

# THE LARGE GLASS

No. 31/32, 2021

**journal of contemporary art,  
culture and theory**



ISSN 1409-5823



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The Large Glass No. 31/32, 2021  
(Journal of Contemporary Art, Culture and Theory)

Published twice a year. Price for a single copy 500 MKD, Annual  
subscription: 1000 MKD

Publisher: Museum of Contemporary Art Skopje  
Address: Samoilova 17, MK - 1000 Skopje  
Tel: (++) 389 2 110 123  
E-mail: info@msu.mk  
Web site: www.msu.mk

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Layout: PrivatePrint  
Printed by: Focus Print  
Copyediting/proofreading: Nick Abraham  
Copies: 1000

The postage fee for sending the magazines abroad is charged according  
to the current price list of Post of Macedonia and is paid when the  
subscription is purchased.

ISSN: 1409 - 5823

Financially supported by:



Republic of North Macedonia  
Ministry of Culture



MUSEUM OF CONTEMPORARY ART SKOPJE  
УЗЕЈНАСОВРШЕНОСТАТСКОПЈЕ

# THE LARGE GLASS

No. 31/32, 2021



Ahmad Al-Bazz, Heather Sharona Weiss, Oren Ziv, Keren Manor  
The photo was taken in Beita during 2021

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# Tihomir Topuzovski Introduction

## THE ERA OF A NEW REALITY

This volume of the Large Glass compares various contributions on *The new reality*, a reality, which has been shaped by events throughout 2020 and 2021. Starting from the early period of the pandemic and the subsequent lockdowns, the reality has been characterized by the absence of human agency in urban landscapes during the lockdowns, where "pictures were taken of a newly ubiquitous nothing: of no people on city streets, no people in major plazas of the world, no people in classrooms."<sup>1</sup> This created a kind of "segmented, immobile, frozen space; where each individual is fixed in his place"<sup>2</sup> or "as the world seemed to come to a standstill, a number of observers have noted that a global rise of nationalism might be a consequence of the pandemic"<sup>3</sup> coupled with forms of social antagonism, struggles, discrimination and exclusion of people from economic activity and political participation, as well as the ongoing climate emergency and ecological destruction. All these aspects have become intertwined throughout 2020 and 2021. Regarding this volatile mix, Badiou asks "about the end of the world, the advent of a different world or what is happening to us in the early years of the century - something that would appear not to have any clear name in any accepted language"<sup>4</sup>, so, the term 'new reality' has been coined to describe the situation resulting from these inter-related events.

Thus, artistic practices and aesthetics can no longer be adequately understood using the old paradigm,<sup>5</sup> nor can they describe the relations that take place in the world of art. Indeed, "Deleuze's descriptions of art remind us that it is one of the primary mediums with which humans learn to communicate and respond to the world"<sup>6</sup> and it is important to recognise the necessity of discussing this new reality. This challenging context not only creates a political emergency but also an artistic state of emergency, while generating the potential for new forms of artistic dissent to be expressed. The artists' engagement with the problems cited above presupposes certain ethical principles, which must consider "...conditions in economically underdeveloped areas, raise ecological concerns, offer access to culture and education for the populations of poor countries and regions, attract attention to the plight of illegal immigrants, improve the conditions of people working in art institutions"<sup>7</sup> as well as addressing issues of discrimination, freedom of speech and economic inequality. For these reasons, this volume hopes to provoke debates regarding the present challenges. Regarding the organisation, the different topics, approaches and objectives in the contributions to this issue are grouped together by theme .

The contributions in the first part directly reflect on current political and spatial conditions, resulting from the current pandemic, which often create conditions of isolation and loneliness, and also political decisions in the disciplinary and control eras. However, such conditions create the possibility of developing a caring culture and building long-term organizational structures among artists, or in some cases using artistic media , such as photography as a vehicle for social and political struggle against forms of oppression, racism and discrimination. The next part of this volume relates to historical reminiscence and how it is embedded in cultural and artistic practices today. For example, it provides a retrospective reading of history and explores some of the ways that symbols, photomontages, and artistic forms can be used for and against the present political challenges. The final part consists of studies and examples of experimental architectonic structures and devices. To a certain extent, these structures and devices have their origin in very particular points located in the Covid crisis, and provide the possibility of finding a rare place for people to be truly listened to. In addition, other examples include experiential use of the concept of architectonics, through which the museum can be reconsidered, including expressions of dystopian urban structures and the entire look of a city.

Taken together, this issue of the Large Glass represents an effort to present some complementary ideas and practices, illustrating alternative ways of interpreting the crisis we are currently living through.

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**STATE  
OF  
EMERGENCY AS  
THE CONDITION  
OF LIVING**

John Paul Ricco

# Solitude and Things in the Time that Remains

## Description

By looking at the ways in which Yiyun Li's autobiographical novel, *Where Reasons End*, and Adania Shibli's novel, *Minor Detail*, confront the singularity of death and what of life remains unlivable, and then turning to Dean Sameshima's photo series, *being alone*, and *zu verschenken* ('to give away'), I begin, in this paper, to outline a queer ethos of finitude. In which solitude and things are two principal existential and empirical affirmations of the sense of time as only ever experienced as the time that remains.

To the question, what would a world look like, artist Jean-Michel Basquiat answered: "just any person."<sup>1</sup> Hearing, in the simplicity of Basquiat's response, an acknowledgement of sheer minimal existence, we might also recognize a non-mythologizing statement of non-mythical justice.<sup>2</sup> This is the justice of *just*, of the non-judgemental rapport with singularity, with "just this," a phrase that is homonymous with justice, and speaks to the minor immanence of what is just (distinct from the complacency of "what just is"). As in the singular solitude of a thing, and of a world that might consist, for each of us, as nothing more or

less than just a person, in the singularity of our existences.

My argument is quite simple: in the midst of the isolation and loneliness that has become the condition of living for so many people today, it is imperative that we, collectively, not confuse either of these states or affects, with solitude.<sup>3</sup> For unlike isolation and loneliness (at least in their respective negative shadings), solitude is the name not only for a state of retreat, but also names what of existence in the singularity of its finitude, remains in-appropriate and incommensurable. Sharing and a sense of the common is wholly predicated upon this inappropriability and incommensurability of solitude. It is in these ways that we can come to think and speak of solitude and things as the time that remains.<sup>4</sup> The time that remains is what of time and temporality remains in-appropriate, and what renders each thing in the singularity of its existence, incommensurable to each and every other thing. Distinct from *chronos* and *aeon*, the time that remains is the *kairos* moment: the time of the now as the time that is left for us, the temporality that we are, this time and none other. In remaining, time passes; and in passing time remains.

In his 1982 essay, "*\*Se: Hegel's Absolute and Heidegger's Ereignis*," Gior-

gio Agamben points out that, "Hegel's thought...is—one of the supreme attempts of philosophy to think its own supreme thought, humankind's entry into its \**se*, into its being without a nominative, which constitutes its dwelling and its *ethos*: its solitude and its consuetude, its separation but also its solidarity."<sup>5</sup>

In the context of this paper, I am less interested in Agamben's casting of Hegel's thought than I am in his identification, articulation, and italicized enunciation of solitude and solidarity. *Se*, is the reflexive without a nominative (subject or object); a prefix that is not a prefix since it is *not fixed* before anything. We might say that "*se*," is the pure or absolute resemblance of self, precisely as not resembling anything, something like Maurice Blanchot's notion of essential solitude. To this separation and solidarity, to this solitude and consuetude (habit), I add finitude, which I take to be the force that rhythmically modulates each of these dispositions and expositions of existence; the way in which, as Leo Bersani might put it, the self (the \**se*) is choreographed into being.

Such an ethos, disposition, or *Stimmung*, is not a movement for the better (liberal progress), or the law of movement that Arendt critically analyzed as the novel form of government that unites ideology and terror. Rather, it is the idiorrhythmic resonance of homo tantum, or the errant monadism of Fernand Deligny's autistic children. Or—to jump species—it is the silkworm's ecstatic solitude, a figure of animal captivation that Roland Barthes returned to on more than one occasion, to envision the pleasurable use of one's body. In the case of the silkworm, it is in being nestled and enclosed in its self-spun cocoon, that the creature works and glows with all its desire and comes to invent silk thread.<sup>6</sup>

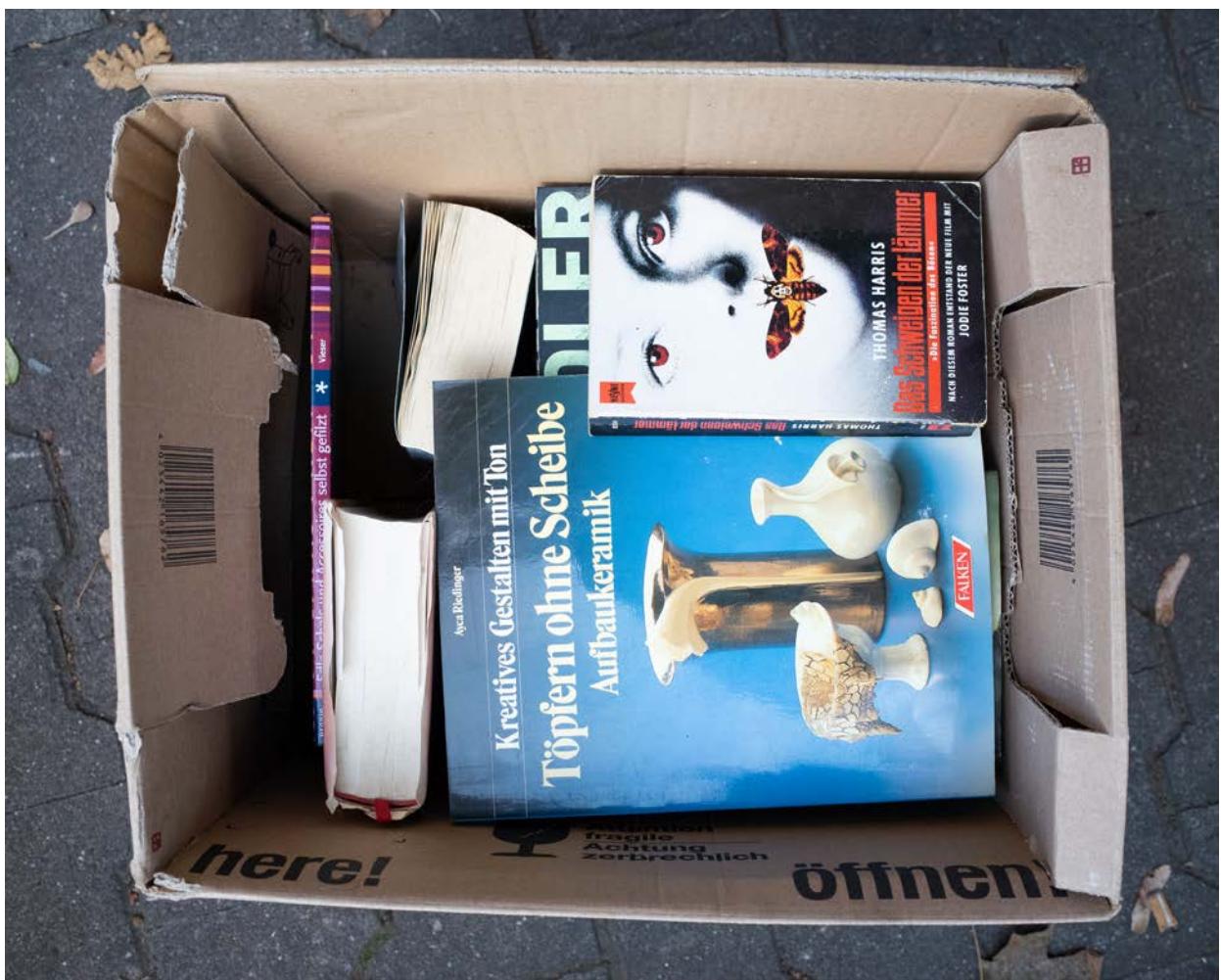
Such queer monadism is not a "dead end" but a dwelling in the in-appropriate as justice. The inappropriateness of solitude lies in the self's essential expropriation—its vocation and way of being in the world. That is to say, in that self's rapport with what refuses itself, and in relation with the lost thing (*res amissa*), that is the title of the collection of poems by Giorgio

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Dean Sameshima, being alone, 2020. Reproduced by permission of the artist

Caproni, for which Agamben's essay, "Expropriated Manner" originally served as Preface. Caproni regards the lost thing as the good (i.e., it is in-operative and in-appropriate).<sup>7</sup> As such, the lost thing might be what Jacques Khalip in his recent book, theorizes as the last thing—and it is the lost or last thing that I am thinking of as the time that remains.

Given existence's radical non-transcendence—its thinness (*haecceity*)<sup>8</sup>—to retreat is always to retreat not out of but back into the world, such that, as Jacques Derrida stated at the very outset of his second seminar on the beast and the sovereign: "we're always talking about the world, when we talk about solitude."<sup>9</sup> As Derrida makes clear, being alone is never *not* a rapport with, and this rapport is heard in the very enunciation,

"I am alone," regardless of whether this bare minimum expression of solitary existence is said to oneself, or to another. Especially since, in both cases of address, "I am alone," is also, at the same time, effectively saying—yet without coming right out and saying it—"I am alone with you." With "you" being either the "me" that is saying "I," or you, as the other to whom the "you" might also be pointing. At once with you and without you, solitude is the shared sense of being in the world and in finitude, and this is why solitude is a wholly ethical comportment.<sup>10</sup> This is one of the many philosophical takeaways of Derrida's seminar and his reading of Heidegger's own seminar from 1929-30, on *The Fundamental Concepts of Metaphysics: World, Finitude, Solitude*.<sup>11</sup> In turn, when Basquiat defines the world

as "just a person," let it be understood that that person is the figure and existential instantiation of finitude and solitude.

A comportment and not an operative instrument, utility or law: solitude is the time that remains in the midst and wake of the coming and going, the appearing, disappearing and un-arrestable passing of other finite existences in the world.

It is in this way that a thinking of a solitude marks a shift from *crisis* to *chresis*. That is, from end-driven apocalypticism to *use (chresis)* as in the free and common use of the time that remains.<sup>12</sup> Through this we can begin to understand the solitary as that which is not the sacred (the abandoned, the excluded inclusion), but instead is that which is infinitely separated in the singularity of its finitude. Which, at the same time, is



Dean Sameshima, *being alone*, 2020. Reproduced by permission of the artist

to say, in its touch, contact and always already contaminating relation with other things. Hence, my conceptualisation of solitude is opposite to any idealization, moralization, sublimation, or redemption. Instead, it is about singular existence left to its own—in-appropriable—death. Something that millions of people in the world are deprived of every year.

While the majority of Giorgio Agamben's written interventions in the pandemic discourse over the past year have been widely off the mark, he is nonetheless wholly justified in his moral outrage over the fact that so many people who have died in the past year, have been left to die alone, in isolation, away from any and all friends and family.<sup>13</sup> Those dying have been deprived of the time that remains, and the chance to spend their last

remaining moments of life with others whom they love. In this rendering of naked bare life in a state of exception instituted by the bio-security state, we encounter the exact opposite of the just solitude that I am thinking through.<sup>14</sup> It is only in the affirmation of the other in their solitude (in their as suchness), in being left alone (i.e., relating to them non-coercively), and in not leaving them alone (abandoned to a state of isolation and loneliness), that the other's singularity is ethically sustained. "As if now [as Denise Riley writes] both of you inhabit a companionate exile rather than being two parallel units of loneliness."<sup>15</sup> Riley goes on to describe this as "a shared a-temporality," which I read as the time that remains in the sharing of solitudes, and a way of coming to have a sense of the world.

"Who does death belong to?" In a marvelous recent article in *The London Review of Books*, Jacqueline Rose poses this question, within the context of her discussion of Freud's theory of the death drive, and the degree to which the death of his daughter Sophie, who "died during her third pregnancy from complications arising from the Spanish flu" (39), on 4 March 1918, informed the revelation that startled Freud, and that he would go on to describe and elaborate in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, of 1920.<sup>16</sup> The solitude of dying one's own death is, as Rose attests, "not the same thing as to die alone in a world that seems deserted" (43). In turning to Freud's slightly earlier essay, "Thoughts for the Time on War and Death" (1915), she finds a notion of the solidarity that is shared in the non-is-



Dean Sameshima, being alone, 2020. Reproduced by permission of the artist

lated solitude of death—a notion, I might add, that is far from unique to Freud.

Something is working through Freud's text, a "socius primitive" in Derrida's reading, or a new form of common life, never more needed than now, which sheds the common pitfalls of the singular ego. A life in which the pain of the times is shared and in which every human subject, regardless of race, class, caste or sex would be able to participate. This may be what it means to struggle for a world in which everyone is free to die their own death. (43)

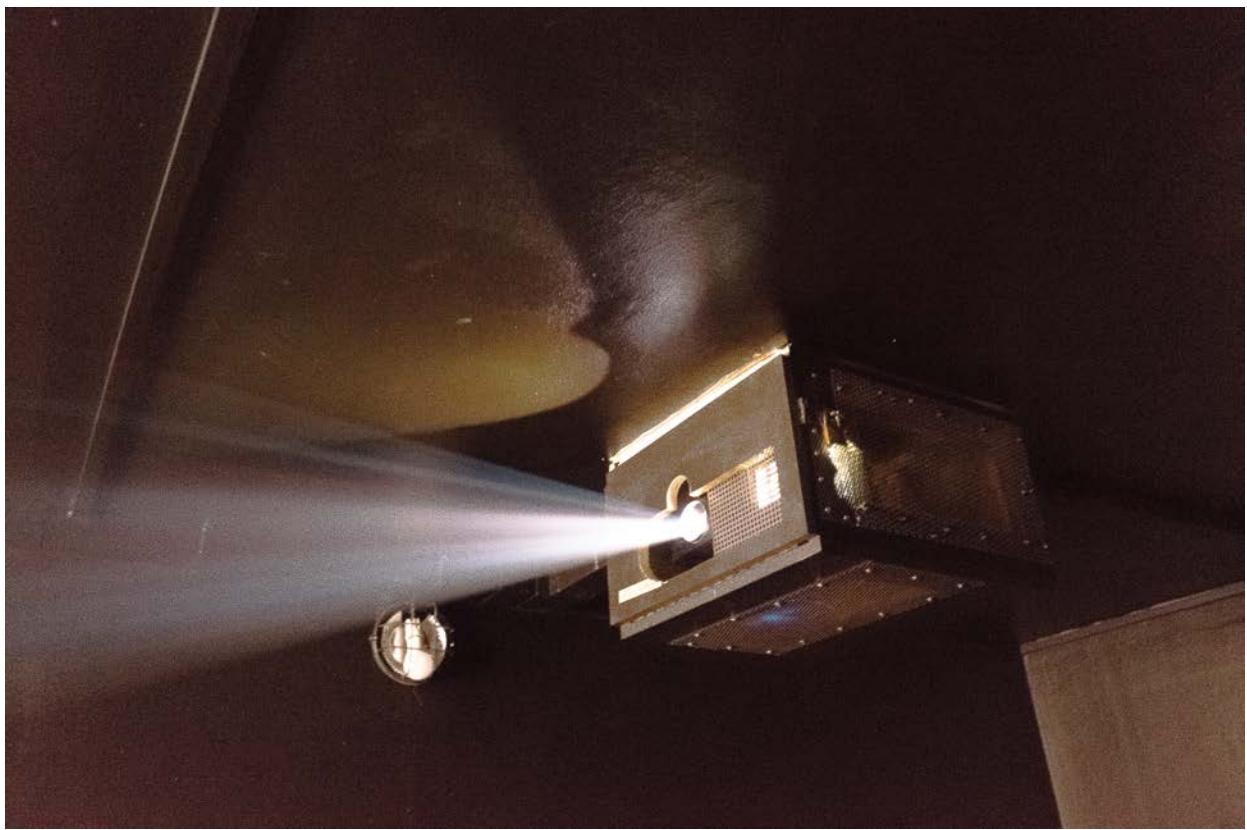
This is an ethical solidarity, a rapport with the "just this" of the other's singular death, and a sharing of solitudes through which a sense of the world is sustained. World, Finitude, Solitude—those three terms are—not only the fundamental concepts of Heidegger's metaphysics, but are also (inextricably) the fundaments of ethical solidarity.<sup>17</sup>

Speaking of solitude in relation to questions of the collective and the communal, Jean-Luc Nancy recently formulated their inextricability as follows: "the communal does not exclude the solitary: it implies it as non-totality or as the non-communion of the communal."<sup>18</sup> In other words, it is through (to quote Nancy again) "the solitude in which each person is born, dies and shares their communal fate" (*ibid*) that the communal is at once possible and does not succumb to any totalization or finality. Instead, solitude is not the negation of the communal, but what keeps the communal open, and as Nancy says, "it is in this way that politics is transcended or exceeded" (*ibid*) and, we might add, that something like justice might be realized.<sup>19</sup>

In what follows, I trace the relations between solitude, the minor detail, and the contemporary, as these correspond to three axes: existential (singularity), empirical (thing), and the temporal (moment, ex-temporal, *aftertime*). In my conceptual diagram, itself a modification of

Heidegger's schema of metaphysics, it is from out of solitude and things, as two primary materializations of finitude that there is a sense of time as only ever the time that remains. Through this existentiality and empiricism of singular beings and things, comes a sense of the common and of the world.

I begin with Yiyun Li's novel, *Where Reasons End*, which was written in the immediate aftermath of the death of a young adult son and provides a way to think about shared solitude as the temporality of existences. I then move to Adania Shibli's *Minor Detail*, which will be my entry point into thinking about the solitude and temporality of things. Both of these books are, to varying degrees and ways, about death, mourning, loss, and grieving; and as such, each pushes up against, reshapes, and expands the genre of elegy beyond any historicization and narrativization that is the work of mourning. In their writing, each of the authors confronts the singularity of death and what of life remains unlivable and unintelligible.<sup>20</sup>



Dean Sameshima, *being alone*, 2020. Reproduced by permission of the artist

I end my paper with equally ethical and aesthetic confrontations with solitude and things, but now also bearing upon the erotic, by turning to recent work by artist Dean Sameshima: *being alone*, and *zu verschenken (to take away)*, two photo series that he has primarily shared through postings on his Instagram feed, the first consisting of images taken in various sex clubs and bathhouses in Berlin, and the second, images of boxes of objects that have been left for the taking, on the city's sidewalks.

#### **Three Times Around the Time that Remains**

##### **First Time - aftertime**

In *Where Reasons End* (2019), Yiyun Li's autobiographical novel structured as a series of conversations between a mother and her 16-year-old son who recently committed suicide, it is the latter who introduces an adjectival temporality, through his notion of aftertime (one

word).<sup>21</sup> Like *aftermath*, *afterword*, and *afterlife*, in which the prefix does not negate what it precedes and modifies, *aftertime* marks the finitude of time and an a-temporal zone that follows time in time. As the son specifies, in his decision to unfollow others (generationally) by committing suicide, he has unfollowed neither life nor death, but has unfollowed time, and now exists and speaks from aftertime—which I want to read as the time that remains and as that which is shared between this mother and this son. Such an adjectival sense of existence and its temporality is what the son has in mind when he says, “There are ways to live not as noun, or inside a noun, or among other nouns” (67), and in her attempt to understand, the mother at one point asks: “How long does it take for the frozen [adjective] to become fossil [noun]?” (83).

