parker Brother 1960.

³ from Diplomacy 1961.

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A Preliminary Outline of Paulo Freire's
"Thematic Investigation" as Cultural Action
Chapter 3, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (1968)

Prepared by Ultra-red for discussion, revision, dissemination, and practice

In *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, the Brazilian educator and theorist Paulo Freire specifically takes up the post-literacy phase of a thematic investigation toward liberation. His earlier work, *Education as the Practice of Freedom*¹ (1967), written from his experiences with adult education in Brazil prior to the 1964 military coup, addressed the process of literacy based on an investigation of generative words. By the time Freire's reader comes to *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, the constituents of the radical literacy process have already experienced an initial phase of his radical literacy method. In chapter three we discover Freire's meticulous description of the four stages in the post-literacy phase of the investigation into generative themes.

The following outline was prepared by members of the sound collective Ultra-red within the context of teaching Masters students in departments of studio art, sociology, and curatorial practice in 2008 at University of California Los Angeles, School of the Art Institute of Chicago, and Goldsmiths University in London. Our own relationship to Freire's ideas comes out of Ultra-red's years of practice as community organizers *and* sound artists where our work as artists contributes to and challenges our organizing and visa versa. In the conventional classroom setting, we deliberately refrain from introducing an outline such as this prior to a collective dialog on chapter three. In fact, the outline only exists as a product, or a remainder, of those discussions. We consistently choose against circulating the outline within classes feeling it far more important for students to develop their own reading of the text rather than working from a prepared summary. For this reason (and because the author himself refused to deliver such an outline in the book itself), we submit this text accompanied by two qualifications.

First, we must acknowledge that Freire presented his method for thematic investigation in a narrative form and not as an outline for action. The fact that Freire withheld such an outline suggests that the basic concepts guiding the four stages of the investigation, and the narrative those stages tell take precedence over a rigid adherence to a set of rules for inquiry. In his opening remarks to Freire's posthumous collection of writings, *Pedagogy of Indignation*² (2004), Donaldo Macedo cautions against reducing Freire's theoretical work "to a mechanical methodology" (xiii) even while acknowledging the late author's insistence on methodological rigor (xv, 17). Balancing between the two proves critical.

¹ Originally published as *Educação como Prática da Liberdade*, and then published in English translation in 1974. See Paulo Freire, *Education for Critical Consciousness*, tr. Myra Bergman Ramos (NY: Continuum Press, 2007).
² Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of Indignation* (Boulder, CO: Paradigm Publishers, 2004).

All too often (particularly in artistic contexts), a resistance to methodology in the name of anti-hierarchy only succeeds in mystifying those methods already at work. Rather than disavowing the relations of power and implicit hierarchies, the articulation of method brings to consciousness those configurations at different moments in the social process. For example, rather than a reactionary dismissal of "experts," Freire locates the voice of professional expertise within a constantly self-referential pedagogical process. Rather than deviating from the problem-posing process, the contribution of the expert becomes an opportunity for methodological precision. The methodology and its constant refinement, then, produce the very conditions for the organization of the investigation.³

Secondly, the method does not exist apart from the labor of reading, of interpreting, and from the discipline of learning how to read the text. If, as Althusser once said of all ideology, ideas exist in practices, then Freire's method exists in the performative act. The conceptual foundation of his theory exists in the method. We reject that tendency among conservators of popular education to treat Freire's ideas as if they require special initiation. The atavistic aura of "secret knowledge" is precisely the tendency that he himself sought to negate. Such an approach denies the space to *read* Freire. It is, after all, through *reading* that theater, psychoanalysis, and aesthetics have endeavored to expand Freire's ideas into other forms of knowledge production. Ultra-red's own enterprise of a praxis of militant sound investigation has benefited enormously from precisely those heterodox encounters.

Freire concludes chapter three by interjecting that, in those cases where no funding exists to support the entire process of the thematic investigation, Basic-Education Teachers - the popular facilitators of the final stage of the investigation - can commence the investigation from the point of the "culture circles" (IV.B.). Thus, the entire method can proceed without the guidance of Freirean specialists. Since the Basic-Education Teachers possess a crucial familiarity with the site, being themselves local to the site, they already hold the capacity to produce "codifications to be investigated." Freire names "the anthropological concept of culture" as one such preliminary thematic (or - in proper Maoist terminology - the *primary* contradiction). Here we find his insistence that, key to any cultural action for emancipation, the investigation must critique those institutional frameworks claiming ownership over knowledge and cultural production.⁴

Furthermore, what is qualified by this expediency in the event of no funding is the role of the outside team itself. In other words, the investigation can occur among those Basic-Education Teachers who do not have access to academic experts, professional initiation, or foundation support. This was precisely the case in the context of El Salvador during the civil war of the 1970s and 1980s. In many instances, lacking professional leadership (even among clergy) often

³ Later in life, while ruminating on the relationship between democracy and liberatory pedagogy, Freire writes: "this methodological exactitude has nothing to do with the discourse of the 'banking system,' something that merely touches the surface of the object or its contents. It's exactly in this sense that to teach cannot be reduced to a superficial or externalized contact with the object or its content but extends to the production of the conditions in which critical learning is possible." Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of Freedom: Ethics, Democracy, and Civic Courage*, tr. Patrick Clarke (NY: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2001): 33.
⁴ This aspect of Freire's thinking became central to the Participatory Action Research movement, notably the work of Orlando Fals Borda in Colombia and Mohammad Anisur Rahman in India. See Fals Borda and Rahman, ed, *Action and Knowledge: Breaking the Monopoly with Participatory Action Research* (NY: The Apex Press, 1991).

resulted in a vulgarization of popular education far removed from what was outlined by Freire - even when operating in his name. However, one effect of those instances, occurring as they did within the context of revolutionary struggle, was the very politicization of Freire's method. This politicization, as described by John L. Hammond,⁵ inverted the Freirean relationship between education and struggle. If, as Hammond describes, Freire situated education as a pre-condition for radical action, those who employed popular education in the Salvadoran context came to the thematic investigation from a prior condition of militancy. The latter, then, proceeded from a displacement of the professional investigator, even when the investigation itself was instigated by clergy who typically had only a secondary (at best) knowledge of Freire's writings.

The institutional aim of Freire's critique mentioned earlier did much to shape his reception in North American during the 1980s; particularly in the areas of teacher training and cultural literacy. At the same time base community groups in Central America transformed the practice of the thematic investigation, the institutional focus of Freire's reception in the United States contributed to a stripping away of the science of organizing explicit in the method. For this reason, we consider the Salvadoran experience a crucial moment in the *politicization* of the praxis. Neither the arts nor the U.S. academy have yet to register the significance of that moment in the discourse around Freire. Therefore, it is in the spirit and practice of that politicization, fraught with its own misrecognitions (critical to the decodification process itself), that members of the sound collective Ultra-red, Janna Graham, Dont Rhine, and Robert Sember have composed this outline.

Outline

I. First Stage

- A. Interdisciplinary team calls a meeting on site with local population [110]⁶
 - 1. Explain the reasons for the investigation
 - 2. Explain the method for the investigation
 - 3. Explain how the investigation will be used
 - 4. Appeal to the local population for trust
 - 5. If agreed, invite volunteers from local population to join investigation team
- B. Initial decoding phase: team begins visits [111]
 - 1. Record *everything* even apparently unimportant observations
 - 2. Each team member writes a report (a "decoding essay") after each visit [112]

⁵ John L. Hammon, *Fighting to Learn: Popular Education and Guerilla War in El Salvador* (New Brunswick, New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 1998). See also, Hammond, "Popular Education as Community Organizing in El Salvador," *Latin American Perspectives* 26, no. 4 (July 1999): 69 - 94.
⁶ Bracketed numbers indicate page numbers in the 30th anniversary edition of Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy Of The Oppressed*, tr. Myra Bergman Ramos (NY: Continuum Press, 2007).

II. Second Stage

- A. Collective decoding [112]
 - 1. The team meets while still on site
 - 2. Reading the "decoding essays" the team analyzes the social whole
 - 3. Divide the social whole into its constituent parts
 - 4. Re-integrate, grasping the nature of the primary / secondary contradictions
 - 5. The primary contradictions = limit situations (i.e., opportunities for research)
- B. Codifying the test
 - 1. The team selects some of the contradictions to constitute limit situations [113]
 - 2. Develop codifications⁷ of these selected limit situations [114]
 - a. Codification is an object (drawing, photograph, etc.)
 - b. Codification should be familiar to local population
 - c. Neither overly explicit nor overly abstract
 - d. Organize codifications into a "thematic fan" [115]
- C. Decoding the test
 - 1. The team brings together a group to help decode the test codification
 - 2. In reading the codification the group will "externalize their thematics"
 - 3. "Make explicit their 'real consciousness' of the world"
 - 4. "Reach a perception of their previous perception"
 - 5. Produce new knowledge / new thematics and action
- D. Codify the contradictions
 - 1. The team examines what emerges from the test
 - 2. Examine thoroughly all the contradictions included within the codifications - even at a secondary level [116]

⁷ "Codification" occupies a central place in both the literacy and the post-literacy phase of Freire's problem-posing education. On numerous occasions, he refers to the codification as an object - linguistic (poetic), visual, sonic, etc. These objects "mediate the *decoders* in their critical analysis" (114). Readers of Freire typically interpret the codification as a representation. The translator Myra Bergman Ramos defines codification as "the representation of a theme in the form of an existential situation" (*Education for Critical Consciousness*, 50, n. 5). Freire himself describes how codifications "should *represent* contradictions" (116, emphasis added). However, it bears asking why he would employ a term whose denotations take us either in the direction of the law or linguistics. If we consider its root, *code*, in light of the latter, codification suggests a signifying practice constitutively relational, discursive, and grounded in writing in a manner distinct from mere representation. The proposition of a Freirean engagement with semiotics, particularly along the order of a practice of grammar, merits further research. For Ultra-red, specifically, that research would examine the potential links between Freire's ideas, semiotics, and the signifying practices of *musique concrète*. We recall composer Pierre Schaeffer's avowed indebtedness to Saussure in articulating his own grammar of *l'objet sonore*. See Schaeffer's *Traité des objets musicaux: essai interdisciplines* (Paris: Seuil, 1966); the accompanying audio recording by Schaeffer, *Solfège de l'objet sonore* (Paris: Ina-GRM, 1967); and Carlos Palombini, "Pierre Schaeffer, 1953: Towards an Experimental Music," *Music & Letters* 74, no. 4 (1993): 542 - 557.

3. Codify not only the first contradiction but also those included therein
4. In the subsequent process, the decoding of the former (first contradictions) will clarify the decoding of those contradictions included therein

III. *Third Stage*

- A. The team returns to site of investigation [117]
- B. Form "Thematic Investigation Circles"
 1. As many circles that will involve 10% of the local population [117, n. 31]
 2. No more than 20 people in each circle
- C. Tape record the discussions in each of the circles
- D. Facilitation team for the "Thematic Investigation Circles"
 1. Decoding Coordinator - Does more than just listen, but poses responses as problems vs. lecture [118]
 2. Psychologist - Notes / records significant reactions in the circles
 3. Sociologist - Notes / records significant reactions in the circles
- E. "Thematic Investigation Circles" decode the codifications

IV. *Fourth Stage*

- A. Research Proposals
 1. The entire team listens to the tapes and reviews the notes [119]
 2. List explicit / implicit themes from recordings and notes
 3. Classify themes according to discipline (duplicate if needed)
 4. Team members prepare research proposals that "breakdown" the themes [120]
 5. The entire team reviews and discusses the research proposals
 6. Thematic Essays
 - a. After discussion, team members write an essay for each proposal
 - b. Comments from discussion can be amended to essay or proposal
 - c. Essays should include bibliographic suggestions
 - d. Essays will be used for training teacher-students in "Culture Circles"
 7. "Hinged Themes" - The team may include themes not raised in "Thematic Investigation Circles," including "the anthropological concept of culture"
- B. Preparations for the Culture Circles
 1. Select local volunteers to facilitate Culture Circles (Basic-Education Teachers)
 2. Use essays from research proposals to train Basic-Education Teachers (BET)
 3. New codifications are produced from these themes [121, n. 38]

- a. Simple
 - i. Visual channel
 - aa. Pictorial
 - bb. Graphic
 - ii. Tactile channel
 - iii. Audio channel
 - b. Compound: simultaneous channels
4. Team members and BET may need to add other themes
 5. Bring in outside knowledge / expertise
 - a. Team approaches 2 or 3 experts from varying schools of thought [122]
 - b. Interview expert for 15 to 20 minutes
 - c. Tape record the interview
 - d. Photograph the expert being interviewed
 - e. Include tape / photograph in discussion by the Culture Circle
 5. Prepare "small introductory manuals" to accompany codifications [123]
- C. Conducting the Culture Circles
 1. Thematics have been prepared into codifications
 - a. Thematics come back to people in systematized and amplified form
 - b. Codifications are not content but objects for problem-posing process
 2. BET present program to local population in Culture Circles
 3. BET explain presence of "hinged themes" and their significance
 4. New thematics arise and the process repeats with the volunteers acting as team
 - D. In an absence of funding, the BET can begin investigation at IV.B. - In which case, basic themes introduced by the BET include "the anthropological concept of culture"⁸

⁸ A common criticism directed at community-based practices is the *a priori* of full-presence as related to the site. In the practice of political organizing *as investigation*, Freire makes possible for the site to become one of the contradictions selected for critical reflection. Given the centrality (and centeredness) of the metaphysics of site in anthropology, his critique of "the anthropological concept of culture" (as inextricable from the investigation itself) puts into operation a deconstruction of those metaphysics. Such an operation begins in the very act of translating the method into struggles arising out of a complex relation to a geo-specific location. In those instances, experience produces a political reading of site as irreducible to place, but rather, fundamentally discursive (for example, a popular analysis of capitalist investments in the ideological link between gentrifying urban development and the displacement of the poor). For a critique of the metaphysics of site in community-based practices, see Miwon Kwon, *One Place After Another: Site-Specific Art and Locational Identity* (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 2002).

Back to the playgrounds!

Gijs van Oenen

Democracy is a blessing, but also a burden. It excites us, and equally stresses us out. We cannot abandon it, yet it weighs ever more heavily upon us. My aim is to provide a diagnosis of this paradoxical and distressing situation. How did we get into this predicament, what might be a possible way out, and what role might art play in this scheme of things?

The idea of what modern democracy should look like, began to take shape in political philosophy in the 1950s. Democracy, that is to say, not merely as an institution or a set of rules, but also as a particular practice and attitude of citizens of modern society. How was the free, public use of reason that philosophers like Kant and Hegel had deemed essential for modern subjectivity, to be realized? A lively culture of free association and exchange of ideas and expressions had to be promoted that could provide a crucial counterpoint in the life of these institutions – a dynamic not dissimilar, we might say, to that of Broadway and off-Broadway.

What had to be rebuilt, as Hannah Arendt already saw in the late fifties, was a public sphere: an atmosphere in which citizens could meet, present views, form convictions, discuss arguments, and find all sorts of other ways to creatively and peacefully express their essential condition of plurality. As against overly formal and procedural accounts of democracy, Arendt emphasized the real confrontation of concrete people in actual public settings. Argumentative force would have to be balanced by theatrical ability, communication by expression. Citizens would literally have to *erect* a public sphere, *create* a stage worthy to play out the drama of democracy.

Politics was for Arendt also the way for citizens to rise above the spheres of necessity and of production, the spheres of ‘labor’ and of ‘work’ respectively.¹ Although her idea of politics as an activity that freed itself from the confines of the private – of reproduction – and of production, was derived from the ancient Greeks, it also meshed with the social and technological expectations of the late fifties. It seemed to many that automation would render manual, repetitive, mind-dulling labor in factories unnecessary and would anyhow shorten the working week for most of the population to a mere twenty hours or less. Free time would be abundant, enabling people to realize themselves not in labor, but in more worthwhile activities such as, ultimately, politics in the Arendtian sense: meeting and joining others in this sphere free of the pressures and distractions of the material(ist) world.

Much has been said in recent years about the strengths and weaknesses of Arendt’s vision of politics.² I would like to draw attention here to an artistic vision rooted in the sixties that seems to embody ideals quite similar to those of Arendt, expressing these however in spatial and architectural forms, rather than as political philosophy. The Dutch artist Constant initiated his futuristic project *New Babylon* in the early sixties, and continued to expand and modify his vision for some fifteen years. Although it is in

some sense easy to dispose of New Babylon as either a kind of sixties ecstasy or perhaps a form of technofascism, it seems to me to embody, in an artistic form, many of Arendt’s ideas and ideals. The extravaganza of *New Babylon* shows us, perhaps unintentionally, both the possibilities and the impossibilities of free, unfettered democratic engagement; both its grandeur and its horror.³

New Babylon might be called a post-marxist utopia, as it stands for a (super)structure that is literally overlaid on the ‘infrastructure’ of the existent, industrial society. It is built over and above the spheres of work and production. The models and sketches of *New Babylon* show a potentially endless network of multilevel corridors, connected by even huger nodes, not unlike giant modern airports. *New Babylon* is literally a separate sphere, an ‘atmosphere’ technologically protected against natural or economical intrusion, discomfort, or abuse. It thus allows ‘free play’ to its citizens, who may roam endlessly along its corridors, disregarding national boundaries as well as other ‘outdated’ separations and categorizations. They are free at any moment to actively re-create their environment, according to their own – momentary or long-term – wishes, designs, and visions.