*Where Reasons End* enables us to conceive an ethical rapport to loss, in which what fades and disappears, is allowed to fade and disappear. In other words, ethics defined, in part, as allowing

things in their singular passing to pass.<sup>22</sup> As the son points out to his mother: “A noun is a wall, an adjective a window” (66). Thus, the question arises: could it be that nouns are the ways in which, in language, we try to hold on to things, whereas adjectives allow us to let those same things go into time as only the time that remains? Such that qualities might be the things-themselves, and the ontological is accessed via an aesthetics of finitude?

Toward the end of the novel, the question is posed (one also posed by Denise Riley), about the naming of those who have lost someone, and the remarkable absence of any such names for those left behind: “What do you call a parent who’s lost a child, a sibling who’s lost a sibling, a friend who’s lost a friend?” (114). As the author points out, we are without names for those who have suffered the loss of someone. Except for orphan, and widow or widower, there are no nouns to name the ones who have lost another. I argue that this absence points to the limits of nouns (but ultimately perhaps all words,

all language) when it comes to the inappropriability of existential loss. It is this that leads me to think of loss as that which cannot be followed but only unfollowed by words. It is the place where reasons (and nouns) end. In its adjectival sense, loss's time, is the time that remains, in other words: it is aftertime.

### Second Time - Temporality of the Detail

In "On Risk and Solitude," an essay from the early-1990s, Adam Philips reads Freud's Introductory Lectures, and specifically his "Symbolism in Dreams," in which solitude is symbolically represented by the act of traveling.<sup>23</sup> Specifically, of venturing out into the world, and with the awareness, that not only might you not get where you are going, but that the journey may result in an unexpected accident, and perhaps lead to your death. As Philips summarizes Freud's logic, "travelers, whether they acknowledge it or not, are traveling toward death" (28). In turn, it is from out of taking risks through what Philips describes as "a generous kind of negligence" of self (30), rather than the opposite (i.e., securitizing oneself again risks), that a capacity for solitude is born.

This is strikingly similar to the perspective and experience of the narrator in the second part of Adania Shibli's two-part novel, *Minor Detail*. In this story, a young, unnamed Palestinian woman, decides to venture from her home in Ramallah in order to find the site in the Negev desert where, on August 13, 1949, Israeli soldiers murdered (after gang raping) a young Bedouin girl.

Drawing upon Philips' psychoanalytic theory, I want to argue that solitude is neither the depressive position (of Melanie Klein, wherein suffering is moralized/idealized), nor the reparative gesture (as in Winnicott, of the relation between the child and its mother), nor the paranoid view (as examined by Eve Sedgwick via Paul Ricoeur). Instead, the disposition or comportment of solitude is an inoperative gesture and hence aesthesis of the minor detail, curiously indifferent to the notion of a whole or completed object

or work, amounting instead to little more than an incommensurable (accursed) share, or part (Bataille and Lacan) that renders any relation, including a symbiotic bond, impossible. It is precisely this sense of the minor detail that is at the heart of Shibli's novel.

The date of the murder in 1949 (August 13th) happens to be, twenty-five years later, the birth date of the narrator. This minor detail pertains to a minor temporality that traverses two forms of "major" time: historical chronology (the line drawn from 1949-2004, and up to the publication of the novel in 2016); and aeonic time (for instance: the temporal loop of coincidental dates, but also recurrences in the many minor details—often non-human or inanimate—that appear in each of the two parts (stories) of the novel: dogs barking, spiders, a clump of grass, the smell of gasoline). The minor incident or detail is aligned with the temporality of kairos (the unexpected and perhaps opportune moment).<sup>24</sup>

At one point in the story, the narrator says that it is due to her solitude that she is able to notice such little details as a month and day shared in common between her and the Bedouin girl. Her solitude takes the everyday form, for instance, of her sitting at a table by a window at home "working," in which this word is always cast in quotation marks, a formatting that can be read as emphasizing that this solitary time of hers is, in fact, inoperative, workless (54). To briefly summarize the relations here: as the empiricism of that which is even less than a thing, the minor detail is accessed via her inoperative solitude and, in returning her to that solitude, is the means by which she has a sense of time as the time that remains.

She tells us that the minor detail provides access not to any major atrocity event, which in the context of the state of Israel is actually quite ordinary and everyday but to the exceptional thing that is otherwise overlooked. And that not unlike the art historical attention marshalled in the methods of Carlo Ginzburg and Aby Warburg (but also Michel Leiris), she argues that it is only through minor details and their connections, that one

can access the truth (and things can be put to a new use; see 67 and her "dump site reverie").<sup>25</sup> Yet truth not as a seamless continuity but in the form of a serial staccato, not unlike the woman's verbal stuttering, a stammering of speech, in which minor linguistic details, less than or other than complete words, are enunciated through temporary and indefinite disappearances of language.<sup>26</sup> As she describes it: "After a disappearance, that's when the fly returns to hover over the painting. Little details drift along the length of the road, furtively hinting at a presence" (74).

The unnamed Palestinian woman's entire journey from Ramallah to Tel Aviv to the Nirim settlement and then back toward Ramallah, is never not in Israeli occupied territory, never not militarily controlled, and in which she is non-citizen and, thereby, a trespasser of boundaries. Boundaries that are not limited to walls and checkpoints, but that define and constitute the entire map of Israel—every square meter—and not only the Gaza Strip and the West Bank. The Ofer Prison that she passes on her way out of Ramallah at the outset of her journey, is a potent sign of the martial law under which she lives, and the destiny that always remains possible for her, if she were to be found violating one of the innumerable laws that have been established and that severely curtail (to the point of essentially eliminating) her freedom and that of all other Palestinians.

She states that in loving life she loves it neither particularly nor generally, but as the very risk of existence (survivance not narcissism). One of the ways in which she says this plays out, is in her inability to identify the borders between things, and in her transgressing of these borders. For her, this transgression is the space and time of solitude and the time that remains, and it finds its not entirely symbolic or metaphorical opposite in the new dump site that she passes as she drives, about which she says, "Not much can be excavated here and reused from the folds of this dump site. Indeed, what ends up here is the very essence of garbage" (67).

Dean Sameshima, being alone, 2020. Reproduced by permission of the artist.



Dean Sameshima, zu verschenken (to give away), 2020. Reproduced by permission of the artist

### Third Time - Time Profaned

Taken at various points over the past year, Dean Sameshima's two photo series, *being alone* and *zu verschenken (to give away)*, enable us to conceptualize a queer ethos and erotics of finitude, in which being alone at a sex club, or the leaving of things for the taking on city sidewalks prove to be existential and empirical affirmations of the sense of time—perhaps especially in the midst of the current pandemic—as only ever the time that remains. In the indefinite waiting that can make the solitude of cruising ecstatic,<sup>27</sup> and in the abandonment of extraneous possessions, one discovers a temporality of queer immanence as here, now this. Not an historical looking backward (Love); not an infinite progress toward some utopian *future* (Muñoz); and not exactly “no future” either (Edelman), this is queer temporality as the *jouissance* of the present—to borrow a phrase from Jean-Luc Nancy—a pure coming (*avenir* not *futur*—as Nancy stresses) that is also not succession, inheritance, duration, or becoming, but interruption, dis-inheritance, cessation, and unbecoming.<sup>28</sup>

The time that remains is time in its coming, its *jouissance*. And the joy or *jouissance* of time, the edging of time and its coming, is not only the time of incomensurable someones and somethings in some places and at sometimes, it is, also the overflowing and joyous sense of the incommensurability of time itself. In the disjunct simultaneity of moment to moment, the *jouissance* of the present is the patency of the surprise that led Nancy to speak of the existence of the world as always unexpected, and therefore is not unlike the stranger, the intruder. The one who, in their incongruity and chrono-indetermination—that is, in their anachronism (which might also be understood as their anarchism)—is the coming of time in its untimeliness, and as such, is the whatever singularity that Agamben has defined as the contemporary.

Like the solitary figures and rejected items that we see in Sameshima's photographs, the contemporary (one name for which is Dean Sameshima), is the anom-

alous one, the lumpen, the non-categorical and no named, that in its dedication to the absolute muteness of places and things, and their profane indifference to language and image, is the exigent of a queer ethos of finitude. As the very existent of the time that remains—as the existent of that exigency—the contemporary is the irrelevant one, the one that does not invoke or speak about queer existence but simply lives it, yet precisely as the inoperative detachment from its actuality and current conditions, along with its attention to what of life will infinitely remain unlived. As Agamben states, “The attention to this ‘unlived’ is the life of the contemporary.” And it is in this attention to the unlived, that the contemporary puts life to a new and in-appropriate use.

The ethics and politics of this kind of attention is what the virus that is currently plaguing the world has called upon us to take up. I am referring here to the anonymous article posted on May 16th, 2020, on the website lundimatin, and titled, “What the Virus Said.” The article, an address to us by the virus, ends with this call and demand for our ethical vocation:

Take care of your friends and those you love. Rethink along with them, decisively, what a just form of life would be. Organize clusters of right living, expand them, and I won’t be able to do anything against you. I am calling for a massive return, not of discipline, but attention. Not for the end of insouciance, but the end of all carelessness. What other way remained for me to remind you that salvation is in each gesture? That everything is in the tiniest detail?” (emphasis in original).

As I embarked on this attempt to conceptually link solitude and things as the time that remains, I marvelled at the sheer coincidence of a single artist currently creating two bodies of work, that together present this very hypothesis. For me, it’s almost as though the very existence of this body of work is at once the instantiation and confirmation of my ar-

gument—all the “evidence” I would ever need in order to make my case. Which in turn tempts me to transpose the respective titles on to the other series of images, such that the sex club interiors would be labelled “to give away” and the boxed items would be titled “being alone.”

These bodies and things—anomalous and anonymous point—to ontology as not only singular plural, but equally as singular impersonal. Such an ontology finds its ethical disposition in a queer erotic aesthetics, in which two tendencies (cast as opposite by Kant) are conjoined: a radically impersonal sexual appetite, and an attention to specific qualities and details in anonymous others and things, and the spaces and places where such anonymous encounters take place. This free use and anonymous commerce—this profanation—is what one of the books I am currently completing seeks to theorize as the intimacy of the outside. Following Agamben, profanation is to use without appropriating or possessing.<sup>29</sup> Rendering the thing, place or action in-operative, unprofitable, *unbecoming*,<sup>30</sup> profanation is there in the minor detail, and where reasons end. Such a profane queer ethos and its avocation to sheer unintelligible empiricism, is what it means to love the fact that at least two adjectives of the ontological are *finite* and *unbecoming*.

#### References:

1 As quoted by Olivia Laing in *Funny Weather: Art in an Emergency*, Norton, 2020: 19; the source of the quotation, said to have been taken from an interview with Basquiat in October 1985 is unattributed by Laing.

2 I am thinking here of recent comments made by historian Daryl Michael Scott during an interview with Len Gluckin, in which he describes the “making” (or imagining, or positing) of worlds as follows: “Once you are making worlds, you are making myths. You’re circumscribing the world for your purposes, and you’re tracing origins.” *The Review*, 15 March 2021.

3 Ricco, John Paul. “Isolation, Loneliness, Solitude: The COVID-19 Pandemic Has Brought Us Too Close Together.” *Topia* 41, no. Fall (2020): 164–72.

4 For one of the most sustained philosophical-philological examinations of the notion of “the time that remains” see: Agamben, Giorgio. *The Time That Remains: A Commentary on the Letter to the Romans*. Translated by Patricia Dailey. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2005.

- 5 Agamben, Giorgio. *Potentialities: Collected Essays in Philosophy*. Translated by Daniel Heller-Roazen. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1999: 125.
- 6 Barthes, Roland. *The Neutral: Lecture Course at the Collège de France* (1977-1978). Translated by Rosalind Krauss and Denis Hollier. New York: Columbia University Press, 2005: 173.
- 7 Agamben, Giorgio. *The End of the Poem: Studies in Poetics*. Translated by Daniel Heller-Roazen. Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1999.
- 8 Thisness (i.e., existential-temporal-empirical singularity). Following Haver, "this modifies nothing, not even a concrete universal" or even achieves the status of an object of knowledge. Instead haecceity is "an experience of the impossibility of transcendence," witnessed by Jean Genet and theorized by Haver in his reading of Genet and the Palestinians, as the unsurpassable trauma of Shatila. Or, in the case of Adania Shibli's novel, *Minor Detail*, that I briefly discuss below, the equally horrendous rape and murder of a young Bedouin girl by Israeli soldiers in the Negev desert in the summer of 1949. Haver, William. "The Solitude of Things," Unpublished Paper: 20ff.
- 9 Derrida, Jacques. *The Beast & the Sovereign*. Edited by Michel Lisse, Marie-Louise Mallet, and Michaud. Translated by Geoffrey Bennington. Vol. II. 2 vols. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2011: 1.
- 10 We note that in Sanskrit, *solitude* means both separation and decision—that in previous work, I have theorized as the two essential features of the ethical, its spacing and the shared-sustaining of that separation. Ricco, John Paul. *The Decision Between Us: Art and Ethics in the Time of Scenes*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2014.
- 11 Heidegger, Martin. *The Fundamental Concepts of Metaphysics: World, Finitude, Solitude*. Translated by Nicholas Walker and William McNeil. Studies in Continental Thought. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1995.
- 12 Two of my principal sources for the concept of chresis are: Foucault, Michel. *The Hermeneutics of the Subject: Lectures at the Collège de France, 1981-1982*. New York: Palgrave-Macmillan, 2005; and Agamben, Giorgio. *The Use of Bodies*. Translated by Adam Kotsko. Meridian: Crossing Aesthetics. Stanford, Calif: Stanford University Press, 2015.
- 13 Agamben, Giorgio, and Valeria Dani. *Where Are We Now? The Epidemic as Politics*. London: Eris, 2021.
- 14 As Judith Butler has made clear, when a life is rendered no longer grievable, it ceases being a life, and with it goes any sense of community. More recently, Judith Butler has written on Donald Trump as someone who refuses to lose and who cannot acknowledge loss. Therein lies a definition of the tyrant as the one who does not accept loss or defeat, and the one who never grieves. In this way, we obtain a further understanding of the extent to which the tyrant is committed neither to life nor community. Butler, Judith. *Precarious Life: The Powers of Mourning and Violence*. New York: Verso, 2006. Butler, Judith. "Why Donald Trump Will Never Admit Defeat." *The Guardian*. January 20, 2021, sec. Opinion.
- 15 Riley, Denise. *Say Something Back/Time Lived, Without Its Flow*. NYRB Poets. New York, N.Y.: New York Review of Books, 2020: 90.
- 16 Rose, Jacqueline. "To Die One's Own Death." *London Review of Books*, November 19, 2020.
- 17 We note that Heidegger taught his seminar less than ten years after Freud's *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* (1920), and that Heidegger's "being-toward-death" is a philosophical corollary to Freud's theory of the death drive, as laid out in his 1920 text. For Heidegger, it is from out of the fact and force of finitude that there is a sense of the world, and that, in turn, and at the same time, that sense of the world returns each of us to a sense of solitude, in a world shared with other, equally finite beings. As Heidegger defines it in the preliminary presentation of his seminar, solitude is "that solitariness in which each human being first of all enters into a nearness to what is essential in all things [their finitude and being in the world], a nearness to world." Heidegger, Martin. *The Fundamental Concepts of Metaphysics: World, Finitude, Solitude*. Translated by Nicholas Walker and William McNeil. Studies in Continental Thought. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1995. As an example, we can understand breathing as a matter of breathing together: wherein the solitude of one's breathing, in the sense of that singular physiological action (no two people breath the same way), is, nevertheless, never something that one does alone. The air that we breathe in and out, the oxygen and carbon dioxide that we appropriate and expropriate, is never wholly ours nor someone else's, and it is also not exhausted—it is, we might say, the air that remains. Recent theoretical meditations on the politics and ethics of breathing include Jamieson Webster's forthcoming article in *The New York Review of Books*, and Stefanie Heine's forthcoming book, *The Poetics of Breathing* (SUNY, 2021). In addition, in her recent article in *The Guardian* on the pandemic cited earlier, Judith Butler writes: "All of us are living in relation to ambient illness and death, whether or not we have a name for that sense of the atmosphere. Death and illness are quite literally in the air" (*The Guardian*, 20 January 2021).
- 18 Nancy, Jean-Luc. *Doing*. Translated by Charlotte Mandell. London, New York Calcutta: Seagull Books, 2020: 28.
- 19 This understanding of essential solitude as being in the world and with others, aligns with the ways in which many thinkers have defined the relation between solitude, world, and others (Montaigne, Arendt, Derrida, Nancy, et al.). But there are other, I would say more difficult and challenging existential modes of solitude, that include *being with others without a world* (Celan's supreme ethical injunction of self: "the world is lost, I must carry you" which Derrida examined in his essay, "Rams," and in the second part of *The Beast and the Sovereign*, which was to be Derrida's very last seminar); and *being in the world without others* (Deleuze on Michel Tournier's novel, *Vendredi*, the topic of one of the appendices to *The Logic of Sense*—written and published one year after the appearance of Tournier's novel; and Guido Morselli's Dissertatio H.G.: *The Vanishing*, newly translated and published story of the last man on Earth); and third and finally: *being* without world and without others, which is no longer solitude but its destruction, because any sense of finitude in its opening as the time that remains has been brutally excised, and a life in its singularity remains has been reduced to a horrifying abject baseness (e.g., the Müselmann). Such bare life is where the world is lost and there is no one to carry you.
- 20 For a recent example of the state's refusal to recognize this impossible historicization and work of mourning, we can look to the city of Minneapolis, and its naming of a police reform bill after George Floyd, the person who was murdered by the police now undergoing reform, and through a piece of legislation that in its reformist rhetoric would still not have prevented his murder, is precisely the work of mourning in its historicization—here in a brutally warped and unjust form of memorialization—of which I speak. The politics of mourning is reformist politics; it is the attempt to put an end to the loss and suffering, and to move on, without in any way addressing the root cause of that loss and that suffering.
- 21 Li, Yiyun. *Where Reasons End*. New York: Random House, 2019.
- 22 One might hear an echo of 1 Corinthians, where Paul writes: "For passing away is the figure of this world. But I wish you to be without care" (1 Corinthians 7:29-32); quoted in Agamben, *The Time that Remains*, 23.
- 23 Phillips, Adam. *On Kissing, Tickling, and Being Bored: Psychoanalytic Essays on the Unexamined Life*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1993.
- 24 For a superlative analysis of the animal in relation to atrocity and bearing witness, see Clark, David. "What Remains to Be Seen: Animal, Atrocity, Witness." *Yale French Studies* 127, no. "Animots:" Postanimality in French Thought (2015): 143-71.
- 25 Leiris, Michel. *The Ribbon at Olympia's Throat*. Translated by Christine Pichini. Los Angeles, CA: Semiotext(e), 2019.
- 26 For some of the most insightful observations and study on the politics, ethics, and aesthetics of stuttering see Roshaya Rodness, "Stutter and Phenomena: The phenomenology and deconstruction of delayed auditory feedback." *Journal of Interdisciplinary Voice Studies*, volume 5, number 2 (2020): 197-213.
- 27 The notion of "ecstatic solitude" is derived from Leo Bersani and Adam Philips, and more specifically perhaps from an analysys of Philips, who evidently spoke of "the ecstasy of solitude." See: Bersani, Leo. *The Freudian Body: Psychoanalysis and Art* New York: Columbia University Press, 1986. Bersani, Leo. *Homos*. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1995. Phillips, Adam. *Houdini's Box: The Art of Escape*. New York: Vintage, 2002. For further discussion within the context of Bersani's oeuvre, see: Tuukkanen, Mikko. *The Essentialist Villain: On Leo Bersani*. Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 2018.
- 28 Nancy, Jean-Luc. *Doing*. Translated by Charlotte Mandell. London, New York Calcutta: Seagull Books, 2020.
- 29 Agamben, Giorgio. *Profanations*. New York: Zone Books, 2007.
- 30 e.g., using x [whatever] as not using x [whatever].

# A caring culture? Art, care, and the collective rights of artists since Covid-19

## Introduction

The Covid-19 pandemic has laid bare and exacerbated different forms of social violence, from the repression of dissent to gendered violence and the violence of neglect under a state of necropolitics. At the same time, the unexpected and drastic changes that the pandemic has brought have prompted deep questions concerning the value of different elements in our lives. What is most valuable to us in our day-to-day? What is the value of care, and of an accessible and properly funded healthcare system? Which sectors of the economy are worth saving in a crisis? Moreover, what about those social activities whose value cannot be measured in economic terms? In the cultural sector, this has meant that actors across different levels, from artists and cultural workers to organizations and those engaged in policy, have had to, once again, articulate how and why cul-

ture is 'essential', and worthy of government support at a time of crisis.<sup>1</sup>

An important question that emerges in relation to this is: how should artists and cultural workers position themselves in the face of a rapidly changing social context that has laid bare the violence of an extractivist, profit-driven, growth-addicted system? By this, I refer to the way that artists position themselves in relation to the art sector and the state, in addition to their relationship, for instance, to social movements that exist beyond those institutions. Is there something about the current conjuncture that calls for a repositioning? It is my contention that there is.

In order to explore this matter, I will center my discussion on the concepts of value and care. Much has been written about care since the start of the Covid-19 pandemic, and, indeed, many of these discussions had been gaining traction in the years that preceded it.<sup>2</sup> My own

interest in care developed around 2018, when I wrote an article about the ways that community media can enact care for communities and ecosystems in the context of socioenvironmental conflicts in Argentina.<sup>3</sup> In the early months of the pandemic, I continued my inquiry into care by considering Argentina's Ministry of Culture's first response to the Covid-19 crisis in terms of a policy of care. On this occasion, I will look once again at the case of Argentina, and will do this in conversation with the histories and contemporary experiences of artists as workers across different locations. However, this time, I aim to problematize the idea of care, and think about the different ways in which artists perform acts of care, and the opportunities and pitfalls of assuming the role of carer in fighting for collective rights as workers.