In the late forties and the fifties, Constant participated in Cobra and was a prominent member of the Situationist International, avant-garde movements that resisted ‘traditional modernism’ as exemplified in the architecture of Mies van der Rohe or Le Corbusier. They did not reject modernism as such, but aimed to discover ways to employ modernist ideas and materials in less formal and more playful ways, to fashion a built environment that would encourage subjects to become active creators of their own surroundings, rather than passive users of efficient, functional designs. Or worse, passive consumers of pre-fabricated commercial experiences, such as provided by modern shopping malls.

The Situationist International was established around the idea of ‘unitary urbanism’, which aimed to dislodge urban life from its moorings in private, social, or political convention. It was inspired by the *dérive*: ‘the roaming drift that undermines the structure of the city by locating transient atmospheres outside the control of any centralized authority or dominant economic force.’⁴ Consequently, in New Babylon there is no place like home – or work, for that matter; there is only playful drifting. The family home is replaced by transit hotels dispersed throughout the structure. The hovering structures that cover the earth and multiply its living-space constitute ‘a chaotic terrain with mobile building elements and environmental control devices allowing people to actively construct moods and develop new form of behavior.’⁵ New Babylon, in other words, is a vast – an interminable – playground.

The tragic fate of *New Babylon* was being at the same time absurdly unrealistic, and prophetically real. Absurdly unrealistic, as it found little resonance with either the public or professional critics, sharply criticized for being inhuman, or even technofascist.⁶ It exhibited an overblown faith in technology, especially in its ability to pre-format and control ‘atmospheres’. Also, the complete artificiality of these atmospheres, supposedly completely cut off from any natural or economic contingency, inspires horror rather than ecstasy.⁷

But also prophetically real, as the ideas behind the spatial design express with unusual clairvoyance many of the values and ideals that have dominated social and po-

litical life, for better or for worse, from the (late) seventies right until the present day. Many of the ideas behind *New Babylon* have indeed been realized or implemented, although most often not in ways that Constant would have approved of.

Most importantly, New Babylon seems to express the ideal of *interactivity*, a typical product of the sixties and the seventies. Public space was meant to bring people together, to let them creatively express their commonalities and differences. The spaces of *New Babylon* are designed to accommodate unencumbered man, that is, man unburdened by the weight of labor and work, to use Hannah Arendt's concepts. Or rather, unencumbered man would be disposed to freely create and re-create the spaces, joyously interacting with whomever would want to join his current project.

In its naïveté and radicalness this is perhaps the perfect expression of the ideal behind interactivity, or better, of the fundamental *fantasy* behind it. Interactivity can be imagined as carefree only when it imagines the actor as completely free to choose whom to interact with. In actual fact many people who, driven by social idealism, enthusiastically join political meetings soon become frustrated by the uncouth, obtrusive, or morose behavior of other participants. They subscribe fully to the ideal of (political) interactivity, but are repelled by its actual banality. In Constant's fantasy of interaction, however, one seems to be relieved of such irritants, always able to turn another corner, climb another ladder, or join another group.

This is the curious thing about the idealized interactivity in *New Babylon*: the citizens in Constant's drawings never seem to be really engaged, or committed, to anything or anyone. They are supposed to create new worlds and new communities, happily interacting, arguing, fighting, and making up. According to Constant, the 'New Babylonian' is 'at any given moment in his creative activity (...) in direct contact with his peers'; 'all action loses its individual character'.⁸ But mostly we see him, in Constant's own sketches, wandering through open areas, looking lost and disoriented in these vast spaces, spaces that indeed are supposed to change continuously and at a moment's notice. Common interest and playful collectivity seem to have evaporated before they get well under way.

The sketches and models of New Babylon thus bring out both the promise of interactive life, and its demise, its collapse under its own weight. They show both the future and the fate of interactivity. Modern citizens are nowadays still fascinated by the endless possibilities they have to (co-)determine the shape of public space and its atmosphere. There is, however, no perception of a goal, no shared purpose that brings them together. Although Constant's Babylonian public space was meant to produce a plethora of views, standpoints, perspectives, and opinions, what it has now produced is a kind of *exhaustion* with interactivity. People still gather in public space, but no longer for the purpose of creative interactivity, to be either for or against something. They merely want to be *present*, no matter what the occasion, goal, or interest. In that sense, modern gatherings in public space resemble nothing so much as a *flash mob*: people gather together at a random spot, in response to anonymous sms-instructions, to pass a few minutes there, and then leave, just as demonstratively as pointlessly.

Modern citizens thus fail to realize their capacities to create a true public space. Other capacities highlighted in New Babylon they *have* in fact realized, but ironically not through playful enactment or joyous creativity, but as consequences of functional re-

quirements and demands of efficient production - exactly the kind of values that New Babylon aimed to overcome. The flexibility, mobility, and disorientation that New Babylon hoped would facilitate contact between people, are indeed characteristics of contemporary society. But not as expressions of playfulness for creativity, but rather as functional demands of the sphere of labor and economy. The flexible subject answers perfectly to the requirements of the constantly reconfiguring labor process.⁹ It answers equally well to the present condition of politics, and of democracy: the political subject is constantly being polled, surveyed, and questioned. Interactivity has been turned into a kind of management strategy that goes under the name of 'governance'. People even tend to phrase their own life project in terms of flexibility and disorientation. Here's what soul star Alicia Keys said at the North Sea Jazz Festival 2004 when asked about her plans for the future: 'I see myself growing in many different directions. I'm not staying in one place, that's for sure'.

The aimless drift and disorientation that we see in New Babylon, is characteristic for the condition that I call *interpassivity*, a notion that I have adapted from the work of the philosophers Robert Pfaller and Slavoj Žižek.¹⁰ Interpassivity is best understood as the radicalized sequel to the better known condition of interactivity. Interactivity denotes that some process needs interaction with users in order to (fully) realize itself. Interpassivity reflects the experience beyond interactivity: although we are more interactive than ever before, the production processes (of policy, art, labour, &c) have somehow become self-fulfilling and can now dispense with our input. To be sure, we are not quite redundant as participants. Our interaction is still expected, in the sense of taken for granted, by both process or machine, and by ourselves. We even feel strongly 'engaged' with them, yet we do not feel much interest or responsibility as to its operating principles, or even its outcome or actual 'product'.¹¹

Aimless and vacuous as these processes are, their motion exerts a strong fascination on those in whose service they operate. Robert Pfaller calls this the principle of the dromenon, exemplified by 'running media' such as the VCR - or perhaps all 'media'.¹² As said, this fascination lies with the process, rather than its product. What produces the satisfaction, even obsessively so, is the sensation of being permanently connected to, or simply being in the vicinity of, a running medium. According to Pfaller, what we desire is to delegate our subjectivity to the aimlessly running medium. Consider, he writes, how people watching a live football match on television often react awkwardly and irritably if we speak to them or otherwise disturb them. This is not primarily because they are anxious they might miss a crucial moment in the match. More pertinent is their desire to 'linger' in front of the television. They want to 'enjoy' not in the sense of having fun and being delighted, but in the sense of 'enjoying' the protection from the machine they have attached themselves to. This is the machine of the dromenon, 'a machine that runs of itself'. After McLuhan's 'the medium is the message' we now have its sequel: a pure medium without a message, a medium that 'stands in' for one's own subjectivity. The function of the dromenon is thus to provide 'cover' for the spectator's retreat into oblivion, or self-forgetfulness ('Selbstvergessenheit').¹³

This may explain, in our view, why the modern, highly mediated subject often exhibits what seems like *autistic* behavior - that is to say, apparently self-immersed behavior in the public sphere. This kind of behavior becomes highly visible when it runs

counter to the ‘rules of engagement’, or ‘repertoires of conflict’, that characterize, and even enable, the public sphere.¹⁴ Daily life examples abound, ranging from mobile calls in public space to cycling on the wrong side of the road while expecting rule-abiding others to give way.¹⁵ Such perpetrators are not simply anarchists or egotists, wanting to either deny the public rules of engagement, or bend them to their own advantage. They in fact recognize and affirm these rules; they are in that sense interactively qualified. But at the same time, they feel an irresistible pull towards interpassivity. An increasing number of people actually *suffer* from the condition of interpassivity, or what we might call ‘interactive metal-fatigue’. They feel unable to act upon norms that they have interactively legitimated and reflectively endorsed. These norms now constitutes a burden, rather than the liberation they intended to be.

It is thus not the failure, but exactly the success of democracy as interactivity that has made it into a burden. Or more precisely, that has created increasing symptoms of interpassivity, of interactive metal fatigue. We still celebrate interactivity, but simultaneously it is turned into something we feel we must *endure*. We still promote democracy, but at the same time we are having ever more difficulty to express what we stand for. Perhaps this is the inevitable result of giving in to the aimless, New Babylonian drift to ‘explore space’. Prefiguring this conclusion in the prologue of her 1958 book *The human condition*, Hannah Arendt expressed her dismay with those who declared that now finally, space technology enabled an ‘escape from men’s imprisonment to the earth’. How could the earth, that had sustained human life for thousands and thousands of years, suddenly be perceived as a prison, Arendt wondered. We might answer now that interactivity took us into orbit, but that after some forty years of spinning we are starting to feel real dizzy.