## Cultural policy responses to Covid-19

In some countries, there has been a relatively fast and comprehensive response to Covid-19 in terms of support for the cultural sector. In Germany, for instance, artists and cultural institutions received swift financial support through a range of government programs, under a national discourse that emphasized the importance of art and culture for a thriving democracy.<sup>4</sup> The UK, on the other hand, stands out as a country that failed to support its artists and cultural workers.<sup>5</sup> A massively delayed response, insufficient investment, schemes that failed to consider thousands of people who did not meet the requirements and as a result, exacerbated marginalization and the prioritization of large institutions in London which represent a narrow definition of arts and culture were some of the traits of the government's response.<sup>6</sup>

In Argentina, the progressive government of Alberto Fernández was quick to respond to the crisis in the cultural sector. Under a slogan of 'culture of solidarity', the Argentine Ministry of Culture introduced a series of measures to support artists and cultural venues, and importantly, to provide artists with opportunities to develop work that would be of

<p>social value during the pandemic and in its aftermath. In other words, there was a clear vision of art as a form of care at a time of crisis.<sup>7</sup> However, these forms of support were not enough to sustain the survival of the many cultural workers who were already in a precarious condition before Covid-19. Furthermore, an insufficiently resourced health system and a delay in vaccinations meant that Argentina had to impose long and strict lockdowns, which had a devastating effect on the sector. Moreover, as bars and restaurants were eventually allowed to reopen their doors once the first wave of the pandemic was over, cultural venues were always the last to be allowed to reopen, a pattern common to other countries as well. This type of measure has prompted artists to speak up against what they perceive as a de-prioritization of culture.</p>	<p>When we speak of autonomy in relation to the arts nowadays, however, we tend to refer to autonomy <i>from</i> institutions. In recent decades, marked by new waves of art activism, authors like Holmes and Grindon<sup>10</sup> have written about artists' exit from the art institution, a move linked to the same desire to bring back art into everyday life, but which also responds to the path taken by cultural institutions across different contexts: problematic sponsorship deals, exploitative labor practices, commodification, and co-optation are just some of the issues artists have identified and wish to disassociate from, adopting instead an ethos of activist or community art.</p>	<p>Then there are, of course, those who oppose the logic of the art market but who still operate within the realm of public institutions and arts funding agencies. Socially-engaged art was the name given to projects emerging in the last few decades that center on the social bonds created through art making. Sometimes, these are merely a symbolic performance, but other times these works are collaborative, site-specific, and oriented towards making an impact in the communities in which they are embedded.</p>
<p>In this context, an important question artists are faced with, is how to make the case for the value of the arts and culture—something academics seem to also be doing over and over again—in a way that does not lock art into one single and fixed form of value. This matter seems of utmost importance at this time, given that, as Mariana Mazzucato has argued, the Covid-19 crisis revealed just how wrong economics has gotten the concept of value.<sup>8</sup></p>	<p><b>Artists in society</b></p>	<p>Finally, at the margins of the cultural sphere we find community arts. Community arts emerge from an ethos of community care and participation, but often do not uphold the same aspirations and aesthetic canon of socially-engaged art, which regardless of how embedded it is in a community, situates itself within the discourse and codes of art history.</p>
<p>Socially-engaged art, community arts and some forms of art activism have all been criticized for their apparent prioritization of ameliorative acts or, we could say, putting forward a care-oriented practice over intervention and disruption.<sup>11</sup> However, as I have proposed elsewhere, these two aims need not be</p>	<p>mutually exclusive.<sup>12</sup> I will return to this point later on.</p>	<p>In parallel to the ethos of different socially-inclined practices, we must consider the history of artists' movements to defend their rights as workers. While some movements for the democratization of the arts focus on democratizing the means of production and disrupting categories such as artist and amateur<sup>13</sup>, the conditions of capitalism have generated the need for artists, as other workers, to organize collectively to demand wider inclusion and decent wages and labor conditions, including for instance health insurance and sick pay, state contributions, and standardized payments for different kinds of work. Across the twentieth century, we have seen different strategies and approaches to this, from French artists organizing for their collective rights<sup>14</sup> to artists in the US fighting to transform the structure of the art world.<sup>15</sup></p> <p>Considering the discussion above, it is pertinent to ask whether the conditions created and exacerbated by the pandemic have solicited new positionings from artists with regards to their view on the art-society relationship, and their own place as art workers. Moreover, are there particular approaches or perspectives that artists and cultural workers should be taking into account at a time that presents itself as unprecedented, but in many ways constitutes an acceleration of the precarity already faced by many in the sector?</p>

### The artist vis-a-vis the state in a time of Covid

The relationship between artists and the state is conditioned by the general social, political and historical traits of each context. This includes, but goes beyond, the different models of support for the arts in place in each country.

In a recent event analyzing the Covid-19 crisis, historian of science and medicine Leon Rocha explained that while in some Asian countries such as Korea, success in handling the virus can be associated to trust in the government, the case of Hong Kong complicates this narrative. There, people began to take

precautions against the virus before any recommendations from the state, precisely because of low levels of trust among the population.<sup>16</sup> Instead, they chose to take responsibility over responding to the crisis as individuals and on a communal level. A more extreme example of this has been that of Brazil, where the head of state directly negated the risks and effects of the virus and the need for protection against it. As a result, communities across Brazil self-organized in order to care for each other during the crisis.

Indeed, with the arrival of the pandemic, many assumptions around governance and value came crashing down. It became blatantly clear that while money is a determinant in containing a crisis, it is also a matter of what systems and structures are already in place, and what values underpin governmental decisions. In places like the UK, the failure to support artists and cultural sector workers properly was a result of political decisions rather than lack of resources, and this has damaged a relatively solid relationship between the art sector and the state, leading to protests from art workers, venue workers and others who are part of the cultural scene.

Going back to Argentina, as soon as the lockdown began in mid-March 2020, we saw the coming together of groups of actors, visual artists and other cultural workers in Buenos Aires such as Artistas Solidarios [Solidary Artists] with the aim of supporting cultural workers in precarious conditions. Some groups of artists also organized the collection and distribution of food and supplies for impoverished neighborhoods in the city where informal work is widespread, and the lockdowns aimed at containing the spread of the virus had suddenly left thousands of people without a daily income. Such initiatives built on the local traditions of autonomous organizing and territorial work, by which people come together to address local issues in the absence of the state, and do so by creating horizontal structures that are embedded in the territories in question.<sup>17</sup>

In addition, groups of artists in Buenos Aires and in other provinces began

to self-organize to also confront the quickly felt consequences of the measures against Covid-19 in their sector, declaring, as a first step, a cultural emergency. From this context emerged Artistas Visuales Autoconvocados Argentina [Self-Organized Visual Artists Argentina] (AVAA), who gathered to assert themselves as a collective political subject, to share their experiences of the crisis, and to generate a list of demands as well as a series of proposals.

In May 2020, AVAA issued an open letter to the state on behalf of artists from across the country, to alert authorities and the general public to the situation of artists as workers under the lockdown. The letter highlighted that the online museum visits, works of literature, online theatre shows and other creative activities that the government encouraged the population to engage in, depended on the labor of artists as creators. They stated:

“Our work doesn’t rest, it is permanent, and we understand that, at this moment, our visibility and social function are most relevant. Yet, our work is not paid and seldom considered. We see this as a new beginning to establish a new paradigm with regards to the role of art in society and in education.”<sup>18</sup>

The letter then moved on to a specific and urgent demand at that time, which was to gain permission to access workshops, the spaces where artists would be able to create the work that is experienced and partaken in by the rest of society.

This coming together also allowed artists to think through and visibilize other issues in the cultural sector which, as a result of the pandemic, have been aggravated and in turn generated new problems. They pointed, for instance, to the concentration of the cultural and creative industries in the city of Buenos Aires. This concentration had for long been an issue, as it causes the migration of artists towards the capital and leads to the homogenization of cultural production. However, during the pandemic, this also meant that because culture is con-

centrated in Buenos Aires, lockdowns in this densely populated area effectively meant a lockdown of all culture.<sup>19</sup>

In July of the same year, AVAA launched a self-census for workers in the visual arts, a grassroots initiative responding to the lack of official data on cultural workers, which in itself has been a barrier to providing appropriate state support in the wake of the pandemic. In this way, the movement went beyond making demands on the state, to generating constructive responses in order to address current problems as well as long-standing ones. Other initiatives that came soon after were the demand for a basic income for art workers for as long as the pandemic lasted, and the proposal of a joint working group that includes art workers and government officials to discuss the distribution of the city of Buenos Aires’ budget for culture 2021. Finally, in September 2020, AVAA launched the Tarifario de Artes Visuales [Visual Arts Rates of Pay], a tool for normalizing and standardizing payment for different forms of visual art work.<sup>20</sup>

A year on, we can see how local groups have emerged across the country from Córdoba to Tucumán, supporting these demands and putting forward new ones, as well as generating their own autonomous projects. Groups such as the Multisectorial Arte y Cultura [Art and Culture Multi-sectorial] in the city of Rosario, for instance, have called for “the creation of public policies for the legitimization of artists, with long-term views and agreed with those affected”.<sup>21</sup> They also call for the inclusion of trans people and other *disidencias* (those who don’t conform to heteronormativity and binary gender norms) in the work place, and for the application of the newly created Tarifario, in addition to continued financial support from the state.

The slogan often used by these self-organized groups is “*la salida es colectiva*”, meaning the exit, or solution, to the crisis is collective. Therefore, in the tradition of collective action, on 1 May 2021, we saw the national artists’ strike, proposed by the collective Trabajadores del Arte [Art Workers], calling for a day of no activity on social media in order to vis-

ibilize the invisible and often unpaid work of artists, and reflect on the condition of artists as workers. In a similar manner to how the International Women's Strike became a method of feminist struggle<sup>22</sup>, we can see the artists' strike as a tool of imagination, as indeed it highlights an impossibility: how can we stop art for a day, when art is all around us? In the context of a pandemic, the mechanism of the strike not only reveals the condition of artists as workers who input labor, experience and care into what they do, but also allows us to reconsider the value of art as something that goes beyond a product: art is revealed as a form of care and sustenance at a time of crisis.

### Toward a caring culture

In 2020, I was invited to contribute to a special issue of the journal *Cultural Trends* looking at cultural policy responses to Covid-19 in different parts of the world. Writing from the UK, where measures were slow, completely distanced from the reality of cultural workers, and where an institutional and elitist understanding of culture was explicitly prioritized, I welcomed the rapid response of the Argentine Ministry of Culture and their upholding of culture as a vehicle of care—even if their responses were far from sufficient, and acknowledging the widespread precarity that characterized the Argentine cultural sector pre-Covid-19. However, a question that emerged for me in the following months was: what are the hazards of a cultural policy of care that builds on a damaged system, in which artists are expected to take on the responsibility of *caring for*—as Tronto<sup>23</sup> would put it—participants, communities and the public, but continue to operate under precarious conditions? Who cares for artists in their role as carers?

In recent years, we have seen the emergence of research looking at the moral economy of community and socially engaged arts. Such research has shed light on the forms of emotional labor that artists and other cultural workers take on when conducting work that fully engages with and takes on the challenges and

oppressions experienced by the communities they work with (be these their own or others). As Belfiore argues looking at the UK, this work not only tends to extend well beyond contracted activities and hours, but it also requires emotional investment that goes unrecognized and that is carried out without any training or support from state institutions and funders, leaving both artists and participants at risk.<sup>24</sup> In places like Argentina, such dynamics are even more naturalized, as precarity, lack of funding, and more extreme forms of social inequality are pervasive, and these conditions place additional pressure on artists taking on a caring role. However, now that artists in Argentina have more strongly embraced their position as workers as a result of the Covid-19 crisis, should they also embrace the position of carers advocated by the state? Or is there a danger that this will inhibit the development of their struggle for their recognition as workers, leading to more precarity, burnout, and difficulty establishing boundaries around work? Moreover, is placing the responsibility of care upon artists a way of acknowledging the value of their work, or a way of burdening them with tasks that other sectors are not able to fulfill?

I find it useful now to return to the question of value in relation to culture. Banks and O'Connor point out that the 'industry/public service dilemma' that characterizes the cultural sector "results in the kind of confused public advocacy so apparent in this crisis in many parts of the world".<sup>25</sup> By now, we know that if we continue to take an economicistic view of art that highlights its contribution to the economy and job creation, this will only serve to champion certain forms of artistic practice over others, effectively ignoring those that do not generate profit. On the other hand, a view of art as important due to its tangible social impact in relation to social cohesion, health, education brings with it much potential, as it values artists as members of society and focuses on the impact of the arts in bettering people's lives, which then makes a strong case for government support. However, there are two potential issues with

a kind of valuing of the arts that sets up such expectations. In the first place, this view adds specific responsibilities upon artists and art workers: suddenly art is expected to have a direct and tangible social impact, and under current structures, artists are responsible for its delivery. However, more often than not, they lack the proper support to do so. Secondly, echoing previous critiques of socially-engaged art such as those of Bishop<sup>26</sup>, we could argue that there is a danger of losing critique if all art has to be ameliorative: a hegemony of socially-engaged and/or community art as an institutionalized aesthetic paradigm could be as dangerous as any other hegemony in terms of its effects on creativity, imagination and transgression. Right now, at a time of crisis, environmental breakdown, and the rise of right-wing extremism in different parts of the globe, there is urgent need for projects that directly improve the lives of communities, and also, for art that makes bold statements about the current problems we are facing, addressing our current challenges in a different way. What I propose here, therefore, is a change in how we understand what qualifies as care: by challenging systems of oppression and speaking truth to power, art that is provocative and transgressive can also enact care for those oppressed and at risk.

In a recent article, Meyrick and Barnett argue that we are now witnessing an incipient change in understandings of cultural value. This change is characterized, among other things, by a transformation of the temporal horizons of value (an expanded temporality in which past and future gain relevance), and the crumbling of boundaries defining the economic, the political, the social and the cultural as separate domains. Following from Mazzucato<sup>27</sup>, Meyrick and Barnett add that "[r]ather than the cultural sector measuring its value as a list of quasi-economic benefits, we see a restructured category of public value as capable of capturing a range of incommensurable outcomes that require a pluralist approach to assess in a democratic way."<sup>28</sup> According to this approach, the public value of arts and culture should

be located through "a social dialogue of the commons in which plural perspectives about what is of value co-exist in a non-hierarchy of proof."<sup>29</sup> What would it take, in practice, to further expand and apply such an understanding of value in cultural policy?

The key, I propose, is to reconsider our understanding of value and of care simultaneously, allowing understandings that are pluralist, democratic and multi-layered on both fronts. This means recognizing the presence of care as an intention—care for the work itself, for the subject matter, for the people that come into contact with the work—but also care manifested as aesthetic-political forms of action, which can be ameliorative *and/or* disruptive, and care as embodied in specific outcomes emerging from those intentions and actions, including material, affective, and pedagogical ones. Adopting an expansive understanding of care, consequently, contributes to a more expansive and plural understanding of the multilayered value of the arts and culture.

I propose, therefore, that advocating for an ethics of care as part of art and cultural work can be a powerful way forward, if it is done *with care*. This means that if we uphold the value of the arts, at least partially, for their potential for care, then the caring actions undertaken by the artist and cultural worker will be acknowledged, and consequently written into cultural policy and funding strategies for the arts. For instance, adequate training and structures for long-term support for both artists and participants beyond the timeframes of project-based funding, as noted by Belfiore<sup>30</sup>, are just some of the basic mechanisms that could enhance the practice of artists, participants, and audiences involved in participatory work. However, importantly, this does not mean equating the role of the artist in society to that of social workers or health workers. It means, rather, rethinking policy in the cultural sector and beyond from the perspective of care, acknowledging the *many different ways* in which artistic practice enacts and involves care, which are different to the care enacted in other sectors, and set-

ting up structures that can improve the experiences of artists and participants in ways that are not prescriptive and not tied to a narrowly defined impact agenda. At a time of crisis when we must work towards a reconstruction of the cultural sector, placing care at the center of such efforts can open up possibilities for re-thinking the relationship between artists and states and artists and other sectors, expanding our understanding of the value of art, and building structures that better support artists in their work. Similarly, understanding the caring potential of art in its broadest sense allows us to better understand the multiple ways in which artists can contribute to a restructuring of society. In a moment when transitions to more just and sustainable ways of living are so urgently needed, artists can make important contributions to how we reshape society in its many facets, from our understanding and management of culture, to education and social organizing. In other words, artists can have an important role in the prefigurative, ontological design of worlds otherwise, envisioning and enacting worlds through their visual production, relational practice, generation of affect, and the enactment of just and sustainable economies.<sup>31</sup> Such endeavors can be understood as acts of care, in which artists and cultural workers take on the task of shaping practices and experiences, with the ultimate goal of facilitating transitions to better futures.

Acknowledgements: I am grateful to Augusto Zaquetti from AVAA and to Prof. Ross Parry for their insights.

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**Jonas Staal and Florian Malzacher**

# Training for the Future: Collectives, Collectivity and Collectivizations

We face intersecting crises in the rise of authoritarian politics, economic precarization and environmental catastrophe, and, as a result, our culture has long taken a dystopian turn. To imagine the future today often means nothing but a worsening extension of the present in which libertarian geoengineering and alt-right ecofascism rules supreme. Right-wing and libertarian forces across the world operate through a web of think tanks and schools to ensure they maintain hegemony over our shrinking future.

We founded Training for the Future in 2018 in an attempt to reclaim the future as a site of collective struggle. We sought to oppose the culture of dystopian normativity and create our own organizational infrastructure to train for alternate futurities and, consequently, alternate pasts and presents. In recognizing the need for structural organization and actionability to reclaim the means of production of the future, we chose '*training*' as a method and '*training camp*' as the common site of practice.

The notion of training suggests a particular hierarchy, namely that between trainer and trainee. This implies that the trainer has a certain competence in reclaiming the future as a site of common struggle, which needs to be transferred to the trainee. Therefore, joining the training camp is to accept this temporary division of roles and power, and to follow instructions and exercises – even if participants might not yet be familiar with the futurity their new competence might enable or whether they entirely agree with the particular future proposed to them in the first place. To train then means to follow a proposal, a possibility, in which critical reflexes take the form of embodied practice first and verbal reflection second.

But this temporal division of roles only emphasizes their exchangeability. In our training camp, trainers also partake in other training as trainees. And, if a training is executed successfully, a former trainee can then act as trainer. Therefore, the division of power



Training Safe Touch  
Zürich, Switzerland, March 6  
Army of Love  
Courtesy of the artist

and agency, which is inherent in the trainer/trainee dichotomy is aimed at overcoming this very separation. At the end of each of our intensive training camps, if executed successfully, all participants become trainers for the future.

Though perhaps we should we say ‘futures’ in the plural? Our pasts differ, as do our presents, so how could we expect the future to be singular? We train for futures, and the training camp is a site of assembly for these alternate futurities. Together, they make visible the possibility that dystopian normativity can be shattered; that there is a plurality of worlds to be struggled for and that we do not have to accept the world as it is simply because this is how it has been presented to us. We train to make alternative worlds instead. And, we train to seek commonalities and solidarities between this world of many worlds.

In our different training camps, the training faculty changes. Trainers are art-activists, protest choreographers, autonomists, zoöpologists, progressive hackers, data communalists, futurological herstorioriographers, social interrogators, anal armies, care collectivists, emancipatory memologists and pan-socialist agitators. Each of them brings different embodied understandings, tactics and instructions to make common futures present and to transform present struggles into futurities.

The localities where our training camps are held matter. In 2018 and 2019, they took place amidst the industrial remnants of the Ruhr area in Germany – archaeologies of a future driven by a belief in industrial progress. This location embodies a history of proletarian consciousness and unionization, a history where humans recognized their agency in shaping future-history. But, it equally represents a history of predatory class oppression, and of an extractivist industrial paradigm that denied agency to non-human comrades and burnt livable futures for all. The two training camps that we organized in these ruins



Training Start in a Place Together  
New York City, USA, March 6  
Savitri D, Reverend Billy  
& The Stop Shopping Choir  
Courtesy of the artist

of the future took the form of neo-constructivist landscapes, where hybrid training objects propagated fragmented slogans of the past as part of a collective exercise to train the future. As such, the location and the form of our camps together enacted a critical, dialogical and morphological solidarity.



Training Open the Hole so the World gets inside  
Bogotá, Colombia, March 6-7, House of Tupamaras  
Courtesy of the artist





Training A Post-Pandemic Errorist Training  
Buenos Aires, Argentina, March 6, Etcétera  
Courtesy of the artist



Due to the Covid-19 pandemic, the locality of the 2021 training camp took a decentralized form, highlighting the way in which the pandemic has further intensified dystopian normativity. Additionally, 'vaccine apartheid' has made the vast disparities in wealth and livability even more visible, exacerbating the unequal pasts, presents and futures we have access to. This pandemic period produced staggering quarterly profits for trillion-dollar companies like Amazon, providing proof for all to see that our common crisis is the capital accumulation of the 0.1% that make up the ruling elite. The age of climate crisis-fueled pandemics – its beginning marked by Covid-19 – shows us the endgame of disaster capitalism, in which remnants of the future will remain the sole property of tech elites hiding in underground luxury bunkers in New Zealand or self-exiled to the terraformed backup planet, Mars.

Yet in the face of disaster, questions of redistribution and collectivity gain additional urgency. This is why, under the title *Collectives, Collectivity and Collectivizations*, we organized parallel trainings in Argentina, Colombia, the United States, the Philippines, South Africa, Rojava (Western Kurdistan), Italy and Switzerland. Through developing a decentralized version of our training camp, we attempted to contribute to the reclaiming of futures as a common right – and to do so at exactly the moment when these commons are being stolen from us in the most violent manner.

The Covid-19 pandemic demanded each trainer revisit the conditions within which collectivity was to be shaped in a moment of deep atomization and isolation. As such, each training proposed a methodology to redefine what it means to assemble and do collective work when the systems we inhabit, and the catastrophes they produce, fragment us so profoundly. The result of this decentralized training camp was a collective choreography across different geographies, and different pasts and presents, to map the possibility of shared futures and a biosphere for all.

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This text is an adjusted version of the introduction to the *Training for the Future Handbook*, forthcoming from Sternberg Press.



Training Growing Food with Humanponics  
Zürich, Switzerland, March 7  
Antonio Scarponi / Conceptual Devices  
Courtesy of the artist

# Beita

**Text by Oren Ziv**

**Photos: Ahmad Al-Bazz, Heather Sharona Weiss, Oren Ziv, Keren Manor**

**Editing: Shiraz Grinbaum**

In 2005, a group of photographers took a stand alongside the people of the West Bank village of Bil'in, and documented their fight to stop the Israeli government building the infamous West Bank Barrier on their agricultural lands. Inspired by what they had seen in Bil'in, the group went on to form Activestills, a collective whose work has become vital in documenting the struggle against the colonial, Israeli settler regime and everyday life of Palestinian communities.

In the last 16 years, the group has documented numerous related struggles in over 200 locations, ranging from women's rights, refugee rights, LGBTQI rights, housing rights and struggles against economical oppression, and other struggles for freedom and equality between the Mediterranean Sea to the Jordan River. The group's archive currently consists of over 40,000 images, which are being used by independent and commercial media outlets, activist groups, academics, researchers, artists and the general public.<sup>1</sup>

As the Covid crisis continues to unfold, the torch of the popular struggle has been kept alive by activist groups in a few focal points. Activestills members have been documenting such struggles in the town of Beita in the occupied West Bank, home to about 18,000 residents, which has become one of the most prominent locations of the Palestinian struggle against Israeli settler land takeovers during 2021.

In May, a month after an Israeli was shot dead by Palestinians at the nearby Tapuach Junction, settlers established the outpost of Eviatar on land that belongs to Beita. The settlers of Eviatar got to work quickly, paving roads and building dozens of structures while receiving protection, and even active assistance, from the Israeli military. The outpost was named after Eviatar Borowski, a resident of the nearby settlement of Yitzhar, who was stabbed to death by a Palestinian in May 2013.<sup>2</sup>

In response to the outpost, Beita's Palestinian residents began organizing regular demonstrations on Fridays, which were soon followed by nightly protests. The demonstrations have looked and felt like a battlefield with over a thousand residents and workers from Beita, and three other neighbouring villages, joining the protests every week, with Israeli soldiers and Border Police attacking them with tear gas (sometimes fired from a drone), stun grenades, rubber-coated metal bullets, and live "toto" bullets. The army has killed six residents of the town, including 16-year-old Muhammad Hamayel and 15-year-old Ah-

mad Bani Shams, and has wounded more than 50 people during these confrontations.

At the end of June, the residents of Eviatar reached an agreement with the state. According to this so-called "compromise," the settlers and their supporters left the area, but the structures remained in place under the army's protection. Moreover, as part of the agreement, the settlers were allowed to establish a new 'Yeshiva' (a Jewish religious school) in Eviatar after six weeks.

The Israeli state was also to review the legal status of the land upon which Eviatar was established in order to potentially formalize it retroactively. Palestinian landowners were not included in the discussions. The agreement has yet to be made official, which leaves room for both sides to change their position. The residents of Beta, that were not part of this agreement, continue to protest, demanding their lands be returned, and for the army to leave the outpost immediately.

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*All photos were taken in Beita during 2021.*

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1 For more info: Activestills.org

2 There are over 130 settlement outposts in the occupied West Bank, all of which were established illegally under both Israeli and international law (under the latter, all settlements in the occupied territories are considered illegal).













# Zoom-Art

## Art and Pandemics in the Disciplinary Era and in Control Societies: a comparative study

Situations of crisis, such as pandemics, reveal and intensify the structures of power. Any critique of such intensification must take into account the specificities of the current technologies of power to avoid importing emancipatory discourses and practices from bygone epochs. In order to avoid such an anachronism, a comparative study between the handling of the pandemic by the old disciplinary powers and its handling by today's control powers becomes crucial. The danger of importing emancipatory discourses from the disciplinary era is that such discourses could blind us as to the real operations and points of applications of control power and could neutralize any form of effective resistance. To undertake that comparison, we will study the ways pandemics were made visible in the disciplinary and control eras, the rationality by which they were assessed, and the types of resistance they called for.

### Disciplinary Power: Readability and Alienation

Power consists in the relation between forces, an action upon an action<sup>1</sup>. Political power consists in acting on the way people act, or, as Foucault defines it as "the way in which the conduct of individuals or of groups might be directed"<sup>2</sup>. More particularly, disciplinary political power is exerted by "imposing a particular taste or conduct on a multiplicity of particular individuals, provided simply that the multiplicity is small in number and the space limited and confined"<sup>3</sup>. To this end, discipline can be exerted by us-

ing two forms of exteriarity, one for the organization of the visible and another for the organization of the sayable<sup>4</sup>.

The disciplinary organization of the visible field is characterized by a horizontal light, an analytical space-time, and readability as the paradigmatic function of the eye. As Foucault shows, by dividing time in accordance with specific tasks and by distributing these tasks in specific spaces, and by opening such spaces to a light that makes each detail and gesture visible, the eye of power can then simply read, i.e. it can grasp everything occurring in such a space-time by a simple glance. Students, workers, the sick, prisoners, inhabitants etc. are distributed across this analytical spatio-temporal grid, making it easy for those in power to know what is going on by simply looking at who is occupying which position on the grid, at which moment and doing what<sup>5</sup>. The different visible machines, be it a city, buildings, the layout of a floor inside the building, or the architectonic elements such as windows, doors, door windows, and the like all contribute to incarnating the diagram of visibility and the paradigm of readability<sup>6</sup>. For example, the large windows in the Panopticon, the tin tubes running from the detainees' cells to the central tower, the metal grid doors, etc. all conspire to make the detainee readable to power.

The paradigm of readability also informs the way we assess diseases. The clinical gaze operates by an erudite glance, it is able to understand which disease is invading the body by simply looking at the development of the symptoms<sup>8</sup>. It remains that for such a glance

to be possible the disease must be first reduced to its spatiotemporal manifestation, and, second, thought of as the synthesis of elementary symptoms organized in a specific order<sup>9</sup>. For example, difficulty in breathing associated with muscular weakness and a livid complexion would point towards scurvy even though it is possible to find these isolated symptoms in other diseases, such as in dropsy<sup>10</sup>. In this way, the body becomes a surface to be read, a picture that immediately reveals its meaning to the expert eye of the doctor<sup>11</sup>.

Disciplinary power is able to direct the conduct of its subjects by assigning them to specific locations in a closed space in view of performing specific tasks. In following and keeping a record of the performance of its subjects, such a power will individualize them, as can be seen in the development of human sciences pertaining to that era<sup>12</sup>. Such individualization occurs when the subject-function of power is pinned to the bodies of the subjects of power<sup>13</sup> as shown by Taylor, subjects become individuals when their capacities are fitted to the assigned tasks. For example, a woman with a good sight and reflexes would be suitable for sorting steel balls and will be individualized as such<sup>14</sup>. After being individualized, the subjects of power are coordinated to form a collective body where the total effect of this body is greater than the sum of its isolated parts such as in the unit regime battalion where all the soldiers fire at the same time, thus, generating a greater firing impact<sup>15</sup>. In this sense, the individual is the unformed matter pertaining to the disciplinary form of visibility: be it in schools, hospitals, caserns, factories, etc. the subjects are given form by being individualized and turned into students, workers, soldiers, the sick, etc.<sup>16</sup>. The more a subject performs and is useful, the more s/he is individualized, and the more s/he becomes docile and obedient<sup>17</sup>. In this way, the individual, and the development of his/her capacities by discipline, reflect the correlate of power.

The disciplinary organization of the sayable is characterized by constitutive finitude. Reality is defined by something

<p>in the world that resists the representative capacities in man, be it imagination or the intellect<sup>18</sup>. What resists these capacities are obscure forces, such as “death in life, pain and fatigue in work, stammering and aphasia in language”<sup>19</sup>. It is from these obscure forces of finitude that we are able to understand a phenomenon and constitute a field of knowledge the finitude of work and its fatigue is what explains exploitation, as capital and wealth provided a form of organization and conditioning of this work<sup>20</sup>. Constitutive finitude opens then a form of intelligibility because to understand the phenomenon of wealth for example, we need to understand that it results from the organization of work and fatigue, and to understand the phenomenon of life one needs to observe how death occurs and is overcome by the living functions – such as in Bichat’s definition of life residing in the functions that overcome death<sup>21</sup>, and to understand the phenomenon of language one must see that articulate language is an organization of stammering.</p> <p>If constitutive finitude is the form of disciplinary knowledge, alienation, on the other hand, is the form of institutional know how, the rationale behind the operations of power. Indeed, the students, the sick, the insane, the workers, etc. are all alienated because they carry within them their fatigue, their irrationality, and their death. In this sense the subjects of power need to alienate themselves to the will of their educators, managers, and doctors in order to overcome these obscure forces inhabiting them and, by doing so, they can achieve their full potential as Bentham boasts happiness and freedom can only be achieved through discipline and surveillance<sup>22</sup>. In fact, only through discipline and surveillance can one become master of one’s capacities and, realize concrete freedom. In the event that a person falls into crime, madness, idleness or acquires unhealthy habits, then such a person needs to be set back on the right track by subjecting him or her to more discipline. Foucault shows that Leuret’s moral treatment, for example, is nothing but an excessive disciplinary institution where the mentally ill</p>	<p>must fully alienate himself to the will of the chief psychiatrist if he is to be cured<sup>23</sup>. Similarly, the prison is conceived as an over-disciplinary institution that requires of its inmates’ full alienation to a strict discipline for them to be reformed<sup>24</sup>. One then needs to alienate oneself to those in power in order for one to un-alienate and free oneself from oneself. In this way, alienation not only paves the way to concrete freedom of the subjects but also constitutes their truth. Indeed, disciplinary power can only study the free-reasonable-healthy-man in the negative image of the mad-sick-enslaved-man for example, the public assembly of free citizens recognizes in the criminal what they were able to tame and overcome in them<sup>25</sup>, or the living organic processes can only be studied in the decaying dead body in the pathological anatomy of Bichat<sup>26</sup>.</p> <p>The plague can be seen as a compact form of the disciplinary prerogatives<sup>27</sup>. The disciplinary measures taken against the plague consist in transforming the city into a readable space. The first measure is to lock down the city and hence to treat it as one closed space. What follows is the division of this closed space into a grid. The grid then assigns each individual to a specific location in order to allow the authorities to check on the inhabitants’ condition. Foucault describes that city as a “segmented, immobile, frozen space”<sup>28</sup>. In this closed city space, discipline and order are instilled by a hierarchical body of magistrates, intendents, syndics, street sentinels, and observation posts. The death penalty is the sanction for anyone who would leave his assigned place. Every day, syndics call the inhabitants by their names to show their faces at their windows, and also weekly searches and inventories of their homes are conducted. Each individual in the city is registered on a tracking document summing up all the information related to him/her. The collected information is then centralized in the hands of the magistrates supervising the city<sup>29</sup>. These disciplinary procedures are completed by the clinical gaze that reads the symptoms of the subjects on the surface of their bodies to establish their possible</p>	<p>contamination or not. Last, these harsh measures are justified through a discourse of alienation, where the subjects have to alienate their lives and freedoms to the authorities if they hope to recover that life and freedom.</p> <p>If the plague exacerbates the disciplinary measures and discourses, and by that the processes of individualization, we can say that art is going to stand as the reversed double of the plague. Indeed, art is going to exacerbate the disciplinary processes in view of the transmutation of the disciplinary world and the liberation of the individual’s capacities. For example, the novel, in general, and the memoirs of criminals in particular, are ways to turn the inspective gaze of power inwards, to analyze, observe and read oneself, and through that, to build one’s eccentric individuality such as in the figures of some celebrated criminals, the likes of Vidocq and Lacenaire<sup>30</sup>. Roussel pushes the readability process further by making language read and write itself by turning the homonymies into generative elements that force language to produce images and narratives<sup>31</sup>. In painting, Manet uses the readability paradigm to liberate the viewer from his/her fixed viewing point<sup>32</sup>. If Modern Art is readable, it is not then because it refers to some meaning, such as in its medieval counterpart<sup>33</sup>, but because it proposes new spatiotemporal forms of freedom calling for different uses of one’s individual capacities for example, Klee considers his paintings as opening a new space of freedom for the eye, provided that the eye can discipline itself to read the composition of his pictograms<sup>34</sup>.</p> <p>If modern art turns the readability paradigm upside down and uses it to emancipate the individual, tragic thought will reverse alienation on itself. Indeed, if alienation aims at realizing the ends of reason through the mediation of spatiotemporal analytics, the tragic thinkers such as Nerval, Nietzsche, Artaud or Bergson show that one needs to break the disciplinary grid in order to recover the eternal vision of the world<sup>35</sup>. The tragic vision will be realized by turning reason into a critical tool, oriented against the discourse of alienation by showing</p>
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that one achieves freedom and an understanding of the universe not by alienating oneself to another's will, in order to construct a normalized persona, but rather by becoming an impersonal power<sup>36</sup>. Tragic thinkers and the thinkers of alienation are both inscribed under the paradigm of finitude because they both share the relation of human to obscure forces: for the thinkers on alienation, humans are threatened by these obscure forces and need to overcome them through discipline, while, for the tragic thinkers, humans need to destroy the disciplinary organization to rediscover these forces<sup>37</sup>. Both also see in such a struggle with such obscure forces a path for individual achievement, the first by realizing the socially acceptable persona, the second by destroying all social personas in the name of an exceptional individuality<sup>38</sup>.

### **Control Societies: Prevision and Reductionism**

The diagram of power mutates within control societies to become "that of administering and controlling life in a particular multiplicity, provided the multiplicity is large (a population) and the space spread out or open"<sup>39</sup>. Control societies have two orientations: the first consists in control technologies as such that have as their point of application the individuals, i.e. the carrier of information in a population<sup>40</sup>, and the second is biopolitics which has the population as such, or the man-species, as its point of application<sup>41</sup>. To implement such a diagram of power, control has recourse to two forms of exteriority, one for the organization of the visible and another for the organization of the sayable.

The organization of the visible field in control societies is characterized by a digital light, the photon carrying information, events occurring in a cybernetic space-time, and prevision as the paradigmatic function of the eye. As Foucault has shown, to control the life of a population one needs to manipulate a number of variables, be it the climate, pandemics, taxation, birth rates, etc.<sup>42</sup>. Such manipulation is achieved through statistical and simulation tools that can compute all the

variables to forecast the behavior of a population in an open space such as the CIA siren server that can predict a social uprising and also prevent it if needed<sup>43</sup>. The different visual machines, be they smart cities, smart phones, smart homes, internet sites, apps, smart cars etc. all collect data on a segment of the population to modulate its behavior: new smart toys, for example, are able to record conversations between parents and children, analyze these conversations into relevant usable data and then sell this data to companies that can implement interventions on parents and the underage population to affect their consumptive behaviors<sup>44</sup>. The modulation of the population's behavior requires the mapping of interactions and data gathering in real space-time. Virtual space-time is real space-time because it is only with cybernetic tools that power is able to gather information as it is unfolding by multiplying all kinds of data extraction devices such as cookies, bots, smart-skins, sensors, wearables, etc.<sup>45</sup>. Action in real time uses real-time data extraction, implemented through actuators where direct action is taken on things such as when a car doesn't start or if the renter doesn't pay his/her monthly fee<sup>46</sup>.

The paradigm of prevision also dictates the way we assess diseases. Medical imagery today allows us to visualize the living processes in vivo but also to predict the evolution of a disease through simulation programs, without the need to read symptoms on the surface of the body nor to wait for death in order to undertake an autopsy, introducing a medical practice without a patient that operates on image archives for example today some doctors can intervene by studying medical images taken in a lab without the need to encounter the patient<sup>47</sup>. Genetic medicine pushes the abstraction further by relying on genetic data gathered on large populations in order to screen possible diseases related to genetic mutations through predictive genetic testing<sup>48</sup>.

Control societies are able to direct the conduct of their subjects by letting them interact in an open space and extracting data from their interactions<sup>49</sup>.

By developing tools to track data in real space-time, the subjects are individualized as data carriers whose data becomes meaningful on the scale of the population opening on data management and the hyper-scale metrics<sup>50</sup> for example, if millions of users are searching for a specific topic, googlmetrics can detect that and sell or use this piece of information. Such individualization occurs when the subject-function of power is pinned on the population as a whole made of individuals for example, the Cambridge-Analytica scandal has shown that the voting tendencies of a population can be influenced by relying on psychometrics and targeted messages addressed to the users<sup>51</sup>. After being individualized, the subjects of power will be modulated to form a population whose general behavior is predictable such as in the science of behavioral prediction based on Google's "physics of clicks"<sup>52</sup>. In this sense, the individual is the unformed matter necessary to the biopolitical form of visibility: be it on the web, on apps, maps, or by through smart objects, etc. where the subjects are given form by being individualized into populations of users Facebook users, Tinder users, Mattel users, Pokémon gamers, etc. The more a subject becomes interactive and the more s/he is connected, the more s/he becomes dependent on the different interfaces and so turn into a reliable member in the different populations<sup>53</sup>. The individual, and the constitution of populations, stand hence as the correlate of power<sup>54</sup>.

The biopolitical organization of the sayable is characterized by unlimited finitude. Reality is then defined by outside forces operating at a sub-signifying level that liberate the intellect and the imaginary of man<sup>55</sup>. What liberates these capacities is the discovery of decoded flows such as the libido to explain the nature of desire or the flow of unqualified labor to explain the nature of wealth<sup>56</sup>. It remains that it is from these unqualified flows that qualifications are determined by developing a code made of a finite number of elements but whose unlimited possibilities of combination can sustain the infinite number of phenomena in a given domain such as the genetic code

that can sustain the diversity of life, or the binary code that can sustain the diversity of labor. Unlimited finitude opens then on a form of intelligibility where, to group all the phenomena of a field of knowledge, one needs to discover a code that is different in nature from the codified such as the chemical code that groups the phenotypes of life, the a-signifying units that group language, or the binary cybernetic code that groups all the differentiated human tasks<sup>57</sup>. The elaboration of the mRNA vaccine against COVID, such as in Pfizer or Moderna, is based on such rationality in so far as the cell reads an information threat prompting it to produce spike proteins that trigger an immune reaction. We are not in the logic of finitude anymore where the illness itself turns into the cure, but rather in the elaboration of a response that operates on the level of the biological information system.

If unlimited finitude is the form of biopolitical knowledge, reductionism on the other hand is the form of institutional know how, the rationale behind the operations of power. Indeed, the individuals can be reduced to infinite codified material because they are nothing but a phenotype that expresses the fluctuation of these flows the fluctuation of financial flows dictate the migration of populations of workers, neuronal interactions explain mental health, the genetic stock and its mutations explain physical health, etc. In this sense, the well-being of the workers, the sick, consumers, inhabitants, etc. is determined by the fluctuation of the flow and the different interventions to the code that aim at securing beneficial cybernetic loops of inputs and outputs as Wiener boasts, the well-being of the population is achieved via cybernetics and its real time adjustments to the fluctuating situations<sup>58</sup>. In the event that a dividual shows some pathological behavior, such behavior will be corrected by prompting the dividual for more participation and connectivity. As Malabou has shown, connectivity is the new paradigm for normality where the marginalized, the non-integrated, the depressed, the anti-social, etc. require a boost in connectivity that could be achieved through antidepressants, that activate

the transmission and connectivity of the neural network, to social networking and integration<sup>59</sup>. The network and its sciences allow then the population and the individuals to be controlled and regulated but also, they delineate their truth and objectivity, one being reduced to the web of interactions of which s/he stands as a mere phenotype one's physical health being reduced to his/her genetic code, his/her mental health to his/her neural network, his/her professional prospects to his/her social network, etc.

Epidemics represent the compact form of biopolitical prerogatives<sup>60</sup>. From such prerogatives, epidemics can be correlated to an open space and a number of variables characterizing a number of flows that need to be controlled such as climate variations, wind directions, flows of people between cities, proximity of the habitat, etc. For this to happen, a collective perception of epidemics is required, distributed across the territory and involving different institutions such as the police to control the flow of citizens, the church or media outlets to spread information, climate and water observation centers, etc.<sup>61</sup>. Epidemics call then, first, for techniques that bypass medical theory and replace it with medical policing. Second, epidemics are addressed through preventive rather than curative techniques, such as vaccination and the control of population flows<sup>62</sup>. For example, Apple and Google joined forces to develop backtracking apps using Bluetooth and location technologies to trace and notify their users when they were in contact with a carrier of the corona virus. Such tracing is anonymous and only works on mass scale, i.e. if the whole population downloads the app. Tech companies, such as Two-L, use an interface to detect people who are not respecting social distancing by analyzing video flows and notifying the police in real time; to control quarantine wristbands were used in Abu Dhabi and a selfie app in Poland. These measures to control the flow of the population involve, on a global scale, collaboration between big Tech companies and different national governments. The rationality used in these technologies, based on the

coding of flows and processing information echoes that of the development of the new mRNA vaccines. Last, the state organization of vaccination campaigns is justified through reductionist discourses where the population's survival is reduced to the statistics of vaccination and participation of the individuals. In short, a discourse is presented that it is only as a homogeneous biopolitical totality that the population can fight the virus, in which are presented as a threat to the population's well-being and used to justify counter exceptional measures set by the state.

If epidemics exacerbate the control measures and discourses of control, and by that the processes of dividualization, we can say that artistic practices are going to stand as the reverse double of the epidemic. Art should aim to transmute the biopolitical world and to emancipate of the population. The real time documentation of one's life via media outlets, in general, and the real time documentation of whistleblowers, in particular, are ways to turn the previsions of power on themselves by showing the unfolding of a global event, such as in Poitras's *Citizen Four* (2014), where we see how Snowden orchestrates in real time a public scandal before it happens. Through this, a global dividuality is built, dividuals, such as Snowden or Assange, turning into global anti-powers. Burroughs had already pushed the previsual process further, showing that an encoded text made of viruses inhabits any signifying text, and that this infra-a-signifying text programs the reactions and behaviors of the readers<sup>63</sup>. Using the technique of cut ups and fold ins, Burroughs is able to liberate a decoded flow of pure intensive life<sup>64</sup>. In contemporary art, Lozano Hemmer's *Zoom Pavilion*<sup>65</sup> uses the tracking and live stream technologies to build a reflexive image of the population of viewers in a museum, while practices such as those of Abu Hamdan reveal the technological background of the surveillance system through gestures of reversed engineering, such as in the *Humming Bird Clock*<sup>66</sup>. Contemporary artistic practices are previsual because they uncover a pure intensive material beneath all cod-

ification, or because they use the same coding techniques to subvert power in view of creating a collective awareness and freedom.

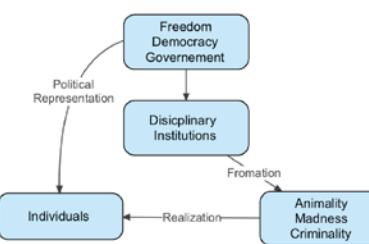
While contemporary art liberates pure flows of life, language, colors, sounds, etc., and emancipates populations reversing the previsual paradigm, the thought of difference reverses reductionism on itself. Indeed, if reductionism aims at realizing the ends of biopolitics through programming and coding the flows, thinkers on pure difference such as Foucault, Guattari, Deleuze, Ruyer, or Derrida show that one needs to break the coding processes to discover pure intensive and differential flows. The liberation of the flows will be realized by showing that there is something irreducible that resist reductionism and that all reductionisms presuppose, the core of the Overman residing in being in contact with these irreducible flows, rather than in being reduced to his genetic, binary, or social code<sup>67</sup>. The thinkers on difference and reductionists share the same paradigm because they are both in contact with uncoded flows. For the reductionists, these flows must be codified in order to control populations and individuals while, for the thinkers on difference these flows need to be liberated and the codes subverted in order for the overman to take charge of his/her life, language and creation. Both also see in these flows the path towards collective achievement, the first by setting in place a connected population while the other carves temporary autonomous zones, disconnected space-times, to build an intense population full of life, and the Alive<sup>68</sup>.

### Conclusion: the form of freedom

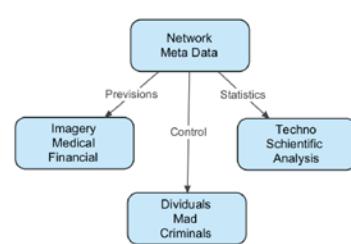
By comparing these two technologies of power, discipline and control, we can draw out the general form of domination. Domination is achieved when the structuration of space-time mediates between an active force and a reactive one. In the disciplinary organization of power, it is the analytical space-time that allows the bourgeoisie to organize and dominate the proletariat by turning them into individuals, while in control societ-

ies it is the tech companies that dominate different populations through the mediation of real space-time by turning them into individuals. The main difference is that the disciplinary regime operated on values such as democracy, freedom, equality, while control functions on some form of intelligent material such as the binary network, the neural network, the genetic code, the financial network, etc. If discipline required values to be implemented, based on a process of individualization and alienation, control, on the other hand, acts directly on the individuals and reduces them to mere automated connectors that react to the fluctuations of the networks.

mediation of imagination. Kant can be seen as the philosophers that best represents the disciplinary form of thought, where the given is a purely undefined material, a thing in itself, that needs to be given form by the schematic activity of imagination under the guidance of reason. Only through that complex process can reason realize itself in the world, and the world become spiritualized by the ordering activity of reason. On the other hand, with unlimited finitude, reason applies itself to codify and modulate the intelligent material by using computation and modelization tools in order to reduce the visible to mere phenotypes, the network and the visible, thus, constituting



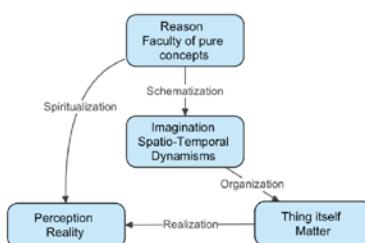
The disciplinary form of domination



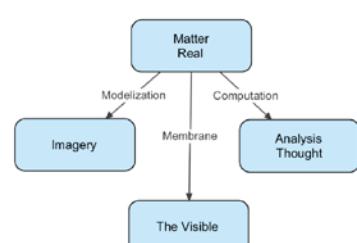
The biopolitical form of domination

The form of domination in the visible world is echoed by a hierarchical organization of the faculties in humans and, hence, by a form of thought. The hierarchy of the faculties in finitude gives priority to reason over imagination and assigns to imagination the role of mediating between reason and the perceived world, which leads to the spiritualization of the world in accordance with the norms of reason, and the realization of the reasonable views in the world via the

a membrane<sup>69</sup>. Cybernetics and Wiener can best represent this form of thought where the fluctuation of digits, or any form of data, ends up building an independent material dimension governed by intelligent rules that escapes the control of humans and even ends up determining their behaviors such as for example in the financial web. It is this intelligent material that now stands as the real, while the visible world is nothing but a phenotype of this reality. On the other hand, in



The disciplinary form of thought



The biopolitical form of thought

the disciplinary regime, it is the structuration of the visible world by reason, via the mediation of imagination, that is reality as such. We can see then that the form of thought itself shifts when passing from the disciplinary regime to control societies.