Another conclusion should be that Constant’s art thematized the modern condition of democracy and interactivity very well, but prophesized their burden better than their promise. Can art nevertheless hold out a promise for democracy? Can art offer something to mitigate or alleviate interactive metal fatigue? The one thing to be retained from New Babylon, it seems to me, is the element of *play*, that Constant took from the Dutch cultural philosopher Johan Huizinga.¹⁶ Although we should take the *goals* of democracy more seriously, we might take its process more playfully. Whatever democracy and interactivity will do for us, its effects should not be stressful but relaxing. On the other hand, we need to jettison New Babylon’s artificial notion of flexibility, its techno-scaped notion of interactivity. In other words, let’s return to a more low-tech conception of public enjoyment.

It seems to me, therefore, that there is a lot of potential for art in the concept of *playgrounds*. Playgrounds constitute a playful focus, and locus, for interactivity, providing an (inter)active yet relaxing relief from the pressures of autonomous, emancipated life. An early example, somewhat akin to New Babylon, was Cedric Price’s Fun Palace idea from the early sixties.¹⁷ Recently some nice new examples have come to attention. For instance Liane Lefaivre’s rehabilitation of Aldo van Eyck’s extensive concern with children’s playgrounds in the city on Amsterdam¹⁸ - not by coincidence the cooperation between Van Eyck and Constant in the fifties ended when Constant started to trans-mogrify the idea of play into New Babylonian shape. Another example is the project *Face your world* by Jeanne van Heeswijk, in which children are enabled to playfully interact in

order to design a real world for themselves¹⁹ - recently for instance a neighborhood park in the Amsterdam borough of Slotervaart.²⁰ Playful interactivity then reappropriates practical, socially valuable goals in the real, daily life of modern individuals. And this may contribute to deliver us from the all too pressing burden of our modern predicament, that of being unremittingly democratic, interactive citizens.

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¹ Hannah Arendt, *The human condition*. Anchor Doubleday, New York 1958.

² E.g. Melvyn A. Hill (ed.), *Hannah Arendt: the recovery of the public world*. St. Martin’s press, New York 1979.

³ The New Babylon project has been brought back to attention by Mark Wigley, now dean of the Princeton School of Architecture, in his *Constant’s New Babylon*. 010 Publishers, Rotterdam 1999. On the link between Arendt and Constant cf. Ken Frampton, ‘The status of man and the status of his objects’, in: Hill (ed.), *Hannah Arendt*.

⁴ Cf. Libero Andreotti and Xavier Costa (eds.), *Theory of the dérive and other situationist writings on the city*, Barcelona, MACBA and ACTAR 1996.

⁵ Wigley, *Constant’s New Babylon*, 13.

⁶ Cf. Hilde Heynen, *Architecture and modernity*. MIT, Cambridge (Mass.) 1999, p. 232ff.

⁷ On this theme, cf. Peter Sloterdijk, *Sphären III: Schäume*. Suhrkamp, Frankfurt 2004, esp. 659-667 on *New Babylon*.

⁸ Constant, ‘New Babylon: Outline of a culture’, in: Wigley, *Constant’s New Babylon*, 162.

⁹ Cf Richard Sennett, *The corrosion of character*. W.W. Norton, New York 1998.

¹⁰ Robert Pfaller, *Die Illusionen der anderen*. Suhrkamp, Frankfurt 2002. Slavoj Zizek, *The plague of fantasies*. London, Verso 1997.

¹¹ Cf. Gijs van Oenen, ‘A machine that would go of itself. Interpassivity and its impact on political life’. In: *Theory & Event*, 9/2, 2006.

¹² Robert Pfaller, *Die Illusionen der anderen*.

¹³ Cf. Gijs van Oenen, ‘Languishing in securityscape. The interpassive transformation of the public sphere’. In: *Open. Cahier on art and the public space*, no. 6, 2004, 6-16.

¹⁴ For these notions see Herman van Gunsteren, *A theory of citizenship*. Westview, Boulder (Co.), 1998.

¹⁵ Cf. Gijs van Oenen, ‘Soured tolerance. The Dutch are losing their way’. In: *Open*, 10, 2006.

¹⁶ Johan Huizinga, *Homo ludens*. Routledge & Kegan Paul 1949 (Dutch original 1938).

¹⁷ Cf Stanley Mathews, *From agit-prop to free space. The architecture of Cedric Price*. Black Dog Publishing, London 2007.

¹⁸ Liane Lefaivre, Ingeborg de Roode (eds.), *Aldo van Eyck: The playgrounds and the city*. NAI, Rotterdam 2002.

¹⁹ Carlos Basualdo (ed.), *Face your world. Jeanne van Heeswijk*. Artimo, Amsterdam and Wexner Center for the Arts, Columbus, Ohio 2002.

²⁰ A project by Dennis Kaspori and Jeanne van Heeswijk. See: www.faceyourworld.nl.

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A SKETCHY REFLECTION ON ART IN TIMES OF REPRESENTATIONAL DEMOCRACY¹

The editors of this volume ask if art has anything at all to do with democracy. Let me start by echoing this with other questions: *how* does art have anything to do with democracy? How are democratic processes defined in post-ideological politics? Do these democratic processes have anything to do with the way art, intended here not as the art system, but as creative practices and production, creation and circulation of imaginary, works? The current model of democracy, rich in slippages between the representative and representation and art do share common traits. On one hand, representative democracy has been emptied out of its capacity to mobilize forms of belonging and to ‘represent’, while on the other it delegates to media, old and new, the production of an affective imaginary. While this can be taken as another sign of the crisis of representative democracy, it could also provide a terrain for creative and cultural practices to intervene producing dissonant, critical and resistant forms of imaginary.

In brief and quite crudely, the two main models of democracy we encounter today are direct democracy – where citizens participate directly in government, as through referendums – and representative democracy – in which participation is discontinuous, performative, limited to the act of voting at more or less regular intervals and mediated by political parties. According to a modern and still set in place vision, the concepts of citizenship, democracy and nation state form a logical and interrelated concatenation. In this essay, democracy is intended as representative system of a state, as the most common form of democracy today.

Political theory tells us that in representative democracy ‘the people’ choose those who will govern on their behalf. Representative democracy, finding its expression in the nation state, requiring the deployment of citizenship to function and implying a movement from multiplicity (the people) to unity (the state), is then opened to the basic question of who

¹ Some initial reflection on the topic were published as ‘Imagining Politics, Politicizing Images’ in the exhibition catalogue *Disobedience*, Begg Z. and McNeil D. (ed), Sydney: University of New South Wales Press 2005.

represents whom on one hand, and what is it that is represented on the other. It is a process of abstraction, in a way not too dissimilar from how Anderson (1983) describes nation building and nationalism as practices of imagination, since representative democracy too requires the ability to imagine a relation based on some commonality, both internal and external, between the represented and the representative. This commonality is traditionally mediated by political parties, whose task is to bring back to a unity – the state – the multiplicities and differences of citizenry (Tari, 2006, in his analysis of the relation between movements and parties in the Italian workerist and autonomous Marxist tradition locates the beginning of the crisis in the 1960s. In this period the inability of parties to move between the developments of capitalism and the effervescence of works comes to the fore, anticipating the formulation of autonomy from parties and state of the 1970s. Today it is capitalism itself that privileging a form of flexible governance to administer and manager power undermines the mediation role of parties).

The category of citizenry and its abstract citizenship, nuanced and layered by migratory movements, diasporic displacements and replacements, deterritorialized and multiple belongings and new ethnoscapas, are in themselves the product of a process of inclusions and exclusions from the nation space, of filters which modulate the effective entitlement and endowment of rights (Mezzadra 2006). At the same time new practices of citizenship that traverse nations and their borders are invented, and at times brought about, in the everyday and by social and political movements. As a result the space where citizenship finds its location, the nation, imagined according to Anderson as limited, sovereign and as a community of ‘deep horizontal comradeship’ (7) is troubled by intersecting and disseminated narratives which complicate any notion of homogeneity (Bhabha 1994) and horizontal relations, while multiple belongings dislocate ideas of limitedness, continuously deferring belonging to other spaces. It is through these new narratives that the concatenation citizenship, representative democracy, nation-state becomes undone.