To resist these forms of domination in the political field and in thought, another form of thought is required and, hence, another hierarchy of the faculties. The general form of freedom can be generated by placing imagination above reason and using reason as a mediator to realize the experience of imagination in the perceptive world. In the disciplinary periods, it is the tragic vision that assigns a

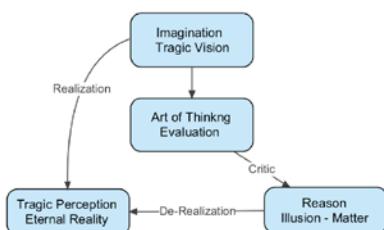
Deleuze best represents the philosophy of Becoming, a philosophy where the creation of percepts and concepts that encompass the intensities of Life allows the Alive to become another, to become a pure living power – for example, Bacon that can become horror through his paintings.

The general form of freedom consists then in using imagination to give body to something that bypasses the world of reason, the all too human world. Imagination puts us in contact with the Idea, the Tragic Vision, or Life, and it is only by choosing these unworldly entities as the mediators between the different agents that it is possible to stop the Image from

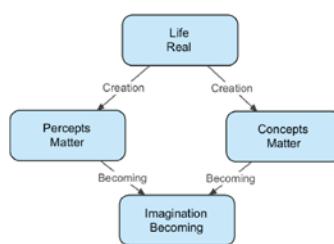
However, there are some difficulties facing this effective form of resistance. The first difficulty consists in an anachronistic use of values and Ideas, for example, such as when Zuboff organizes her critique of the new surveillance age around notions of democracy, individual freedoms and privacy, which pertain to the heydays of the disciplinary era<sup>71</sup>. Another difficulty is that those who feel the urge to resist must find the means to make such Ideas palpable and effective in their contexts by creating images that can give an experience of such Ideas. Conceptual and artistic creations are hence politically crucial because the first creates Ideas proper to the context while the later makes these Ideas manifest and part of a collective experience. Only then, and under the guidance of the Idea, can reason and imagination, epitomized in the philosophical and artistic activities, join forces to resist domination.

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- 20 Deleuze, 128.



Resistance to the disciplinary form of thought

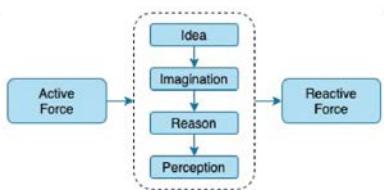


Resistance to the biopolitical form of thought

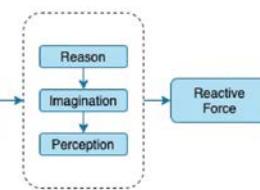
critical use to reason in order to destroy normality and realize such a vision. Nietzsche best represents the tragic philosopher that uses reason against reason, develops an art of thinking, in order to realize his tragic vision of the world by destroying the rational organization of this same world. In control societies, imaginary practices will put the Alive in contact with energetic and vital decoded flows and use reason to create concepts and percepts in order to become a living component of such flows becoming animal, cosmic, turtle, warrior, etc.<sup>70</sup>.

being used as a tool for domination. The general form of oppression and of freedom are then as follows:

It seems clear that these Ideas are contextual, each historical contingent situation calling for a specific type of Idea tragic visions are called forth by the disciplinary organization while liberated flows are called forth by the technologies of control. Hence, effective resistance must remain contextual by using the Ideas that stem from the different organization of power, and more urgently today, from the present power prerogatives.



General form of freedom



General form of oppression

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**Alfredo Cramerotti**

# The Gift

The 'new reality' shaped by the Covid pandemic and related events throughout 2020 and 2021 such as lockdowns, closed borders, nationalistic government responses, protests, etc. has produced a political emergency but it has also allowed the emergence of a kind of social 'positioning' embodying forms of individuality freed from previous concerns and pressures.

Trust in other people has been key for social interaction as the neighbour, the colleague working remotely, the doctor, the staff member at the checkout counter, the delivery person became the interface that mediated the 'world outside' to our indoor reality. This, in turn, brought a strong sense of solidarity and social response, yet at the same time an equally strong sense of weakness, emotional unsteadiness and liability, evidenced by people witnessing those who passed away, who were bereaved or who suffered loneliness, depression, unemployment, impoverishment, domestic abuse, and other forms of travail.

However, along with the 'community building' and 'social responsiveness', there were certain aspects of this new state of affairs that I noted with interest. The sense of 'blessed solitude' that the pandemic brought upon us was, and I suspect still is for a lot of people, an unexpected reward. Those of us, who were not directly victims of distress or anguish, suddenly found the opportunity to live a life that, if uneventful (but who are we to evaluate the whirlwinds of domestic existence), freed us from the obligation of following someone else's schedule. The obvious example is commuting, but this also includes the previously rigid schedules of workplaces, schools, shopping, entertainment, leisure, and the rituals of administrative bureaucracy.

While in no way avoiding the hard truth that people have died and are still dying from the disease on a daily basis, the pandemic does seem to have facilitated a sense of being and working more fruitfully, without the overhanging social pressures and deadlines. During the fraught months of 2020, nobody was expecting anything in particular. And even if people were expecting something specific, i.e. to turn up for a Zoom meeting, it was not the end of the world if it didn't happen for some reason or another.

For many categories of workers, and those not home-schooling full-time or working in intensive care, the reality of staying at home has actually produced something positive out of the tragedy of the pandemic. The happiness from not being required to socialise and/or interact was undeniable. For many, retreating into our comfort zone, far from being a regressive step, resulted in people enjoying the new 'liberty' of not having to put up with a whole universe of things and tasks and fellow human beings that were forced upon us by expectations and pressure. The unspeakable fact is that many became happier under the conditions of pandemic, provided that good personal health was maintained and loved ones were safe.

This appreciation of misanthropy is a fine line to walk, and not one to show or advertise too much. At the time of writing, the UK is opening up and face coverings, social distancing and staying at home are no longer mandatory. With a 'new, new reality' emerging and taking shape quickly, I admit I am not sure what I want. When I find myself surrounded by people, colleagues, co-workers, associates, friends or neighbours I am quick to self-diagnose a mild social anxiety which is the opposite of FOMO Fear Of Missing

Out; it is more Fear Of Being In, which is a kind of awkwardness caused by simply being in a public space with other people.

In my case, the pandemic has 'uncomplicated' a previously very busy life, made up of meetings, travels, social interactions, writing and curatorial assignments scheduled with a military precision, necessary in case a lack of time and mental resources made it impossible to tackle and deliver them. I still have the same tasks, invitations, commissions and requests, but, strangely, the context of my time and work has somehow expanded, letting me take things more slowly and not feeling that I am expected to pack things into tight schedules. It may not last, but for the time being, I am enjoying it.

Increased levels of satisfaction, happiness and even optimism are not the classical features of a misanthrope. However, the 'new reality' seems to have produced, dare I say it, exactly that. Fake social animals turned happy loners. If not affected directly by the Covid virus, health and physical wellbeing could be described as the private sphere where many people benefited by simply switching to a simpler, slower, less busy lifestyle. I am aware that this can be read as a function of class privilege and elitism but in truth, this happier contingent may be significant. Simon Kuper in the FT Magazine, March 2021 quotes a piece of comparative research which found that approximately 20% of a sample of 5,000 people pre-pandemic and about 18,000 people post-pandemic were impacted positively by the pandemic. The research by Meike Bartels is published in Horizon, the EU research and innovation journal.<sup>1</sup> Moreover, we need to bear in mind, as Kuper suggests, that "admitting to contentment during a pandemic is socially inappropriate."

Therefore, has the gift of adopting the 'pleasures' of misanthropy really affected a large proportion of the world population? It would be naive to think so in absolute terms. Yes, people in the rich parts of the planet, who have managed to stay healthy and relatively unscathed by the virus, likely did enjoy some benefits. Some of them realised that they were not

living a life they enjoyed and that they wanted to spend their time in a different way - they found a more fulfilling life by being given the opportunity to step away from routines that had preoccupied their lives. Others simply streamlined their commitments and tasks, revised their priorities, and freed themselves from a tangle of half-hearted promises and undertakings. Some others got richer, not because they profited from e-commerce businesses (though there are a good number of these, too) but simply because they spent less money – somehow ‘uncomplicating’ their social and professional expectations and self-imposed, consumer driven lifestyles.

However, the most valuable gift of the new reality, which I suspect will also stay in the new, new reality, is somehow more intangible but nevertheless important. In my view, it is the realisation that we actually have the ability to re-assess personal choices, social duties and professional relations. It is true that where we live and how privileged we are have the biggest impact on our ability to enjoy this gift. This is without doubt. However, my inkling is that across a wide range of categories of belonging or unbelonging, the idea of ‘unlearning’ our previous lives is still a valid and achievable possibility. Only time will tell if such changes in our understanding of the world will prove to be a step-change in social, political and cultural domains.

When presented with an unexpected gift, which might drastically change our personal outlook and worldview, it is difficult to pinpoint exactly what will change and how. It may be a matter of rendering the perception of the gap between what we want to do and are actually doing more sharply; or strengthening our curiosity for other, different ways to undertake our responsibilities and duties be those familiar or professional. Alternatively, it could lead to an increased willingness to embrace the unknown and to explore things that we do not understand, thus, making curiosity a central tenet of living. Structures in life are good and helpful, but so is contemplating how things could be structured differently. Systematized information received from

family, education and work is linear and ‘transactional’ rather than multidimensional and experienced. It is equally key to realise what we strive for and to reduce the unknown to the expected.

The process of unlearning as a way of facing life’s choices includes, according to Mark Boncheck in the Harvard Business Review,<sup>3</sup> firstly, the recognition that one’s current mental model (the proverbial water to the fish) may not be the best one in terms of relevance to the times or effective in the situation. Secondly, recognising that there may be alternative ways of living i.e. models – and in my view, this usually comes about when we step out of ourselves for a moment and look at ourselves from an external point of view as if we were our best friend. Thirdly, shifting our habits, ingrained behaviours, and daily routines to the new, alternative model we have identified. Not doing so reduces the possibility of real learning and the recognition of unexpected gifts, which may come our way in very oblique ways.

#### References:

- 1 Bartels, Meike and Grover, Natalie, 2020. Q&A: Why some people’s wellbeing has improved during the pandemic. *Horizon, the EU Research & Innovation Magazine* [online], 7 December 2020. Available at: <https://ec.europa.eu/research-and-innovation/en/horizon-magazine/qa-why-some-peoples-wellbeing-has-improved-during-pandemic>. Accessed 16 August 2021.
- 2 Kuper, Simon, 2021. Truth is, many of us have had a good pandemic. *FT Magazine*, 20-21 March 2021, p.5.
- 3 Boncheck, Mark, 2016. Why the Problem with Learning Is Unlearning, Harvard Business Review, 3 November 2016, online. Available at <https://hbr.org/2016/11/why-the-problem-with-learning-is-unlearning>. Accessed 16 August 2021.

# Igor Štromajer

# Intima.org

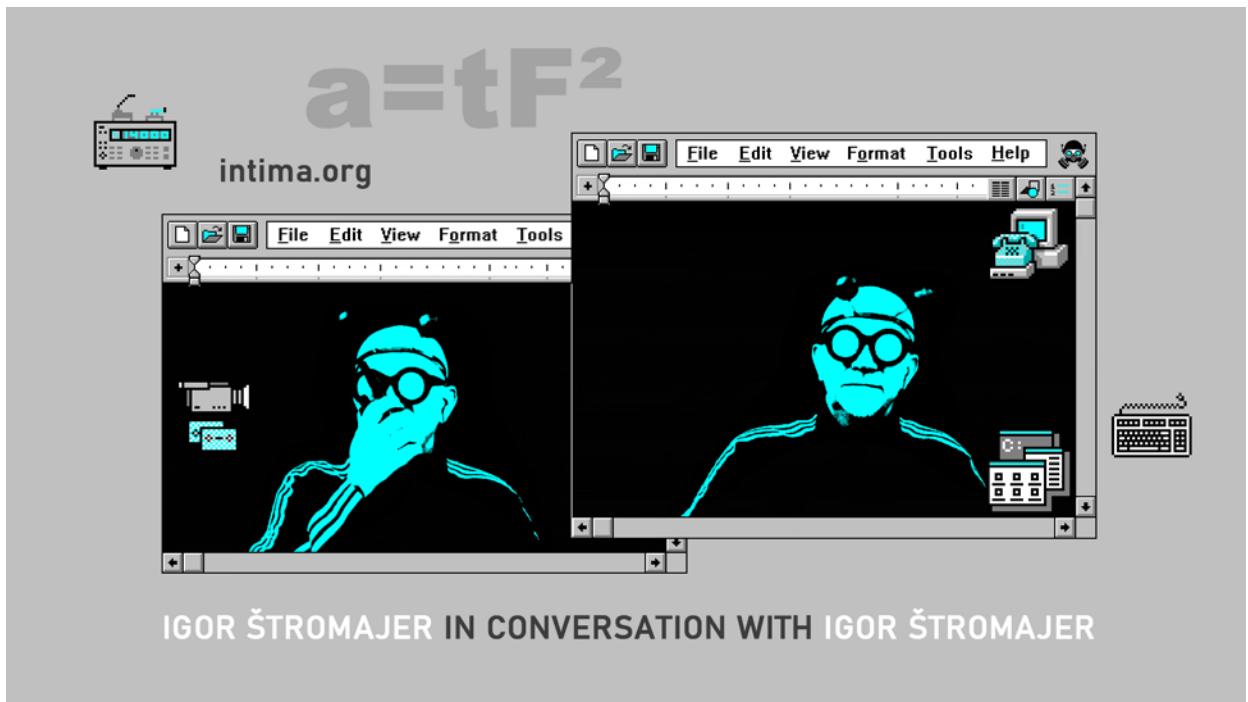
The work investigates the nuances of modulations through the use of slow motion and close-ups which emphasize the generative nature of digital media. The artist explores abstract and boring scenery as motifs to describe the idea of cyber-intuitive artifice. Using radical loops, non-linear narratives, and allegorical images as patterns, Štromajer creates meditative environments which suggest the expansion of space.



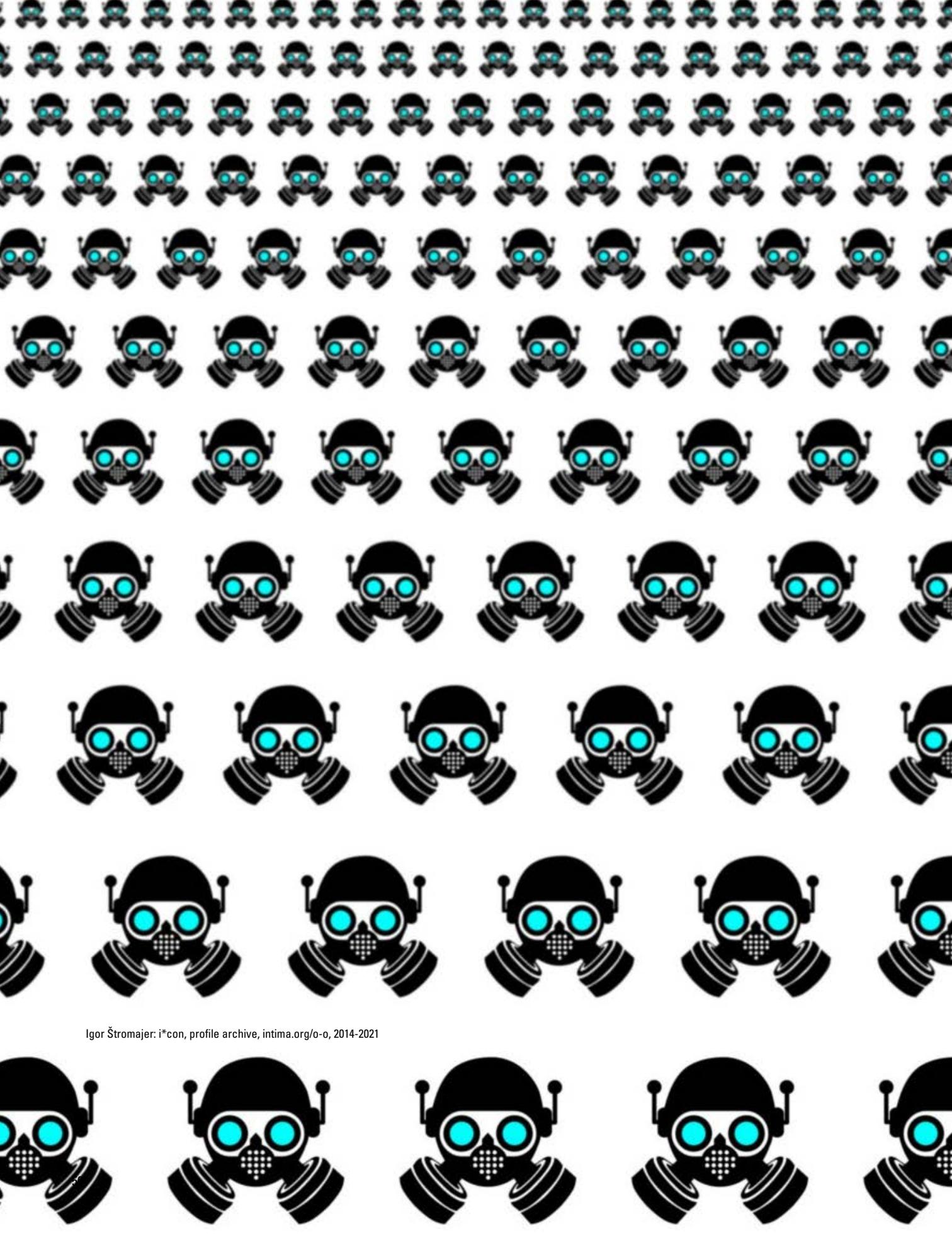
Igor Štromajer: i\*con, profile archive, intima.org/o-o, 2014-2021

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Igor Štromajer in conversation with Igor Štromajer, live-streaming video, [vimeo.com/482282872](https://vimeo.com/482282872), 2020



Igor Štromajer: i\*con, profile archive, intima.org/o-o, 2014-2021

Igor Štromajer: i\*con, profile archive, intima.org/o-o, 2014-2021







**REMINISCENCES  
OVER  
THE  
PRESENT**

# Encountering the new reality

## Interview with Boris Groys by Mira Gakjina

**Mira Gakjina:** This new issue of The Large Glass is on the topic of "The New Reality", a fashionable subject so to say for quite some time. In your writing, you often investigate the terms "new" and "reality", particularly as they relate to the museum as an institution, while also referring to the Ecclesiastes' text which claims that what seems new to us is a function of our incomplete archives, and the limits of our collective memory. In your work, the so-called "new" is separate from the profane reality in the cultural archives of the future. What an observer of our time might see as a new reality, one with an apocalyptic tone, is the feeling that we all belong to an interconnected world, an empire, where all the social struggles happen at a global level. Every day, we are bombarded with images from distant places which we experience personally and locally, legitimizing the challenges of the planet and humanity at large. Simultaneously, direct social contact has been perverted by the intensity of online communication, long preceding the social distancing brought on by the pandemic. What do you observe as new in this reality, as the third decade of the 21st century begins?

**Boris Groys:** To recognize something as new one has to be able to compare this new with the old. Only then can one know if this new is really new and, if so, then in what respect. However, as you correctly say in our globalized world, we are permanently confronted with stories, images and news from the parts of the world, of which we may not have much knowledge or perhaps have only vaguely heard about. We cannot know our global past well enough. And we do not even know our own national histories very well because, time and again, we are confronted with different stories of previously marginalized social groups. Thus, we cannot say if certain stories and images are new or not. As a result, we lose our sense of history and find ourselves in a present beyond historical comparison. This loss of the past corresponds to the re-evaluation of the future. Today, the future presents itself to us not as a promise or chance but as a danger – of ecological catastrophe, cyber war, dictatorship of Artificial Intelligence etc. The work of progress is experienced as destructive – as destruction of the natural environment, erasure of traditional cultures and extinctions of animals and plants. Today, left politics takes the form of resistance to progress, restraint of the progress leading to the inevitable apocalypse. This politics of restraint, of katechon, was an early characteristic of conservative thinking but now has influenced left activism.

**Mira Gakjina:** In recent years, the art of Eastern Europe has become of interest to the bigger museums. There was the

exhibition "The Promises of the Past" at Centre Pompidou, and works from the era leading up to the fall of the Berlin Wall have been displayed at the Tate and the MOMA. Yet, as you yourself have noted, the dominant streams of art theory tend to overlook the art in this part of Europe. It feels as though many Eastern European countries, even ones which have been members of the EU for a while, are not regarded as really "European". I recently saw a piece by Dan Perjovschi which requests all who have taken pieces of the Berlin Wall to return them to their original place (*All persons who acquired pieces of Berlin wall between 1989 – 2009 are kindly requested to bring them back for the reconstruction of the wall*). You have paid close attention to the scene in this part of Europe, where many new names have come up, and we, of course, keenly follow what has been going on in our region, in Southeastern Europe. What is the evolution that we can expect on a continent which regards itself as a leader in the promotion of cultural values?

**Boris Groys:** In our time of globalisation, art travels all around the world. The Chinese, Indian, African and Latin American artists exhibit their works in the centres of the Western World. The worldwide competition is intense. At the same time, the art institutions are still not really globalized. Museums and universities remain national and, thus, inevitably concentrate their attention on their own national traditions and also on the contemporary art of their countries. The only way to deal with this situation is to develop new art institutions in which artists who have remained outside the 'view' of Western art institutions can find a place. That is true for all countries as well as for the Eastern European countries.

**Mira Gakjina:** Alain Badiou views art and philosophy as coupled, like in the relationship Lacan describes between the Master and the Hysteric, wherein art is always the Hysteric in relation to the Master that is philosophy. He attempts to systematize philosophical thought about art by creating three categories. According to him, the form of this relationship stretches along a continuum between censorship and idolatry. The three categories are: didactic, romantic and classical, what is your stance toward Badiou's distinction?

**Boris Groys:** I do not think that art or art theory can be systematized in this way. Beyond that, during the period of modernity, both art and philosophy have demonstrated their ability to undermine and transgress all such systematizations and descriptions. So, a return to the (pseudo)systematic thinking could not be successful in this field.



Boris Groys. © Natalia Nikitin

**Mira Gakjina:** In your work you note that the French Revolution was followed by a reactionary period, which in turn was the precedent to romanticism, and you draw a parallel with the current state of widespread neoliberalism, which followed the failure of socialism and the fall of the Berlin Wall. Can we expect the start of a new trend in which virtues like solidarity are held in high social regard?

**Boris Groys:** I would prefer to speak simply about capitalism. Yes, capitalism is based on individualism and competition. People want to be successful. And every individual tends to believe that he or she will be more successful alone – the road of solidarity seems to be a too long and difficult one. Globalisation creates the possibility for almost everybody to migrate, to leave their original community, to start a new life and even many new lives. Africans move to Europe, Europeans move to Dubai and Abu-Dhabi. To develop the feeling of solidarity, one has to abandon the idea of personal success anywhere in this world. Probably, this global disappointment will come but it needs time. And then it may lead to a global solidarity.