That the representative system is in a state of crisis is evident by a glance at elections and political campaigns in the past few years, should we take political elections as the prime moment of representative democracy, when the rights of citizenship are performed through the vote. Toni Negri (2006) has examined the political elections in Iraq and Iran and in United States as example of an equivocal transformation and stalemate in the democratic

process. Negri reads the Iraq and Iran elections as a protest vote against the United States' attack on Iraq, and as expressions of a desire for independence that nothing has to do with electing representatives. On the other hand he identifies in the American presidential elections of 2000, which brought Bush to power with a margin of about 500 votes after the Supreme Court put a stop to the recounting of Florida votes, a breaking down of democracy that undermined the mechanism of the electoral process itself. Negri rightly isolates another factor that characterizes the crisis of representative democracy: the power and ability of media to precede, pre-constitute and dominate the making of a public opinion. The question of imagination, and who has and exercises the right to imagine and how, who has the linguistic, symbolic tools and the power to imagine and represent, becomes central to the way we think of democracy.

Italy is in this sense indicative of the slippage from the representative system to a representational one. This slippage is centered on the production of affective imaginary, as the following examples illuminate. Italy, ruled for five years (2001-2006) by media mogul Silvio Berlusconi by means of videocracy has been defined as a laboratory for the study of political degeneration (Dominijanni 2003). Berlusconi's success, however, cannot be explained simply in terms of saturation of the mediascape. What is of interest here is the usage he makes of a variety of media. During the electoral campaign for the 2001 political elections Berlusconi appeared on a television show, *Porta a Porta*, and read a program based on five points, titled, and presented as, a contract with the Italian citizens (*Il contratto con gli italiani*, Forza Italia 2001). Much of the political commentary examined the content of the contract itself, the likelihood of Berlusconi carrying out the five points as promised and the corporate rhetoric implicit in the idea itself of signing up a contract (which found a counterpart in Berlusconi's definition of the nation state as *azienda Italia*, company Italy, and of himself as its CEO). It is worthwhile to reflect also on this event as the moment that brought to the fore the crumbling of representative democracy in Italy. In a smooth sweep, Berlusconi did away with the institutions of the representative system, parties and parliament, speaking directly, through television, to *the Italians*. The format of the show and the complacency of the TV host, Bruno Vespa, ensured a seemingly unmediated effect, hurling Berlusconi directly into Italy's living rooms. In this act, he symbolically removed any distance between himself and the electorate, by transforming Italians in some sort of

company clients and entering their homes, with all the phony intimacy of the cruise ship entertainer he was once. This 'contract' would have been just a campaign stunt if it had not mobilized a powerful imaginary made of a populist mixture of multiplied workplaces and decreasing taxes, but above all of the myth of the self made man, with whom *the Italians*, by means of televisual intimacy, could identify. Berlusconi, in other words, fully understood the role of 'direct affect' as post-ideological power (Brian Massoumi in Zournazi 2003), the role of the media in its articulation and the way through which modulating affects he could reinvent the nostalgic fiction of a homogeneous community, *the Italians*. It worked for some, as the right-wing coalition led by Berlusconi won the elections. The creation of a Berlusconian affective imaginary continued and continues not only through television and other 'old' media, but also through the circulation of images through Berlusconi's party Forza Italia's website (www.forzaitalia.it). Here, in an inversion of tactical media, one can download the kind of material generally to be found in tool kits on websites of activist groups who use creative and communication practices in the making of politics by other means. Depending on the political season one can find: a Christmas card to be personalized and sent to 'Silvio'; an 'electronic gazebo' where one can download propaganda flyers; pictures of Berlusconi; the magazine detailing his life and political program, titled *Una storia italiana*, an Italian story, he sent in hard copy to each and every household as part of the 2001 campaign; a newsletter, which invites everybody to stand up and do their share; electoral posters and stickers. The content of this material is often populist in tone and not particularly refined from a graphic point of view, but it creates a network of users. By reducing the distance between the user and the party as bureaucratic apparatus, and the user and the leader ('Silvio'), it puts into effect a form of affective belonging to the imagined community of Forza Italia. Of course, it can be argued that affective belonging in politics is nothing new and that Italian fascism largely functioned through the process of affective belonging. The important difference is that if fascist imaginary had predominantly a pedagogic role, in creating 'the Italians' as objects of history through master narratives of race, Roman past and nation, Forza Italia's imaginary is performative (I am using the categories of pedagogical and performative referring to Bhabha's essay 'Dissemination' 1994. See also Chakrabarty, 2002, for an analysis of the two categories in relation to museums and democracy). The shift from a pedagogical model to a performative one is in this case made possible by internet technology, which allows people to perform themselves as political

subjects in real time and without any previous political history. It can also be used to describe the making of Berlusconi's party, Forza Italia, created in no time at the end of 1993 to fill the void left by the disintegration of traditional parties in Italy (Ginsborg, 2003, 289).

While Italy can be taken as perhaps the most blatant example of postmodern and post-ideological politics, and of the deployment of a politics of imaginary, it does not represent in any way its only occurrence. Brian Massoumi, for instance, relates the rise of 'direct affect' to the arrival on the political scene of Ronald Reagan, an actor-president (2003), having elsewhere analyzed the modulation of affects and 'the consequences of saturation of social space by fear' (1993: vii). More recently, Brett Neilson (2005) has drawn attention to the politics of imaginary in relation to affect modulation and circulation through electronic media by examining events spanning from the post 9/11 politics of fear to the 2001 Australian scandal of the 'children overboard'. In all these examples, representation, the shift towards a 'pictorial turn' and digital media are central to the production and circulation of political imaginary that comes to occupy the space of representative democracy. The entanglement between modern democracy and representation, has been analyzed by the Italian philosopher and journalist Ida Dominijanni:

At the origin of this slippage we find social complexity and the dissolution in mass culture and mass media of the community languages at the core of political identities and of political parties' capacity to mobilize the symbolic level; the crisis of legitimacy and credibility of politics; the exponential growth of mass media and their technological and financial development. Subsequently we find the already declining myth of 'direct democracy' where the opaque mediation by parliamentary parties between those governed and those governing would be substituted by the transparency and immediacy of televisual visibility and by the rapidity of 'real time' in the electronic agora (1998, 34).

In this entanglement between the representative system and representation, Dominijanni identifies the common origins of both fields: 'the communicative function of politics and political function of communication. Politics *and* language; social order *and* symbolic order'(35). It is through the progressive loss by politics, and we should add by representative democracy, of its ability to mobilize the symbolic level both through metaphors (such as in grand narratives, what I have linked to the pedagogical) and metonym (such as in linguistic and communicative practices and forms of direct political participation, associated with the

performative) that politics surrenders its symbolic and communicative function to media (36). This symbolic function is emptied out of its political content through a progressive slide towards technical templates: repetition of successful formats, of particular strings of words, of stereotypical terminology, of 'representation that does not represent' (36), of a constant flow of disconnected images. Both politics and media suffer a common fate: a tendency towards dematerialization, abstraction from both individual and social bodies and self-referentiality, or in brief a tendency towards a system based on hyper-metaphors (36). To this it should be added that in the crisis of representative democracy, politics also surrenders to the hyper-metaphorical media its imaginary function, its ability to produce not only a common (political and metonymic) language, but also a common (political and metonymic) imaginary.

Where does art stand in this crisis of signification? Indeed, how can we think both art and democracy when politics itself has dissolved in the hyper-metaphorical regime of communication? Is it possible that Brian Holmes (2003) is right in defining art as a field of extreme hypocrisy in the age of corporate patronage and the neoliberal state, thus directly reflecting the crisis of the representative democracies? What happens if we shift our perspective and abandon art as purely the product of the art system and corporate patronage to focus on the usage of creative practices and techniques as means of politics? Can the drift from representative democracy to representational democracy generate some material to work with, to take apart and play with the politics of representation? Can we think of the creative practices used by some activists (see for instance Tarì and Vanni 2005) as a detournement of representational democracy?

Benjamin, in his 1934 essay 'The Author as Producer' believed enquiring whether a work of art endorses the productive relations of its time, and is therefore reactionary, or if it challenges them, and is revolutionary, is to posit the wrong question. The question to ask should be, what is the position of the artwork *within* the production relations of its time (1992, 485)? Moving Benjamin's argument into our own period is useful for thinking how we can 'do' things with art, in which context of production and circulation art should be placed, and how we can liberate it from what is essentially a representational and hyper-metaphorical role. Much of what today is celebrated (and immediately absorbed by the art system) as political art, art able to create an imaginary of resistance, to open up spaces of democracy by

bringing prickly social and political issues in galleries, to fight against censorship, war and famine is largely constituted by representations, pictures, illustrations and metaphors of political issues. This art is not political in its being in the world. The kind of imaginary produced operates through a device of metaphorical substitution, becoming simply an abstraction. Positioning is a crucial element of any form of imaginary, including art, which is in the world politically. By this I do not imply any normative and ultimately populist positioning, for instance outside the gallery or museum space and onto the streets. I allude to those creative practices which, through incursions into the politics of representation and displacements across different spaces can contribute to disturb, show the seams of the representational character of democracy (see for instance www.boat-people.org, www.bewareofthegod.com, www.serpicanaro.com, <http://theyesmen.org>, www.lutherblissett.net, to name but a few). What these creative practices have in common is a dialogic relationship: with other imaginaries, with social and political movements, with productive relations, with bodies, spaces, locales, things and ideas. It is in these generative relations that imaginary can become, and be produced as, political and not simply as representation that does not represent and be part of the production and narration of a political culture of democracy that creates new political subjectivities.