**Mira Gakjina:** Among the first to take a hit in post-socialist countries, as you have observed, was modernist architecture. We have given significant space to this within our magazine and our Museum, which we believe merits research like the ones conducted by Forensic Architecture. Our capital was radically transformed through the Skopje 2014 project, spearheaded by the previous government, and rationalized with naïve arguments about fulfilling the expectations of the emerging 'romantic' tourist, as you have named them. But behind this goal of a 'beautiful city' was an abuse of the public budget. To what extent can the global governing elites abuse the power of art?

**Boris Groys:** Architecture is always a matter of national – not global – elites. And, yes, these elites mostly try to make the local architecture look truly local, national, 'authentic'. They do that for two different, and apparently, contradictory reasons. They want to establish themselves as the heirs of the glorious national past and its wonderful achievements. And, at the same time, they want to situate themselves as local representatives of the contemporary global elite that are able to keep their piece of territory in good shape. In both aspects, architectural modernism is not helpful. It does not reflect the national traditions and at the same time looks too grey, too monotonous, too ordinary, too boring. If one wants – too socialist.

**Mira Gakjina:** While processing the significance of curatorship, you point to the origin of the word, its connection to caring, fostering, and healing. An image is powerless to represent itself, and the curating process heals it into representation, fully recovered. This renders the curator an agent of the secularisation of art. The institution "curator" is first mentioned in Justinian's legal reform in the sixth century, and this role is precisely to defend the interests of those who are powerless to do so themselves, in communication with the legal system and governing norms. Do you find this ongoing

global crisis to be ones of institutions?

**Boris Groys:** Yes, museums are like hospitals – they care for the artworks like the hospitals care for the bodies of people. However, today the museums, art spaces and galleries are not the primary spaces in which we are confronted with images. We mostly see images on the Internet, on the TV etc. Image production has become independent of curatorial control. Today, anybody can produce images and spread them worldwide. The traditional art institutions control only a small and increasingly irrelevant sector of image production and distribution. The only area in which the museums are still important is in image preservation. Here, the role of the curators is still relevant. But it seems to me that also this privilege is only a temporary one.

**Mira Gakjina:** You often emphasize prestige as a motivation. Is the supreme artistic accomplishment that of prestige? When we speak of a new reality, we imagine a new society in which (as Beuys says, everyone is an artist) the self-realization of a human is true creativity, authorship? Would you risk making a prediction?

**Boris Groys:** Under the new cultural conditions under which anyone can produce selfies and distribute them worldwide beyond any censorship and control, there is obvious difference in the degree of visibility of such images: some have millions of likes and some of them – only few. The artist is an artist because he or she wants to show something to others. If I do not want to show anything to others, then I can think and imagine without producing anything at all. It is a very good option – but then I am not an artist or a writer. Now if I want to show something to the others then the question of visibility emerges – and I speak precisely about visibility and not about prestige. For example, God has prestige – but he is invisible. Now, if I want to be visible there is, of course, a question: to whom? If I want to be visible to my family and friends, I do not need museums or the Internet. If I want to be visible in my country – the situation is different. If I want to be visible globally – the situation is very different. So, a lot depends on the character of the individual's ambitions. And, a lot depends on pure chance. Thus, it is possible that if I had lived in the ancient Greek or Roman empire, I could have made a vase for my family and, after some centuries, it could have been exhibited in the Louvre. Such cases are also not so rare.

# Nemanja Cvijanović

# The Monument to Red Rijeka -

# The Self-Defensive Monument

The Monument to Red Rijeka - The Self-Defensive Monument is a large object/installation shaped in the form of the five-pointed (discarded and forgotten) Partisan star, and studded with 2800 glass shards symbolising the 2800 fighters who died in the battle for Rijeka. The installation was presented as a part of the Pocket Turned Out - Art Interventions in the Public Space programme organised by the Museum of Modern and Contemporary Art in Rijeka (Croatia) as part of the Times of Power flagship - Rijeka 2020 - European Capital of Culture festival.

"The primary symbolism of this slanted and truncated star communicates the paradox of the discarded yet still "dangerous" anti-fascist and revolutionary legacy as a symbol of the international labour movement and the struggle for a more just society".

## **The paradox of a discarded, yet still "dangerous" legacy.**

The artist Nemanja Cvijanović created his work fully aware of the trend of selectively but systematically abandoning historical monuments to oblivion and destruction. The shards of red glass symbolically pre-empt the potentially damaging vandalism of the five-pointed star and reflect the ability of the monument to resist such destruction and oblivion. The primary symbolism of the slanted and truncated star communicates the paradox of the discarded yet still "dangerous" anti-fascist and revolutionary legacy as a symbol of the international labour movement and the struggle for a more just society.

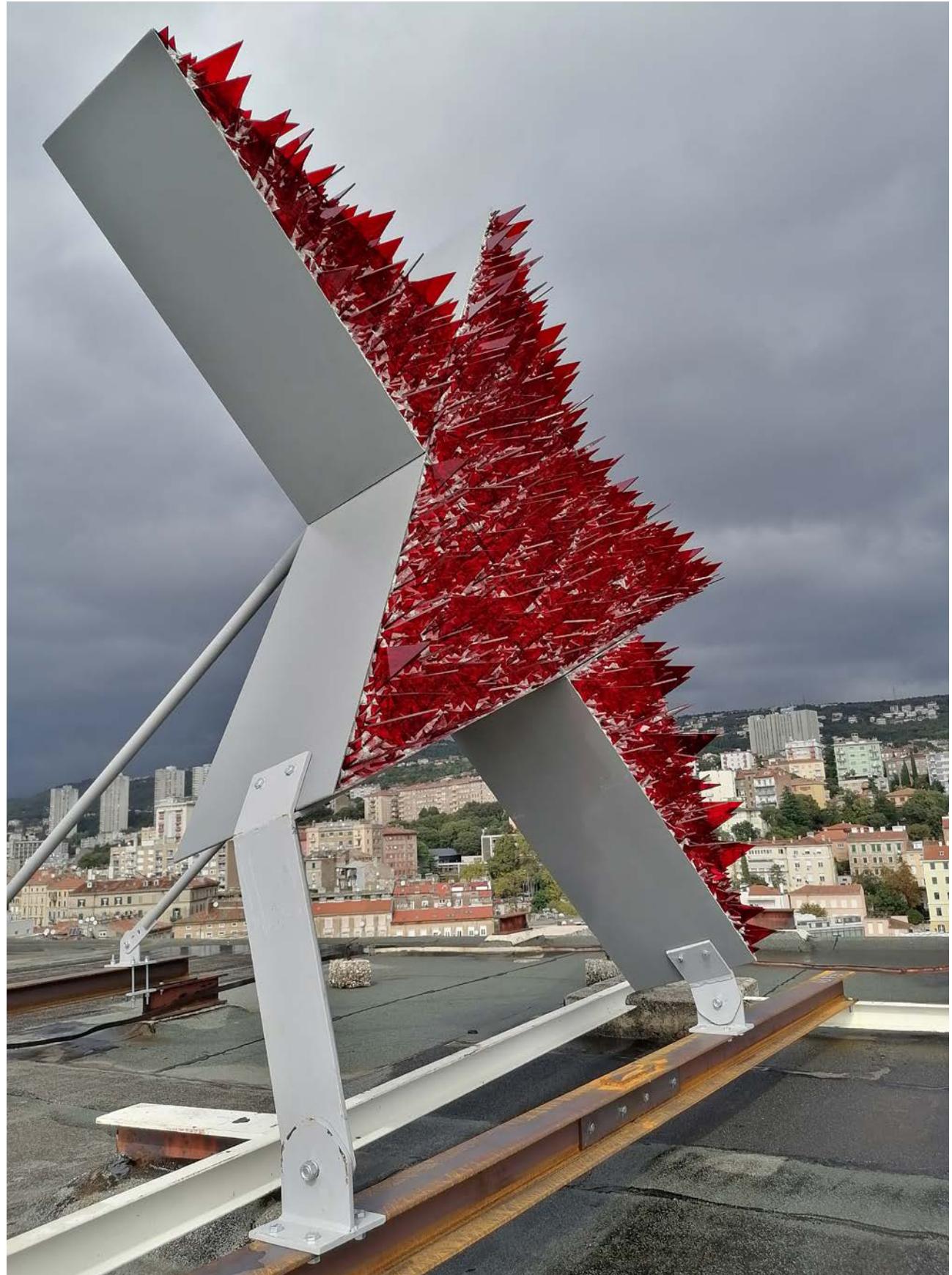
It should be noted that as soon as it was announced that the monument would be erected on the originally planned date of 3 May on Rijeka Liberation Day, the art intervention sparked significant attention from the media and plenty of reaction from the public and individuals on social media, as well as from politicians, who

used it to share their sentiments on the subject and emphasise the position from which they spoke.

By erecting the monument in this context, the artist poses the question of whether this slanted and truncated symbol can remain a part of the city's identity, with the star's slantedness acting as a symbol of the position of anti-fascism in the global contemporary political and social context. To be more precise, can a star that is a part of our cultural heritage, regardless of the opinions associated with it, remain a part of our identity? Can it defend itself from a historically revisionist agenda and defy it?

Contemporary anti-fascism, which includes the fight for democratic freedoms and the fight for human rights as the civilisational achievements of a society, is rooted in historical anti-fascism. The symbolism of the day on which this artwork was installed in Rijeka and remembrance of the historic fact that Rijeka was reintegrated into Croatia during the aforementioned historical period marked by anti-fascist struggle are important for precisely this reason.

Spomenik crvenoj Rijeci - Samoobrambeni spomenik,  
The Monument to Red Rijeka -  
The Self-Defensive Monument  
Intervention in public space (iron, aluminium,  
two-component industrial paint, thermo-plaster, red  
plexiglass)  
dimensions 300x300x40 cm,  
Production: "Izvrnuti džep",  
MMSU Rijeka, Rijeka 2020 EPK, Croatia.  
Photography:  
p.59,60 Nemanja Cvijanović  
p. 60,61 Siniša Gulić  
Courtesy of The Artist







# RESISTANT IMAGES:

## John Heartfield and The Satirical Photomontage 1921-1945

16. 09 – 26.09.2021

Museum of Contemporary Art, Skopje

Research project by Vladimir Janchevski

The exhibition entitled *Resistant Images: John Heartfield and the Satirical Photomontage* is the result of a long-term research project on antifascist photomontage and the visual culture in the Interwar period.<sup>1</sup>

The beginning of the 20th century was marked by a series of dramatic events and turning points, both political and technological, but also in an artistic sense, and, in some senses, they can be seen as two sides of the same coin and interdependent.

Unlike in the premodern period, when art was almost exclusively at the service of the ruling elites, the modern concept of the artist has opened up space for individual expression, which is not controlled by powerful elites. In conditions when the new media is increasingly becoming a tool for promoting populist tendencies, representing the new radical right, the question arises about the importance of anti-fascist traditions and the innovation with which the authors in the interwar period dealt with the challenges of that time.

World War I, which caused unprecedented devastation, vast material damage, and human casualties, fueled the anti-militant internationalist spirit of many historical avant-garde artists, especially those associated with the Dada movement.

The Berlin Dada, probably the most openly political group in the entire network of the Dadaist International, received its most iconic example of political art in the uncompromising satirical photomontage of John Hartfield (1891-1968)<sup>2</sup>, which was created to oppose the rise of German National-Socialism, and the crimes of the Third Reich (1933-1945).

Visual antifascist messages, evident in the works of pioneers such as Hartfield or Marinus Jakob Kjelgaard (1884-1964)<sup>3</sup>, which were combined with humor, to create photographic fragments with textual comments and slogans, are also seen in the work of Spanish artists Josep Renau (1907-1982)<sup>4</sup> Monleón, as well in Boris Klinch (1892-1946)<sup>5</sup> and Alexander Zhitomirsky (1907-1993)<sup>6</sup>. It is further transmitted through time and this creative line is kept alive to this day in the era of Photoshop interventions, fake news and deepfake video manipulations.

These pioneering artist were a great inspiration for the younger generation and the contemporaries of the May 1968 student protest, like Hector Cattolica, establishing a clear relationship between these works and the striking creations of more recent times by political artists like Peter Kennard<sup>7</sup> in

Britain, Klaus Staech in Germany and many others, including the work of Banksy, who has gained extreme popularity and a much greater influence than any other artist in the institutional museum-gallery network.

In the past decade, we have witnessed the rise and increasing domination of social networks, to some extent democratizing communication channels in the public sphere. At the same time, software tools, channels of persuasion and image manipulation, are becoming available to a wider group of citizens. As a result, a specific satirical meme culture has been created on the Internet, as a continuation of the traditions of caricature drawings and satirical photomontage.

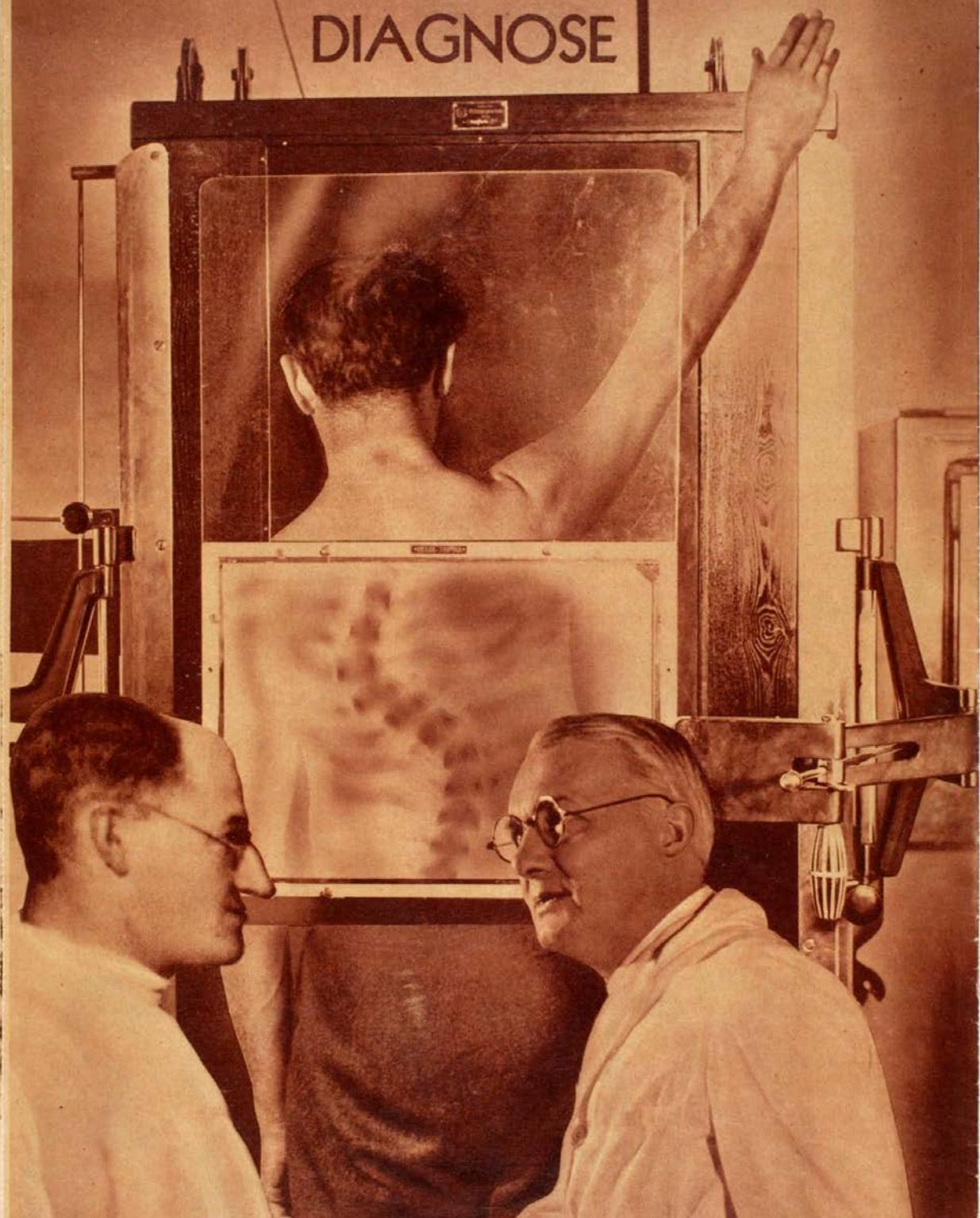
Although there is a long history of attempts to understand and clarify the phenomenon of the image, today, the question arises again; do we sufficiently understand the nature of the image as part of mass culture and its effects on mass media?

This project, linking the old experiences of the pioneers of photomontage, with a focus on the work of John Hartfield and his contemporaries, aims to examine and analyze the emerging situation, the political conflicts and the current 'image wars', addressing the role of the visual sphere in the contemporaneity as well as the ways in which new media influences the formatting of communication and the formation of consciousness.

### References:

- 1 The research process and a shorter selection of original works and publications, was presented on November 16, 2019 at the Cultural Center "Miladinov Brothers" in Struga and on November 18, 2019 at the Museum-Gallery Kavadarci, under the title "Seeing Yesterday's World Today: Photomontage and antifascism" curated by Vladimir Janchevski, in cooperation with the Center for Visual Studies - Skopje.
- 2 Peter Pachnicke and Klaus Honnep, *John Heartfield* (Köln: DuMont, 1991).
- 3 Gunner Byskov, *Marinus & Marianne: Photomontages satiriques 1932-1940* (Paris: éditions Alternatives, 2008).
- 4 Josep Renau, 1907-1982: *Compromiso y Cultura* (CAAM, 2013); José Renau, Función social del cartel (Valencia: Nueva Cultura, 1937).
- 5 Boris Klinch is the pseudonym of the caricaturist Gary Grigorevich Petrushansky, one of the most interesting examples of satirical anti-fascist photomontage from the pre-war Soviet period, whose oeuvre is the subject of a monographic study by the author of this text.
- 6 Александр Житомирский: Искусство политического фотомонтажа (Москва: Издательство „Плакат“, 1983).
- 7 Richard Slocum et al, *Peter Kennard: Unofficial War Artist* (London: Imperial War Museum, 2015).

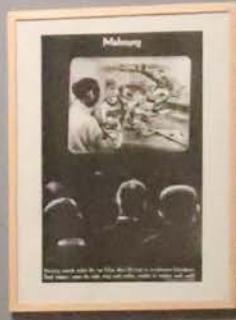
# DIAGNOSE

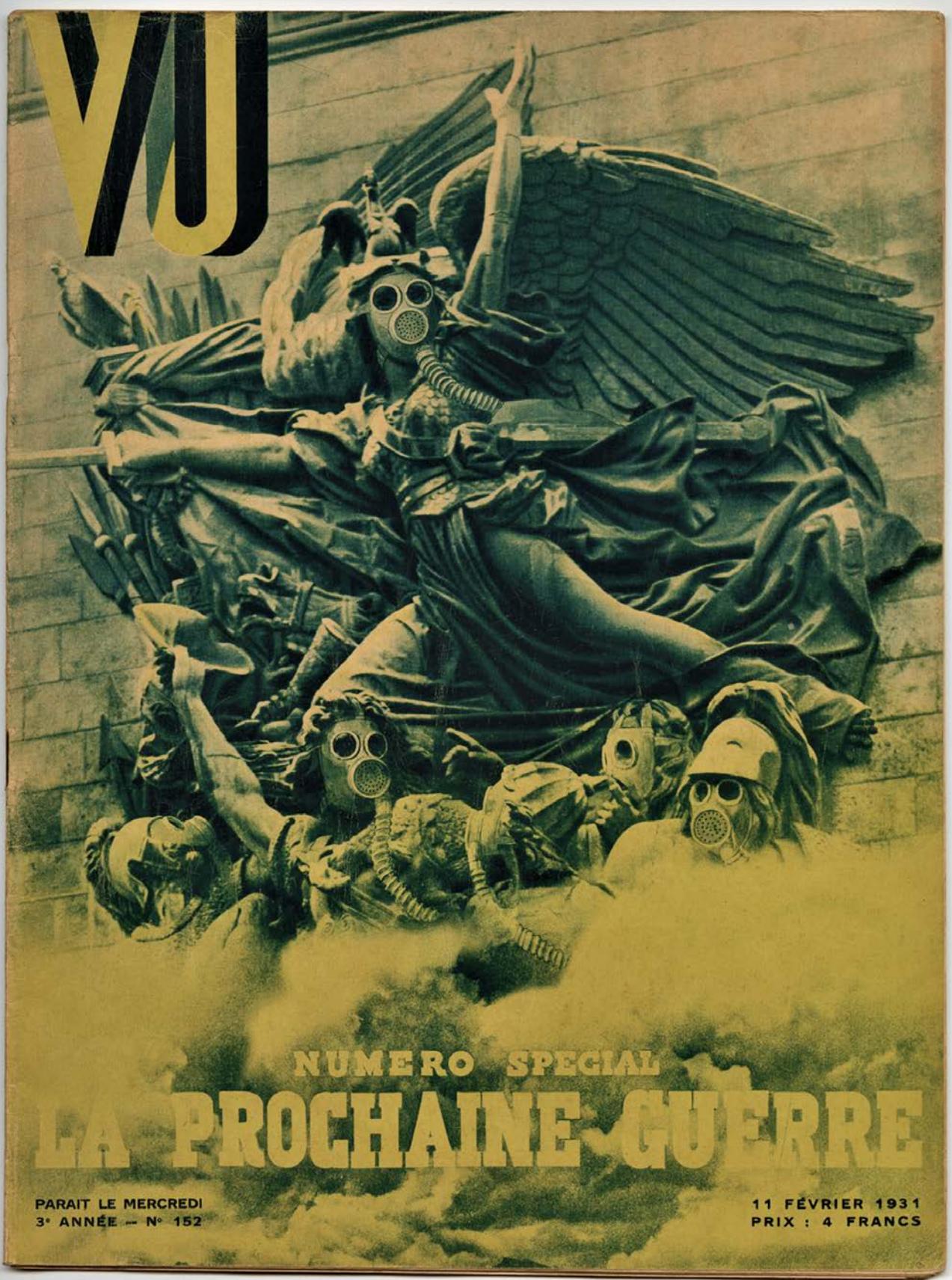


„Wodurch zog sich der Mann denn die Rückgratsverkrümmung zu?  
„Das sind die organischen Folgen des ewigen »Heil Hitler!«“

Fotomontage: John Heartfield







Anonymous (A. Noël, pseudonym?)

The Future War ('La Prochaine guerre'), photomontage cover of the special issue of magazine VU, Vol. 3, No. 152, 11 February 1931, Paris, 37 x 27,3 cm. Private archive of the curator



John Heartfield, Kaiser Adolf, photomontage cover for Picture Post, Vol.4, No.10, 9.  
September 1939, London, 35 x 25,5cm. Private archive of the curator

# Specters of Beuys

**Interview with Catherine Nichols by Mira Gakjina**



Catherine Nichols. Photo: Peter Rigaud

Berlin-based Australian Catherine Nichols appointed Creative Mediator for the 14th edition of Manifesta taking place in Pristina, Kosovo in 2022. She is currently the artistic director of *beuys 2021*, a year-long centenary programme in the state of North Rhine – Westphalia dedicated to the artist Joseph Beuys. MoCA Skopje is a partner organization of the 14th Manifesta Biennial 2022.

**Mira Gakjina:** During this year, you are still engaged as the art director of the programme *Beuys 2021*, celebrating the 100th anniversary of Beuys' birth. Although we still do not have the historical distance essential to truly appreciate his work, we can certainly celebrate his extraordinary contribution to the art of the 21st century. He recognized the artist within every human and pointed out the need to rethink our relationship

to the world at large (a more-than-human world within which we can see a friend in the feral coyote). Could we say that Beuys was among the first to sound the alarm on the crises we are living through (the climate collapse and the global pandemic)?

**Catherine Nichols:** I really appreciate how you use the preposition "among" in speaking about Beuys's contribution to ecological enquiry, that you evidently consider Beuys not as a standalone figure but as one of many people – activists, scientists, thinkers and artists – who collectively sounded the alarm. Having spent the past couple of years examining how Beuys – who tends to be heroised or demonised rather than critically appraised – participated in artistic, political and theoretical discourse, I'm always relieved when he is situated from the

start in the broader context out of which he emerged, whether it's Fluxus or Land Art, whether it's the German post-war period of denial and democratisation or the political upheaval of 1968. I think Beuys helped to amplify the alarm that had already been well and truly sounded by the Club of Rome's 1972 report *The Limits to Growth* or by people like Rachel Carson whose 1962 publication *The Silent Spring* had already overtly demonstrated the devastating nexus between capitalism, global politics and environmental destruction – and was read by millions of people worldwide. It's unfortunate that fewer people were paying attention when Eunice Foote published a paper linking carbon dioxide to global warming back in 1856.

What Beuys and other visual artists contribute – here I'm thinking of Agnes Denes with her *Wheatfield* that overtook Lower Manhattan in 1982 or Mierle Laderman Ukeles with her Maintenance Art practice evolving since the late 1960s – is a highly evocative imagery and a model for social engagement. It's an imagery – or rather an imaginary – that dwells not on the detritus and destruction but on its collective public transformation into a recuperative, life-giving entity, into an embodiment of ongoingness that calls for widespread involvement. It's not as if you would only find this kind of imagery and practice in the artworld. To the contrary, ecological participatory practices are widespread and have in many cultures been passed down for decades, centuries, even millennia.

Still, there is no doubt that *7000 Oaks*, Beuys's contribution to documenta 7 in Kassel in 1982, managed to touch an inordinate number of people across the world. Like Denes's *Wheatfield*, it was a work that truly succeeded in moving beyond the boundaries of the artworld. And it was by far the most legible manifestation of Beuys's theory of social sculpture, which, as you pointed out, called on people to think about the intricate interrelationships between all living species and their habitats and – from the late 1970s onwards – to examine how these are affected by the flows of capital. Beuys certainly didn't anticipate the pandemic as such, but he did point to many of the conditions that engendered it.

**Mira Gakjina:** The Biennale slogan, borrowed from Donna Haraway, relies on the importance which our modes of communication, our languages, our collective ideas, have in reshaping the world we inhabit. The transformative power of storytelling is truly significant in visual media and languages which open new forms. What kind of role do you foresee the artist (art) having at the Centre for Narrative Practice within the Hivzi Sylejmani library in Prishtina?

**Catherine Nichols:** The Centre for Narrative Practice plays a central role in Manifesta 14. While all the different elements comprising the biennale – from the artistic interventions through to the thematic exhibitions and sites of learning – examine and experiment with the politics and practices of storytelling, the Centre for Narrative Practice is a site where the storytelling becomes the story, so to speak, where we invite people to explore all different modes, media and materials

of storytelling and to themselves engage in weaving stories of their own. The idea was inspired by Prishtina. If you visit the city and meet the people who live and work there, you cannot help but notice how many residents of the city and the country – not only artists, historians and writers – are consciously working in some way with narrative techniques, whether it's to come to terms with history, to heal trauma, to grapple for better or for worse with old and new mythologies, or to imagine other scenarios for the future. Narration is an inherently creative, artistic act, one that is common to all human beings.

Since storytelling seems like one of the most effective means we have of heightening political engagement and training ourselves to "think with an enlarged mentality", as Hannah Arendt puts it, it seems timely to offer a place where people from all different cultures and subcultures can meet to think about and share different practices of storytelling and, in the process, to tell new stories or to situate well-rehearsed stories in a broader cultural, multidisciplinary and indeed multispecies context. So, as you can imagine, the centre is designed to have facilities, spaces and resources to accommodate practitioners of all kinds, whether they're engaged in poetry, archiving, hip-hop or choral singing, podcasting, filmmaking, weaving, some kind of visual arts or curatorial practice or even just reading, thinking and daydreaming.

Thanks to a close collaboration with the Rijksakademie in Amsterdam, which itself teaches and fosters an extremely broad range of narrative practices within the visual arts context, the centre is able to include in its programme a wide range of workshops, seminars and talks run by contemporary artists. During the 100 days of Manifesta 14 Prishtina we're planning to have a strong focus on artists working with archives, particularly of the kind known as "vulnerable". We're also hoping to establish a residency programme that, like the centre itself, will be ongoing. The small exhibition spaces within the building and the beautiful garden both offer the opportunity for various forms of artistic intervention, performance and display.

**Mira Gakjina:** This is Manifesta's first edition in this part of Europe, the Western Balkans, whose artistic scene has truly blossomed in the last few years, yielding several significant authors from Kosovo, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Serbia and Albania. Have you considered them in the realization of Manifesta14's programme?

**Catherine Nichols:** Yes, certainly. The thematic approach for Manifesta is very much drawn from Prishtina and the region in which it is situated. Of late, as in the 1990s, there's been a palpable presence of artists from the region in international exhibitions. The recent show curated by Zdenka Badovinac at MAXXI in Rome – *Bigger than Myself: Heroic Voices from ex-Yugoslavia* – is evidence of that. And many museums across the region, yours in Skopje being one great example, have really shown the significance and strength of the artists and their contribution to contemporary discourse. Yet, as I'm

discovering now by immersing myself in the cultural scene of the whole region – I'm currently on a lengthy road trip from Berlin to the Western Balkans and back – there are so many younger emerging artists too, artists whom Manifesta has given me the occasion and opportunity to meet. I'm extremely happy to have the possibility to get to know them and their work, not only for Manifesta but also for my ongoing research and future exhibitions. I'm not going to mention any names yet, because the concept is still developing, but I think you'll see when the list of artists is published next year that Manifesta 14 Prishtina unfolds from within the region and engages from there with the cultures and discourses that lie beyond.

**Mira Gakjina:** The exhibition programme will not be limited to Prishtina alone; parts of it will take place at our Museum in Skopje. Could you give an insight into the locations and contents of the parallel exhibition programme?

**Catherine Nichols:** By the time I joined the team, the Western Balkans project was already well underway. It's entitled Co-Producing Common Space and Shaping Formations of Solidarity in the Western Balkans. People can think of it as a large-scale collaboration between many different institutions that was initiated by Manifesta and is funded by Creative Europe. It aims to extend the outreach of Manifesta beyond the city of Prishtina to the region and to strengthen the networks between the various cultural centres. The formats planned include expert talks, exhibitions, performances and many other forms of interaction and involvement that are currently being developed. I had the pleasure of meeting representatives of most of the nine partners in Prishtina in October 2021. There was the Post-Conflict Research Center from Sarajevo, Termokiss from Prishtina, Qendra Harabel from Tirana, the APSS Institute from Podgorica, NGO Aktiv Kosovo, Meydan D.O.O. (Hestia) from Belgrade, the Kosovo Architecture Foundation (KAF) from Prishtina, the Institute of Contemporary Art from Sofia, the European Roma Institute for Arts and Culture (ERIAC) from Berlin and of course, as you mentioned, your museum: the Museum of Contemporary Art in Skopje. From the conversations I had, it seems that the partners are planning various forms of engagement with the question of how to tell stories otherwise. Fortunately, the quest to find ways of reaching into "rich pasts to sustain thick presents to keep the story going for those who come after", as Donna Haraway so poetically puts it, resonates with existing lines of enquiry. So, there is much to build upon and share.

**Mira Gakjina:** The focus of your activity is the city of Prishtina. In reshaping it, through new ideas and stories, you will have an important partner, the architect Carlo Ratti. Do you expect a close collaboration, as a collective?

**Catherine Nichols:** Definitely. Something that really attracted me to joining the Manifesta team in the first place

was the Urban Vision strategy that Hedwig Fijen, the director of Manifesta, developed a few years back as part of her ongoing reflection on what a biennial can or could be. The opportunity to collectively conceive a biennial with and for the people of a city on the basis of a long-term, in-depth investigation into the fabric of that city is quite unique. It makes a lot of sense to me to engage specifically with a city, to engage in a way that takes the city seriously, that takes it to heart, so to speak, that refrains from merely descending upon it for a while and departing. In fact, the collaboration with Carlo Ratti and his team began before I had even had the pleasure of meeting them in person insofar as I was invited to develop a proposal for the Prishtina edition of Manifesta taking the Urban Vision as one of my key points of departure. So, I knew from the very beginning, say, that the dearth of convivial public spaces – beyond the admittedly appealing café scene – was an issue that most people in Prishtina strongly care about. The recent mayoral elections showed that quite plainly: all the main parties had placed the greening of public space, the creation of parks and outdoor recreational facilities, high up on their agendas.

Coupled with the information gleaned from the numerous citizen assemblies, which were run by the Manifesta 14 Prishtina education department in collaboration with the Studio L A team, architects Arna Mačkić and Lorien Beijaert, the insights proffered by the Urban Vision have been crucial to the conceptual process. In the months ahead I'll be joining in on the conversation about the realisation of the urban interventions conceived by Carlo Ratti and his team. It's a conversation that has many participants, so I'm only one of many voices, most of whom have the intimate knowledge of the city I hope I will be able to acquire in the months ahead. Another important point is the architectural and historical research conducted on the many fascinating venues around the city which, during Manifesta, will become sites of artistic intervention. The continuing dialogue with the architects around these venues and their neighbourhoods, a dialogue that also includes the residents with their memories of their past and desires for their future, plays a significant part in enabling interventions of a multi-layered site-specificity, works that interact in a profound manner with the historical and urban complexity of a given place.

**Mira Gakjina:** Having worked in both Australia and Europe, could you make a comparison between the artistic and social ambiance present at the "old" and the "new" continent?

**Catherine Nichols:** Since I moved to Berlin to complete my PhD back in 1999 and ended up staying there – for the love of a person more than the city – I never actually worked in my profession in Australia. I worked in bookshops and tutoring maths (no one pays to have their children tutored in literature), but never in the humanities or the arts. Even though my first exhibition project – as a curatorial assistant

at the Hamburger Bahnhof in Berlin – was an Australian show, I feel challenged to make any meaningful comparison between Australia and Europe. The dichotomy of “old” and “new” is rather fraught considering Australia’s colonial history. To consider Australia a new continent belies the fact that Indigenous Australians have inhabited the land for over 50,000 years and have a very rich philosophical, artistic and scientific heritage. Perhaps it’s precisely this common misconception about old and new that has something to do with the difference between the two worlds. When I left Australia back in the late 1990s the main discursive difference between Australia and Europe was, in fact, the focus on postcolonial theory. I remember when my German partner, who had spent some time in Australia, submitted his masters thesis on Christa Wolf’s novel *Medea*, explored from a postcolonial standpoint, his German professors were quite excited by what to them was a theoretical novelty. Now it would be commonplace.

That’s not to say that Australia was, or is, any closer than other postcolonial – or post-totalitarian – societies to resolving or reconciling the injustices brought about by repressive regimes and perpetuated by people still bound up in their legacies. Rather, it’s just to point out that the pertinence of post-colonial theory to politics and social enquiry caught people’s attention much earlier where I grew up.

I guess the fact that you hear so many Australian accents around Berlin suggests that the city is offering something that people from Australia can’t find at home. Most of the people I know from Australia working in the arts in northern Europe have difficulty pinpointing exactly what it is that makes them stay for years despite the cold, grey winters. If there’s one common denominator it’s the vast and relatively well-funded cultural and academic landscape to be found in many parts of Europe, Germany being one of them. Australia has a much smaller population. It’s geographically remote. So, for all the good museums and institutions, biennials and triennials you might find there, there are still notably fewer opportunities to find work. That said, Europe is, as we know, an extraordinarily diverse place. You only need to consider the divergent perspectives of the countries in the Western Balkans to recall how difficult it is to generalise.

**Mira Gakjina:** Your doctoral dissertation concerns itself with the oeuvre of Hans Magnus Enzensberger. Within our territory he is known as the laureate of the International poetry festival “Struga Poetry Evenings” in 1980 Tito’s Yugoslavia. Do you see a link between poetry and visual art, particularly nowadays when language is crucial to contemporary visual art?

**Catherine Nichols:** If there weren’t such a strong link between poetry and visual art, I don’t think I could have found my way into working as a curator and maybe I wouldn’t love working in this field as much as I do. Certainly, language plays an overtly important role in contemporary art, as has been the

case in many of the artistic movements throughout the twentieth century from Dada and Surrealism to Serial and Conceptual Art, from Fluxus to Art and Language, to name only a few obvious examples. For me, the most pertinent correlation between poetry and visual art or indeed between poetry and exhibition-making is the device of estrangement or defamiliarisation, to cite the Russian Formalist theorist Victor Shklovsky, that is common to both. When I think of linking two objects, figures, forms or associative entities of some kind together in space, the first thing that comes to mind is the dynamic poetic space that opened up for me in my engagement with modern poetry, especially with Stéphane Mallarmé and with concrete poetry: semantic units come into contact with one another, with the white page, with their own sound and shape and the sound and shape of other words, whether sensical or nonsensical. The appearance and positioning of the words are as essential as their meaning. The eye teams up with the ear and the mouth to form the syllables and with the inner ear, as it were, to “read” the score-like textual entities into being. Applied to the spatio-temporal experience of an exhibition, which is realised by numerous actors, the audience cannot but perceive the act of perceiving as a sensory, creative event that, to cite Shklovsky again, “awakens” the “mind’s attention from the lethargy of custom”.

**Mira Gakjina:** The term “art of the 21st century” is gaining momentum, evident in the opening of a Museum in Rome under that name. Could you compare the art of the last 20 years to its predecessor?

**Catherine Nichols:** I always struggle with broad historical comparisons. How do we summarise with any accuracy the art of the last twenty years, how do we group together the art of the twentieth century in a manner that opens rather than closes possibilities for thought? Having learned a lot from the experiences of my colleagues both at the Hamburger Bahnhof in Berlin and the Kunstsammlung Nordrhein-Westfalen in Düsseldorf, as they took on the challenge of rethinking twentieth-century art histories through a lens less Eurocentric as part of Museum Global, a three-year collaborative research and exhibition project, I’m even more reluctant to speak of twentieth-century art in any monolithic sense. I would feel more comfortable in making a few observations. I’ve noticed, for example, that in the last twenty years there’s been a decline in appreciation for self-referential forms of art; that the growing sense of environmental and social crisis and the fragility of civility have lent renewed relevance to socially and politically engaged practices; that collective work is more and more often favoured over heroic monumentality; that art galleries and museums all over the world are going to considerable lengths not to repeat the same hegemonic gestures that silenced vast numbers of artists – and made their collections lopsided and substantially less interesting than they could be. Obviously, many of these developments are rooted in the previous century.

**EXPERIMENTAL  
ARCHITECTONIC  
STRUCTURES  
AND  
DEVICES**

**Kim Skjoldager-Nielsen**

# It takes a Village and The Experimental

## field – researcher/performer's reflections

This essay, concerning the exhibition '*The Experimental field*', and the performance '*It takes a Village*', reflects on the experiential combination of an immersive, interactive performance in an art exhibition at Stockholm University's Accelerator exhibition hall during the Covid-19 pandemic. In this essay, I particularly focus on the performance art from my own researcher-performer's point of view from within the work. *It takes a village* ran on-line in the spring of 2021, using the Zoom platform and then, in the fall of same year, it moved on-site. I argue that the performance opened an integrated artistic gap for critical reflection in the space of the surrounding exhibition '*The Experimental field*'. The purpose of the performance was to critically create a place of care for human conversation and sharing of lived experience.

**Providing a rare place for the human to be truly listened to how the visitor encounters the Council in the installation**

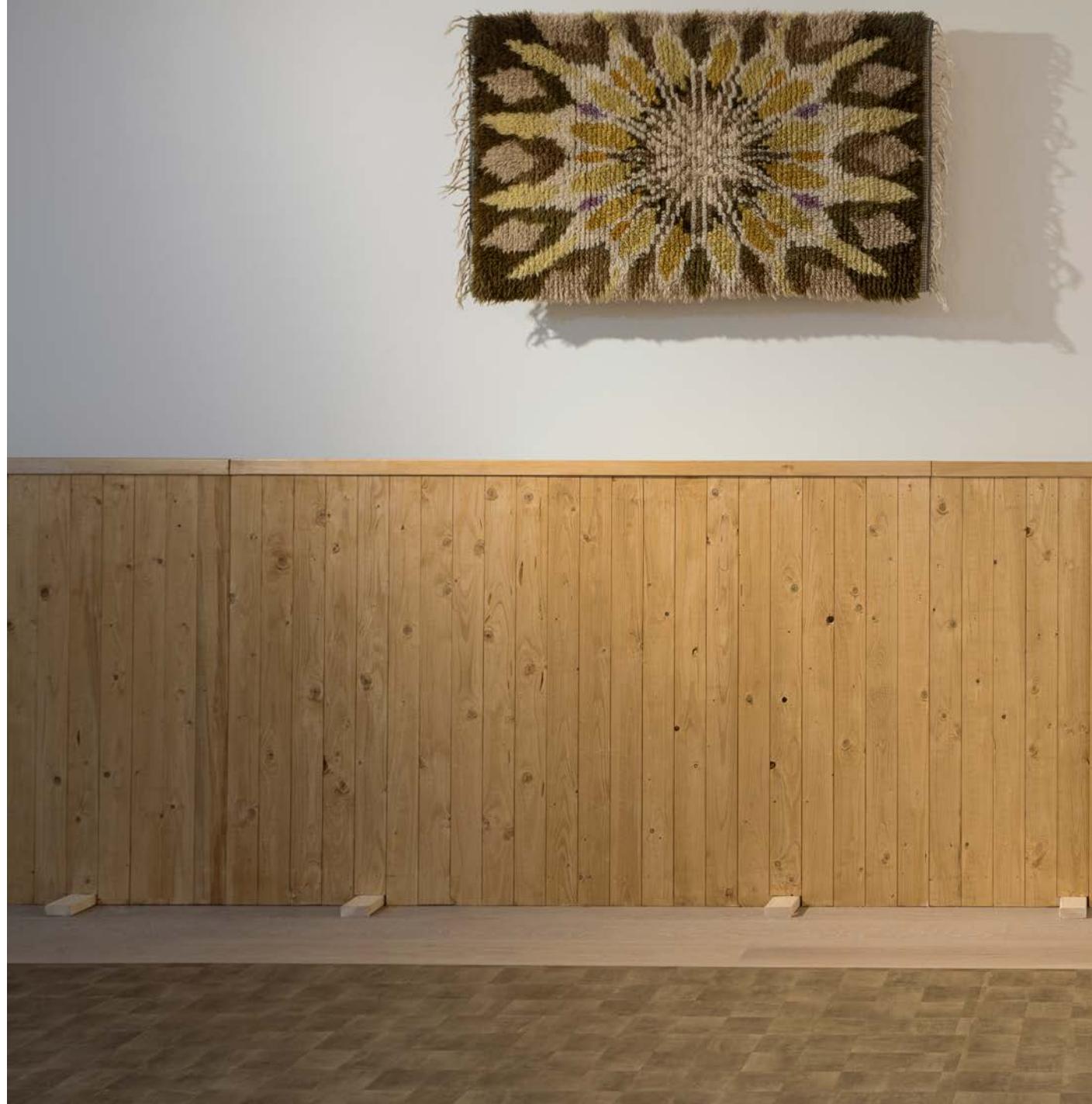
The performance consisted of individual meetings with the Community Council, where each visitor could ask for advice on matters, which were important to them. The number of meetings was limited to 202. Each visitor signed up for the meeting through an online form and then waited for an invitation. The meeting was structured over a very formal agenda, which gave direction and ritual safety to the conversation. After the visitor presented their problem, the Council offered them advice or statements, when advice was not wanted. The concerns that visitors presented to the Council were wide in range, such as personal dilemmas and profound, existential questions often involving the spiritual; but also questions about how to talk to others about the immense ecological/climate crisis we find ourselves in the midst of (of which the pandemic is just one symptom).

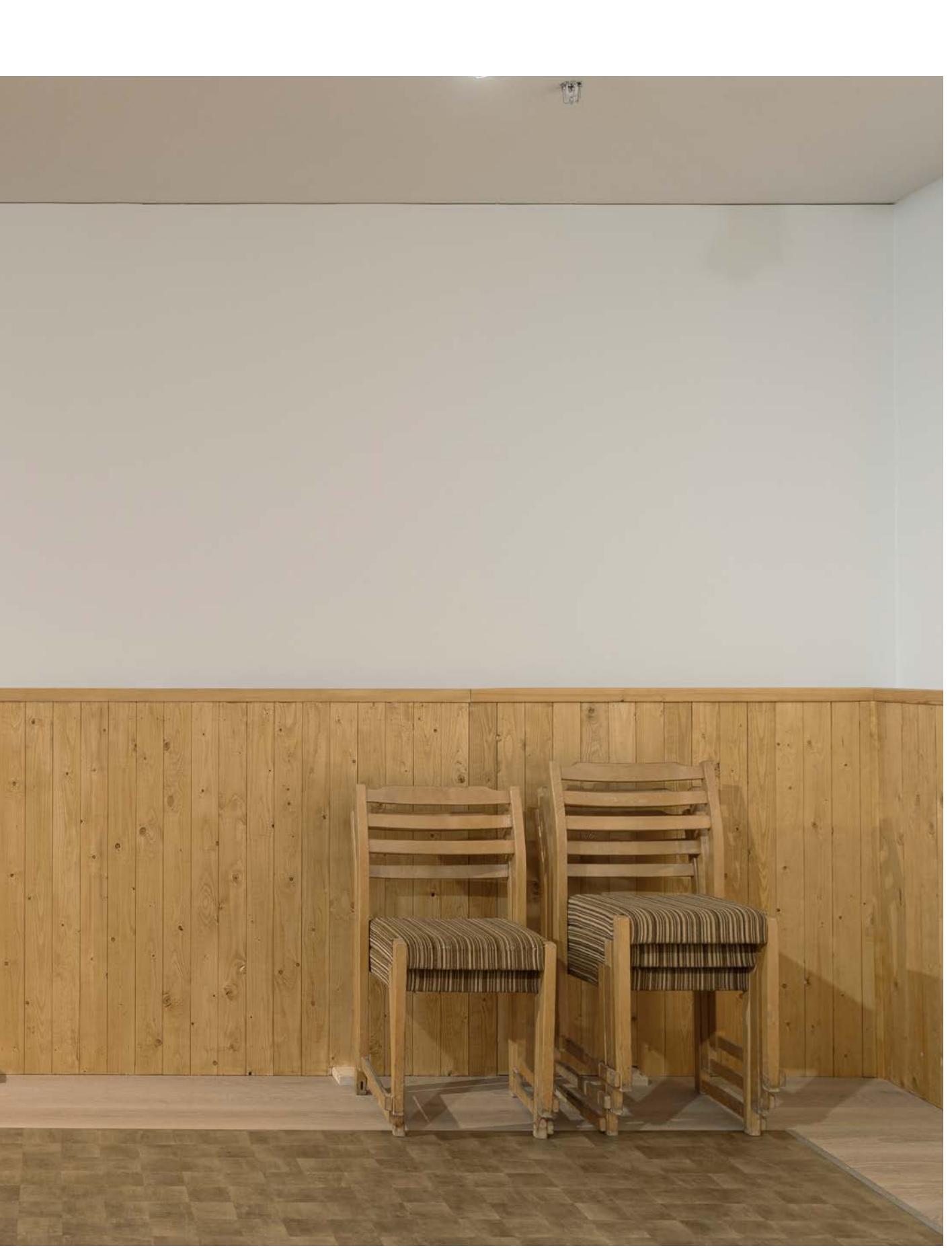
'*It takes a village*' can be seen as a critical comment on the exclusion of lived experience as a form of epistemol-















ogy, which has been ignored for far too long by science (even by the humanities), in the name of striving for objectivity and rationality, i.e., cornerstones of modernity. However, 'It takes a village' asks the audience to reflect on what people's real concerns are and, therefore, what should be important to society and its governing bodies.