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choose an unacceptable colour:



11.00 plurals'

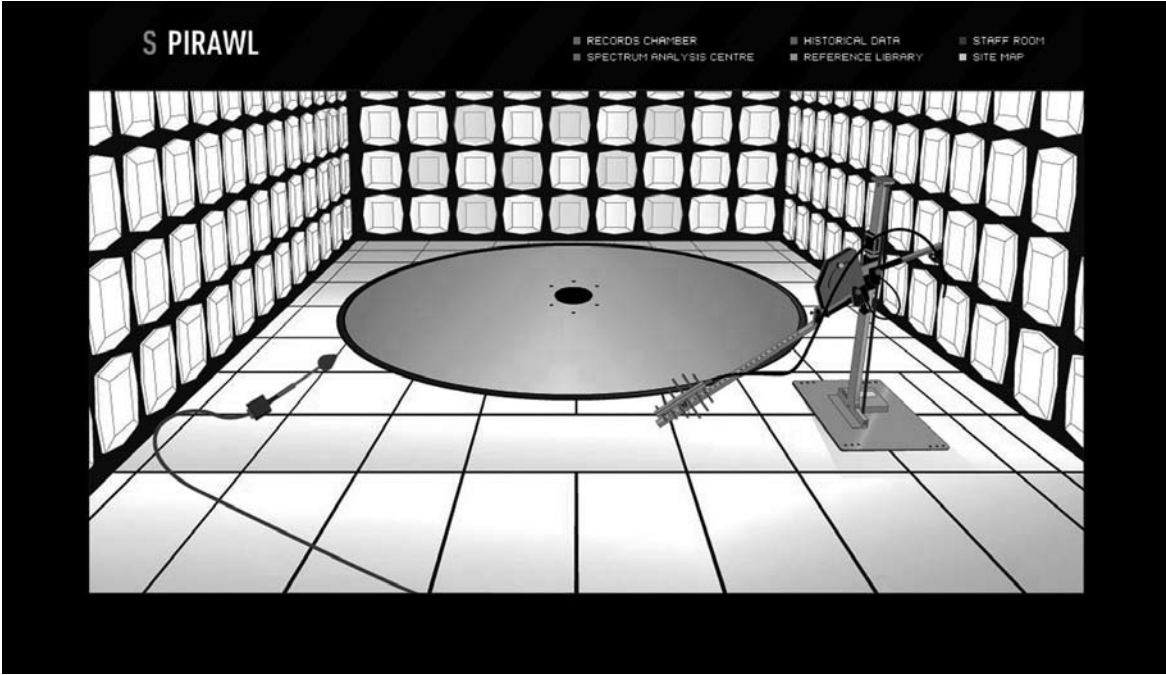
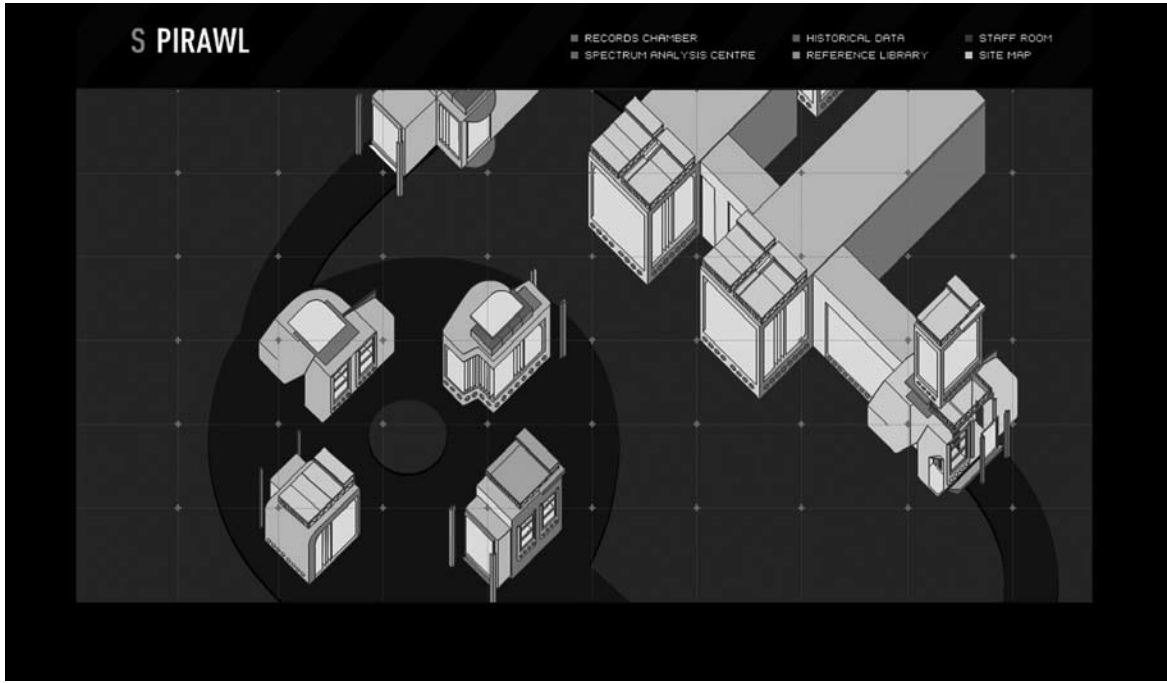
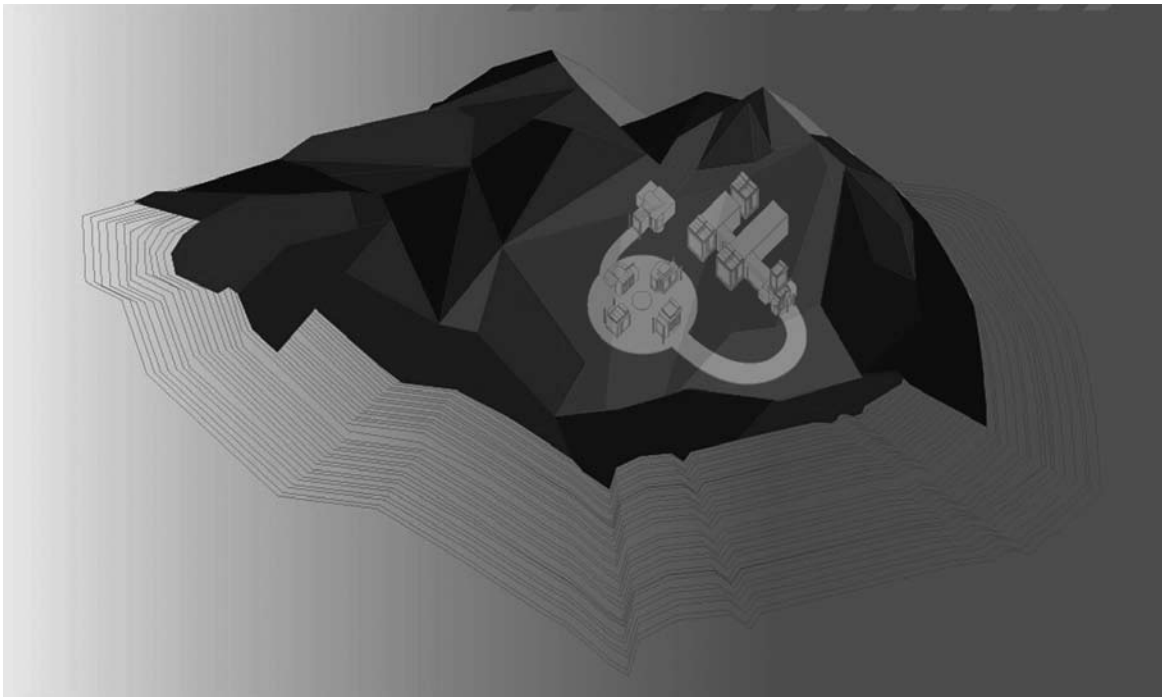
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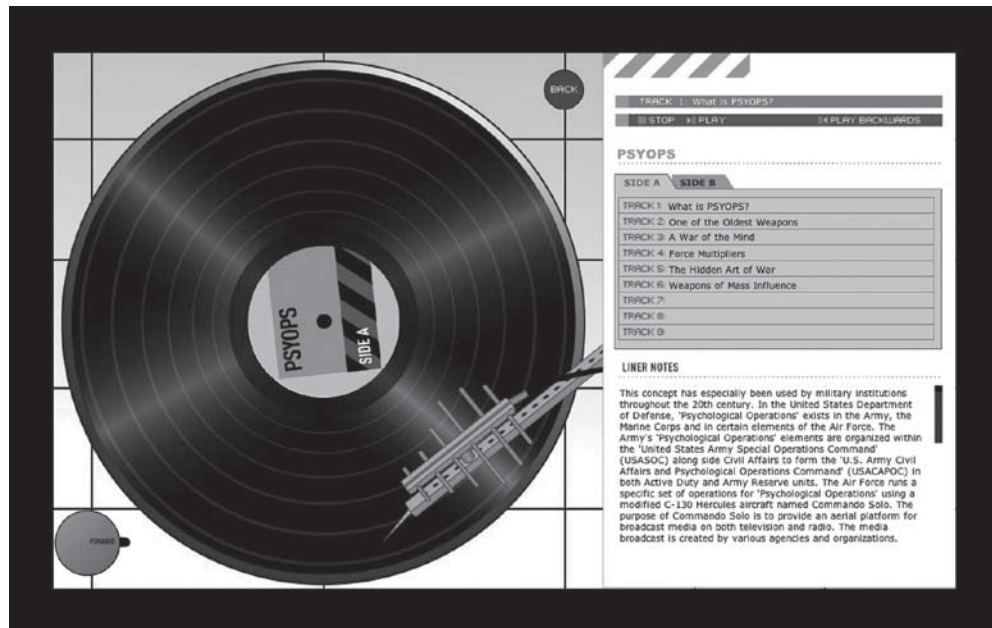
¹Law and order defies the rules of grammar and is singular

Remember that elections are not always plural. The opposition demanded an election is often preferable to The opposition demanded fresh elections.

Propaganda looks plural but is not.

from The Economist Style Book 2003.





S.P.I.R.A.W.L.ing Into Control

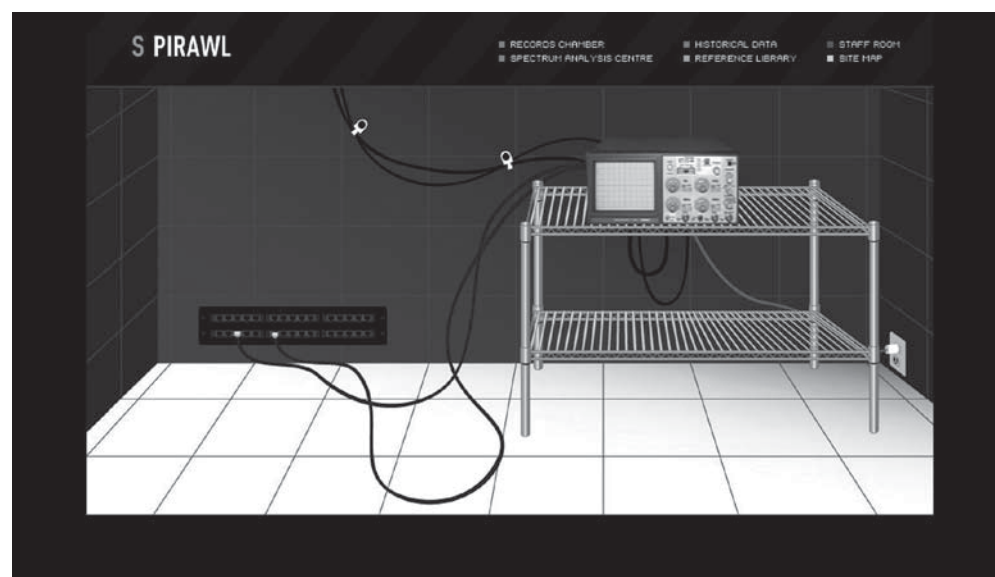
The following text looks and listens to an online documentary produced in 2006 named *S.P.I.R.A.W.L.*¹ about the functional use of frequencies by the English/French collaboration 'Battery Operated'. The project focuses on how aural boundaries are currently being quietly pioneered by military and civil enforcement organisations through the use of weapons utilizing sound, infrasound and ultrasound in times of 'war and peace'. By exploring the *S.P.I.R.A.W.L.* site, we can traverse 4 different virtual buildings, each of which contains an interactive interface where one can access research papers, documentation and records about the escalating use of frequency-based weapons around the world. The *S.P.I.R.A.W.L.* project proposes that the frequency-based landscape that we all exist within has not been democratically mapped, demarcated or inhabited.

New media artworks such as *S.P.I.R.A.W.L.* map the sonic terrains of the local and foreign through times of 'war and peace', to uncover whether our democratic rights exist, in a landscape where we cannot see what is being dissolved and where we have not yet learnt to listen. The use of sonic, infrasonic and ultrasonic weapons by international agencies brings such questions to bear precisely because they cannot be perceived by the common man and woman in the street until they are harmed by them. *S.P.I.R.A.W.L.* has been placed online as a covert facility which allows audiences an opportunity to research how these new frequency-based weapons are increasingly employed by the military and how they fit into a larger arsenal of arms known as 'non-lethal' weapons.

Scientific fact: Everything in the known world has a resonant frequency. Humans can only perceive a small range of these frequencies by ear, from 20 to 20,000Hz, which means that there are many that exist outside of our range of hearing that we are exposed to everyday. The audible fields of sound are mapped out, managed and regulated in similar ways as physical territory. The inaudible frequencies, however, represent a free zone. This silent soundscape is now being staked out chaotically with an ethical and moral disregard, reminiscent of the way the American West was 'won' in the C19th.

Mankind has been aware of the potential of sound as a tool of social control since before the creation of the written word. Ceremonial spaces were chosen and constructed for their acoustic properties; from the caverns of the Cro-Magnon shamans to the ritual chambers of the Celts to the great cathedrals of Notre Dame and Chartres in France. Gregorian chants were sung by monks outside their monasteries to lift the spirits of workers in the fields, while knights of the first crusade hired musicians to accompany their efforts on the battlefield and Tibetan Lama's produced thigh bone trumpets believed to resonate at the same frequency as the human body and thus induce a calming effect.

The examples above very briefly illustrate how sound has been used across the globe by many different cultures to change and influence human's psychology and physiology. A more recently discovered naturally occurring phenomenon, which has been used from the early C19th onwards, is that of infrasound. Infrasound is the range of frequencies under 20Hz that is below the threshold of human hearing. When amplified with the use of electricity it can be used for many purposes such as creating frequency barriers and producing collective disorganization. There is an array of sound weapons that operate utilizing infrasonic frequencies. Weapons manipulating these frequencies can cause overwhelming nausea, loosening of the bodily organs and ultimately death. One of these weapons, as it is described in its patent ('Subliminal Acoustic Manipulation of Nervous Systems', US Patent 6, 017, 302)² 'causes disorientation and drowsiness in law enforcement standoff situations.'



times of ‘peace’. The roll call of these weapons is too long to list, but a selection of their medieval sounding names suffices in giving some idea as to their aims – ‘The Curdler’ used by the British Army in Northern Ireland in the 1970s, ‘The Vortex Ring Generator’ and ‘The Ultrasound Pain Generator’. These are real devices with patents that can be located easily online and have already been used.

A different but pertinent use of sound as a weapon can be seen in the events of the 1989 American invasion of Panama, when the exiled General Noriega took refuge in the Vatican Embassy. The CIA and U.S. Department of Defense blasted loud rock’n’roll music at the Embassy - reportedly AC/DC, Bryan Adams etc - continuously for three days until church authorities protested. As hard rock music blared around the clock, a U.S. psychological operations specialist claimed it was part of a campaign to harass Noriega. The second infamous incident occurred at the Waco siege when the U.S. military surrounded the Branch Davidian complex with speakers and blasted the inhabitants with Nancy Sinatra, Christmas carols, Tibetan chanting and the squeals of dying rabbits to try and psychologically disorientate the inhabitants. This PSYOPS strategy was only stopped when the Dalai Lama intervened and requested that the military stop using sacred Tibetan music for such purposes.

The reason that weapons development companies, militaries and police forces around the world have decided to inhabit and pioneer the territories of the sonic landscape is brazenly voiced in the March, 2000 Overview Brief by the U.S. Department of Defense Joint Non-Lethal Weapons Program. It states that one of the military’s three focuses for the development of these types of weapons is the ‘Media Factor’. This is extrapolated in no ambiguous way; that non-lethal sonic weapons are media friendly because they do not leave marks on the victims for the television viewer to witness. The majority of people experience war, protest and sanctioned violence through television reports and documentaries. It should come as no surprise that ‘non-lethal’ weapons have been developed with their media representation in mind. Governments and military leaders around the world understand this only too well and have learnt how to play the ‘media game’ which Marshall McLuhan theorised in the 1960s. In fact they have not so much learnt how to play, but have gone further and changed the location of it to further their own ends, from a landscape that is visible and audible to one that is increasingly silent and ocularly duplicitous.

Through witnessing the effects of conventional weapons of war and civilian control, we can see the lifeblood of the social body bleeding when the riot police hit protestors with batons or shoot them. We feel compassion for defenceless people when their blood is spilt or if they are choking for air due to the inhalation of pepper spray. Frequency based weapons are ‘clean’ weapons; they do not cause blood or bruising. Their initiation into the public sphere has been camouflaged. Indeed, who would consider an amplifier or a speaker system a hostile weapon? What defence or protection is there against such a device?

The U.S., Canada, Russia, China, France, the United Kingdom, Israel, Sweden, Japan, Poland, Yugoslavia, and Denmark have acoustic weapons programs. There is an urgent need for broad public disclosure about ‘non-lethal’ weapons, particularly ones that utilize sonic frequencies for offensive purposes. Human-rights activist Dr. Steve Wright, who as director of the Omega Foundation in the U.K. works with Amnesty International to monitor ‘non-lethal’ weapons, states that the use of these weapons is dangerous and irresponsible. A 1998 report³ prepared for the European Parliament classified ‘non-lethal’ weapons as techniques of political control. In an appraisal of those techniques, the Omega Foundation recognized ‘non-lethal’ crowd control weapons as a growing arsenal of political technologies that pose a threat to civil liberties.

Through extensive research and interviews, the *S.P.I.R.A.W.L.* project charts a camouflaged growth of sonic weapons throughout the twentieth century; tracking their development under the benign

rubric of ‘non-lethal’ weapons programs, since the Second World War. Battery Operated trace out the success of these weapons in field ops whilst pinpointing how and where they have been commercialized and inaugurated into the tactics and strategies of agencies which focus on the control of civilian populations. This project asks how democratic nations are able to develop and introduce these weapons without regard to international humanitarian law, public policy or arms control. Calls for international human rights directed policies have fallen on death ears, precisely because our culture does not afford the same time, gravity and significance to sound as it does to vision.

In his book ‘City of Panic’, Paul Virilio⁴ proposes that unbeknownst to themselves, the civilian population has been militarised and that every metropolis throughout the world has become a war zone. If this assertion is true, then the tidemark of public discourse surrounding these issues needs to rise dramatically. Since the sonic landscape is less developed both theoretically and practically than its visual counterpart, it will take us longer to hear the voices that tell us what’s goin on. With this in mind, *S.P.I.R.A.W.L.* presents us with its own records - collections and compilations of material that chart the uncharted – each one a locating device for the resonant frequency of ‘total war’.

by

DX Raiden

Endnotes:

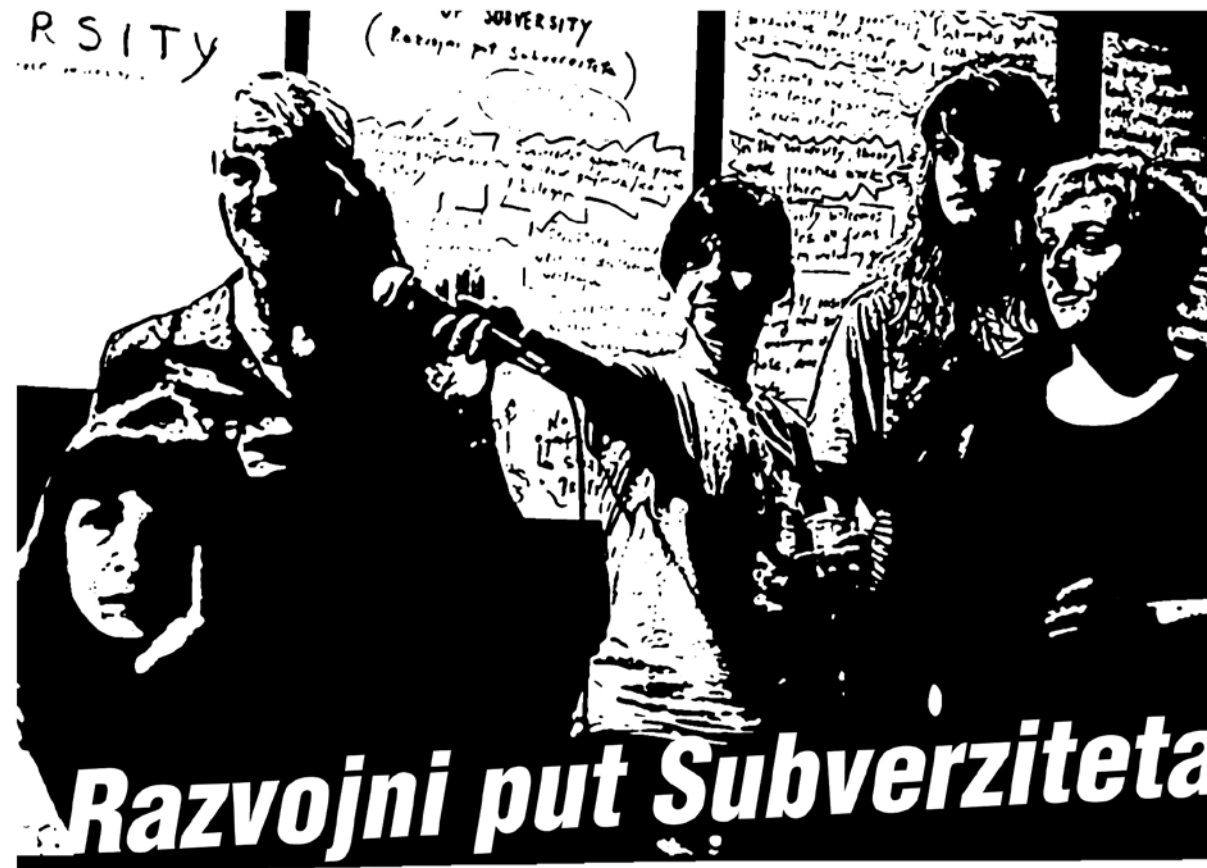
¹ *S.P.I.R.A.W.L.* (Sound Proofed Institute for Research into Acoustic Weapons Logistics)
² United States Patent and Trademark Office can be found at - <http://patft.uspto.gov>
by Battery Operated can be found at - www.batteryoperated.net/spirawl
³ See Steve Wright, *An Appraisal of Technologies of Political Control*, Report to Scientific and Technological Options Assessment, European Parliament 1998 (<http://jwa.com/stoa.atpc.htm>)
⁴ Paul Virilio, *City of Panic*, translated by Julie Rose, Berg Publishing, Oxford, UK, 2007

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DX Raiden is a writer from England who has published articles and essays in magazines such as: – Parachute (Canada), Monument (Australia), Sandbox (USA), Artists Newsletter (England), Virtualia (Mexico) and Technikart (France). He has also written catalogue texts for many artists and institutions such as the 2006 Beijing Architecture Biennale.







The subversity practices
productive mentorship
and knowledge creation

Students and teachers
open their practices
to each other

in the subversity, theory
and practice work
together

the subversity welcomes
and invites all forms

Subverzitet praktična
produktivno mentorstvo i stvaranje
znanja

Studenti/ce i profesori/ce
otvaraju svoj rad jedni drugima

Na subverzitetu,
teorija i praksa
funkcioniraju zajedno

Subverzitet je

PHOTOS: SUBROSA



Rhizomatic of Subversity

- Subversity produces healthy social relations.
- Subversity guarantees the right to choose professors and subjects of study.
- The structure of the subversity sets the example for the rest of society.
- The subversity respects the connection of body and mind and provides a comfortable and productive environment for growth and learning.
- The subversity teachers are students, and students are teachers.
- The subversity practices productive mentorship and knowledge creation.
- Students and teachers open their practices to each other.
- In the subversity, theory and practice work together.
- The subversity welcomes and invites all forms of expression including queer identity.
- The subversity insists on introducing new subjects and encourages students to initiate, develop and teach.
- The structure of the subversity is fluid and not fixed.
- Subversity accepts all who want to study or teach, regardless of age, color, race, ethnicity, country, nationality, political persuasion, religion, gender, body type or sexuality.
- The subversity will provide a wide range of quality materials.
- The subversity administration will be efficient and serve the needs of teaching and learning. It will be open to change based on student demands.

...work always in progress...

During *Look! Listen! A Week With | Out Women*, the US-based cyberfeminist art collective **subRosa** enacted feminist traditions of hosting, hospitality, feasting, mutual nourishment and consciousness-raising as sites for critical conviviality. We listened to and collaborated with women artists, activists, professionals, educators, and students in Zagreb to make visible the often invisible ways in which women produce, reproduce, maintain, cultivate and care for life in both intimate and public spheres. At this time subRosa met the **wo.kolektiv**, with whom we founded a free university—*Subversity*—on Friday, June 6, 2008.

www.cyberfeminism.net | wo-kolektiv.refugia.net



PHOTOS: DAMIR ZIZIC



...That's not what
democracy looks
like *this* is what
democracy looks
like...

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