#### **The common frame of the two stagings of the performance: the on-line and the on-site versions**

When the covid-19 pandemic delayed the performance, the artists decided to open with a Zoom-based version, hoping to change back to the original on-site concept when it was safe. Both the on-line and on-site versions involved the visitor in encountering three Community Council members from in the exhibition hall of Accelerator<sup>1</sup>.

202 Swedish inhabitants were invited to bring their concerns to the Community Council, whose only shared feature was the fact that they had gone through life-changing experiences. The visitors were randomly picked for a meeting and received a phone call with a suggested date and time during weekend opening hours to come to the exhibition and meet the Community Council. When they arrived, they were directed to a clinically white waiting room featuring white benches along the walls, facing a reception desk. This setting was designed to be reminiscent of a dental clinic or the like. In the waiting room, the visitors met a receptionist, who greeted and prepared them for what would happen in the meeting. The walls were adorned with a black number display, indicating the next one in line to meet the Council. Behind a mysterious double door, which eventually opened, was a wooden paneled meeting room featuring a 1970s-designed table and chairs with green and beige upholstery. During on-line performances, the visitor was alone in the room and met the Council through the large screen. When the performance moved on-site, the Council met the visitor in person in the meeting room.



After the agenda of the meeting was presented by the Council to the visitors, they were invited to put their concerns in their own words. After that, the Council asked necessary questions, which allowed them to understand the particular concern better and to build a relationship with the visitor. When everything was clear, the Council announced an intermission, during which they left to deliberate on what had been presented to them, while the visitor was served fika<sup>2</sup>. Behind closed doors (or with their screens turned off in the online version), the Council deliberated on the matter and decided on a piece of advice or statements from individual Council members, based on personal experience relating to the visitor's concern. Many meetings became emotionally charged due to the profound subject matter, but they were always handled by the council members with great care and kindness to maintain trust and reciprocity.

Upon leaving, most visitors expressed deep gratitude that they had been listened to and had been taken seriously by strangers. This is not something to be taken for granted in today's Western societies, as many visitors remarked to those of us, who performed in the installation. Such comments gave me and my co-performers a sense of doing something very meaningful in our troubled times.

### The exhibition context

'The experimental field' exhibition has a historical reference as it was held in the area of the campus which served as a scientific experimental station for developing agriculture in Sweden. It was established in 1840 and continued as such till the 1960s. Parts of the exhibition document this past with maps and drawings, as well as photos showing existing buildings from this period, still used by the Stockholm University today. But, in the exhibition were also art works, installations and sculptures dealing with ecology and recycling, such as a shamanic shrine made of the bones of unnamed sea creatures – a future memorial for life lost, or makeshift sheds for living in the desert made of discarded material and parts.

In particular, one picture from the 1930s became particularly relevant for my interpretation of the performance. It showed an agricultural researcher spraying a field with some form of pesticide. It made it evident for me that even in the historical fabric of the university are the roots of the ecological crisis we are experiencing today. The fact that so many of us feel alone, not listened to; that so many find it difficult to talk about matters that are important to us, is not (or it should not be) a new normal. It is a new symptom of the underlying mega-crisis; the end-product of modernity, which grows more and more evident all the time, in the form of the breakdown of climate systems, eco-systems, and mass extinction.

#### References:

1 Accelerator is placed in a decommissioned particle physics laboratory, now located in the humanities campus of Stockholm University.

2 A Swedish for a break, usually for coffee and cookies.

**Yane Calovski and Hristina Ivanoska**

# Oskar Hansen's MoMA: The Instrument

**(or, a Museum That Could Not Be)**

*Tihomir Topuzovski: A note on Calovski and Ivanoska's project*

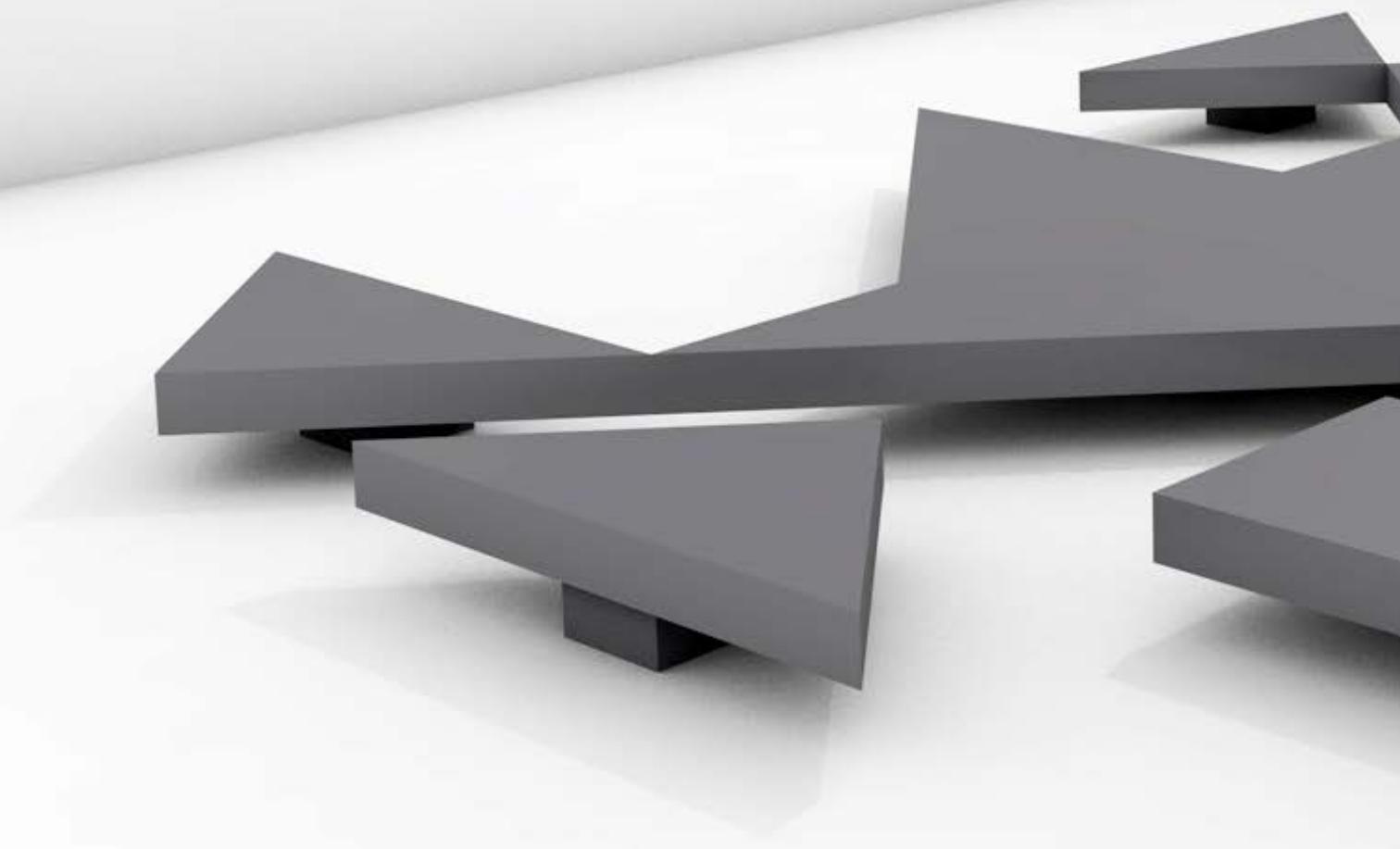
*An instrument is always designed to examine phenomena experimentally, in specifying the instrument architectonically, in the context of the museum, it is important to think of it in a different form, more experimental, less architecturally and conventionally structured. So what does this discussion about instruments mean for the role of museums in representing or engaging their audiences in the time we are living through, facing the reality of political turmoil and crisis, where a growing number of people have been forced to leave their homes, or are exposed to various forms of exploitation, and the complexities of environmental challenges and climate changes. Quite simply, beyond conventional debates about curatorial practice, museum space, exhibitions, collections and audiences, this raises question concerning the role of Museums in an era of the reality. It offers opportunities to reframe our normative architectonic traditions through a new set of concepts and methodologies.*

*The project of Yane Calovski and Hristina Ivanoska is paradigmatic, creating an instrument through which the museum can be rethought. One of the main outcomes of their project is the 'The Instrument (or, a Museum That Could Not Be)', which examines the utopian, imaginative aspect of the relationship between artistic and curatorial research, on the one hand, and socio-cultural context on the other. This approach demonstrates their ability to form a nexus while simultaneously providing a recognizable focus on an important range of aspects and an open platform for public discourse about the role of the museum today. In addition, as noted above, 'the instrument' also implies imagination about what it might be possible to do, not as a place or destination but the museum as a process or direction. Thus, the instrument can be used as an effective means to critique the museum as it is, and also to imagine the museum as it could be. This dialectic between the "Museum that Could Not Be" and the museum as it could be creates an interesting space for interpreting social, political, cultural contexts, without closing down the free space, or it uses imagination to exceeds conventional architectonic frameworks.*

*The work of Yane Calovski and Hristina Ivanoska is entirely consistent with Hansen's views, particularly with the unbuilt design for the Museum of Contemporary Art in Skopje. Starting from their ongoing research, we need to recognize 'the instrument' as a tool to open up museum spaces to engage and respond to the complexity of our present context.*



"Horizontal Verticals, Fraction", work in progress, digital drawing, 2020. Collaborator: Ivan Peshevski. Courtesy the artists.



"Horizontal Verticals, Fraction", work in progress, digital drawing, 2020. Collaborator: Ivan Peshevski. Courtesy the artists.



*"How can we have a say in the conversation about the future of museums? How can museums become even more democratic and responsible models of governance? How can we actually "build" a museum? How can museums use their own design as a provocation? Can a utopian non-building serve as an instrument in this moment of collective awakening over the state of our public institutions, or our societies? How can we – as artists and constituents of art in a wider sense – use our curiosity, but also our hard-won organizational know-how, to make our institutional ideas operational on a larger public stage? How can museums expand the constituency of art and form a new understanding of exhibition-making as a collective shape-shifting process?" These are some of the questions that Yane Calovski and Hristina Ivanoska are asking in their multi-layered collaborative project "Oskar Hansen's MoMA: The Instrument (or, a Museum That Could Not Be)."*

Initiated in 2005, the project examines the conceptual elasticity of archives and the methodological ongoingness of artistic research. Inspired by the instability and mutability integral to Hansen's "Process and Art" (1966), an unbuilt proposal for the Museum of Contemporary Art in Skopje (co-authored with Svein Hatløy, Barbara Cybulski, Lars Fasting and Jerzy Dowgialło), and the intuitive and socio-politically charged "Open Form" theory<sup>1</sup>, the latest chapter of their research questions the applicability of speculative design through usable digital and analog tools and production methodologies. Furthermore, Ivanoska and Calovski's research incorporates reorganization and adaptation of value systems and attribution of ideas that provoke dialogues. In that sense, "Oskar Hansen's MoMA: The Instrument (or, a Museum That Could Not Be)" examines the applicability of creative and theoretical output for a wider audience by looking into the relationship between artistic and curatorial research, on the one hand, and socio-cultural activism and observation of the institutional, cultural system, on the other.

The project aims to generate curatorial and editorial processes both physically and virtually through the digital platform ohmoma.org, one of the first outcomes of Ivanoska's and Calovski's research process. Developed in collaboration with Interdisciplinary Design Studio "Pillow Talks", the platform attempts to come to terms with the unbuildable but plausible museum in the context of the current socio-political, economic and cultural context.

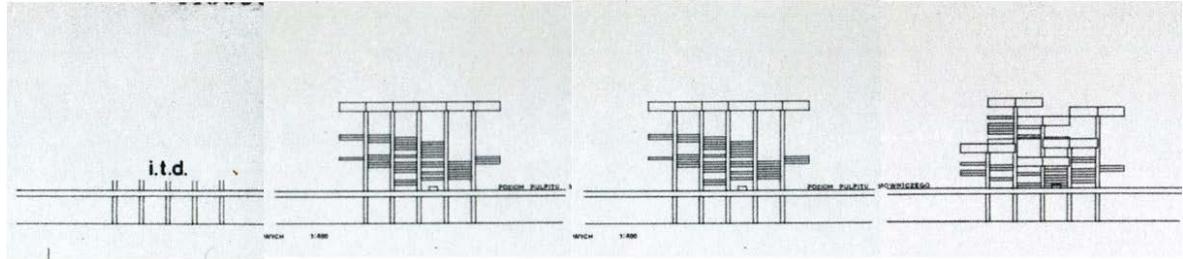
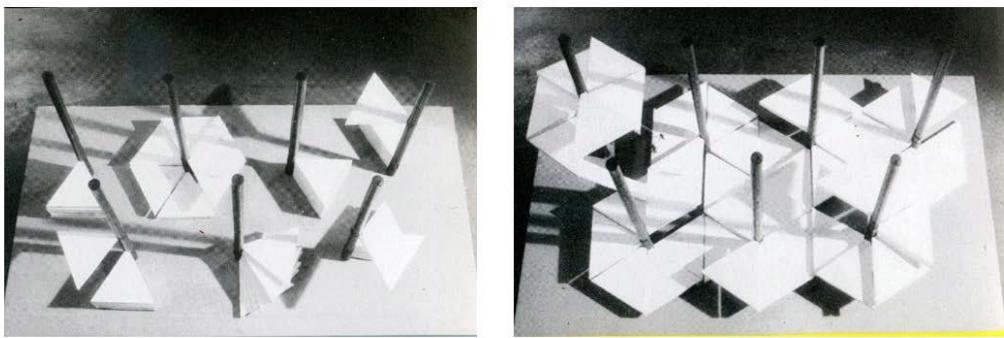
#### **Artist's Statement**

The story begins with the earthquake that devastated Skopje, Macedonia, on July 26th, 1963. In the outpouring of international solidarity and support that followed, an architectural competition for the design of a museum of modern art was launched. It was made possible through a donation by the Polish Government to the city and a number of Polish-based architects were invited to contribute proposals for an art institution meant to become a symbol of the city's "immortality."

One of the proposals was submitted by Oskar Hansen. Born in Helsinki in 1922, but living and working in Poland, he was considered a visionary of his generation. He proposed a museum as a transformable exhibition space, with hexagonal spatial elements mounted on hydraulically powered rotating telescopes. The structure could be expanded and contracted horizontally and vertically at the same time.

For us, "Oskar Hansen's MoMA: The Instrument (Or, the Museum that Could Not be)" is a collaborative and artistic research project which goes beyond a single discipline, materiality, and processes of production. It brings together architectural concepts, creative methodologies, and different possibilities for human engagement in assessing the theoretical aspects of creating a contemporary art museum.

As with many of our collaborations since 2000, this project animates multilayered conceptual possibilities inspired by how we align ourselves with unresolved histories and the opportunity to take action in the present. Our research methodology is best described as an experimental process almost always situated beyond a specific discipline or mode of production.



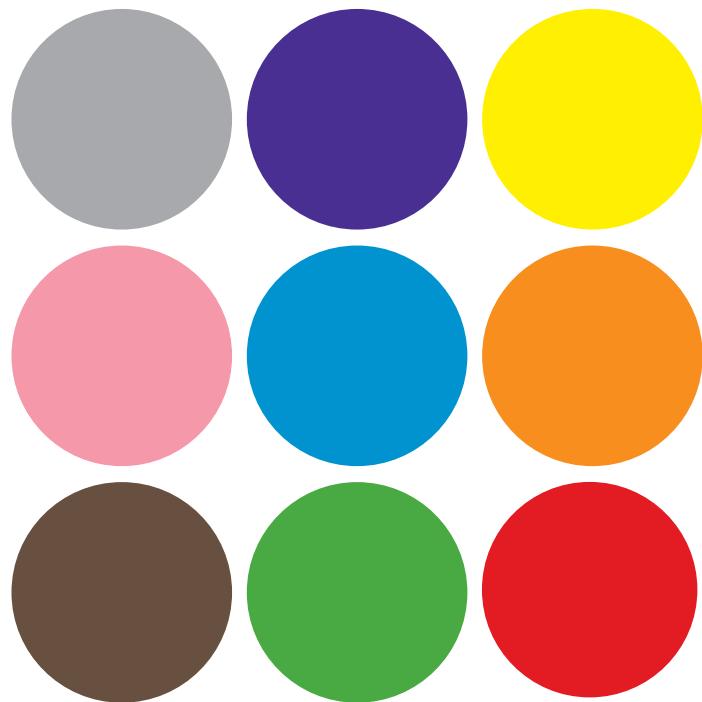
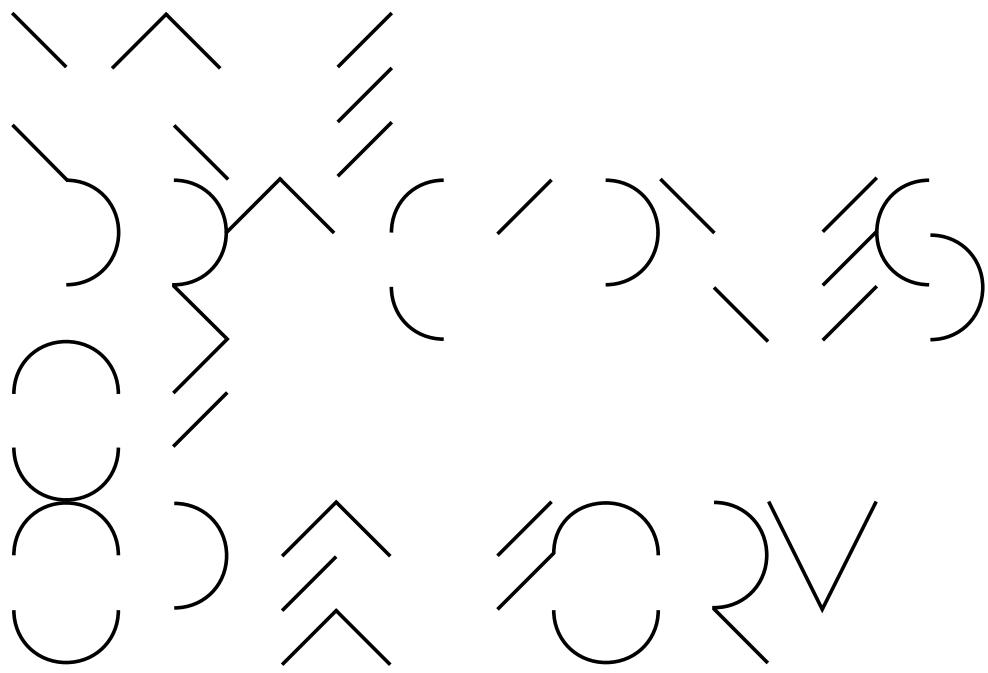
One of the primary source materials in our proposed project is Hansen's original proposal titled "Process and Art" (1966).

Our research into Oskar Hansen dates back to 2005 when we invited Polish curator Sebastian Cichocki to Skopje as the first guest curator at Press to Exit's Visiting Curatorial Initiative. Among other things, he brought a print-out of Hansen's entire Skopje proposal, with his personal approval that it be reintroduced to the city after almost 40 years.<sup>2</sup> Inspired by the potential of this material, we initiated a new research project into ways of "building a museum": a hypothetical exhibition program of content curated through the lens of artistic subjectivity. The series of 12 digital graphic works published in our book *Oskar Hansen's Museum of Modern Art* (Kronika, 2007), attempts to answer our own initial questions. How can we imagine exhibitions for a museum that never existed? What kind of curatorial strategies would have been enforced by the reality of a "foldaway museum"? What kind of art would have been exhibited? What would such a radical design for a museum in Skopje have meant in the larger international context?

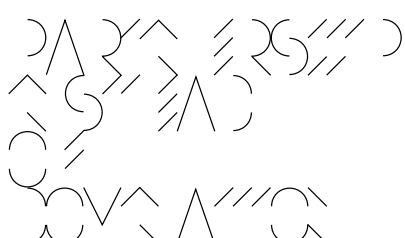
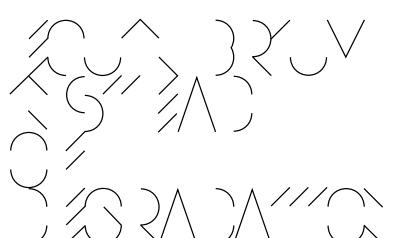
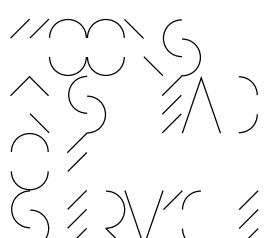
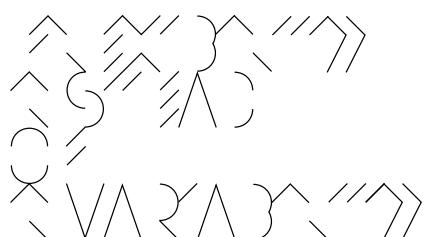
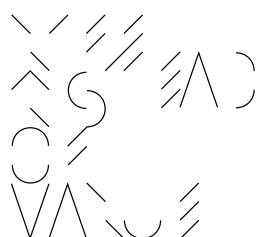
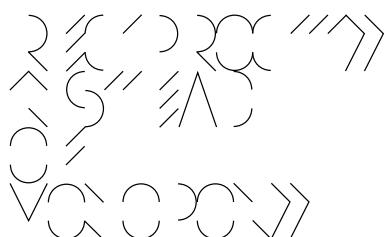
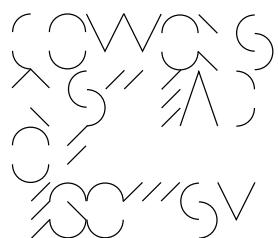
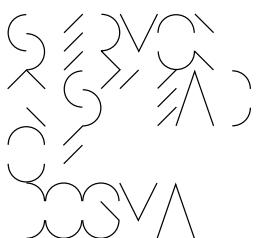
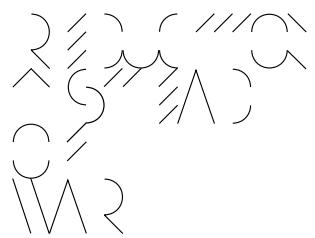
Hansen managed to draft a vision for a contemporary (modern) art museum by effectively eliminating the Euclidian cuboid building in favor of an experimental elongated structure. He drafted the museum's substantial horizontal network, including a research lab, a corridor gallery, and a vertical set of ever-evolving hexagonal umbrella-like exhibition platforms powered by hydraulic pipes. This visual and structural change is an essential element in the design that we have adapted in the integrated digital platform ohmoma.org, one of the proposed outcomes of our project.

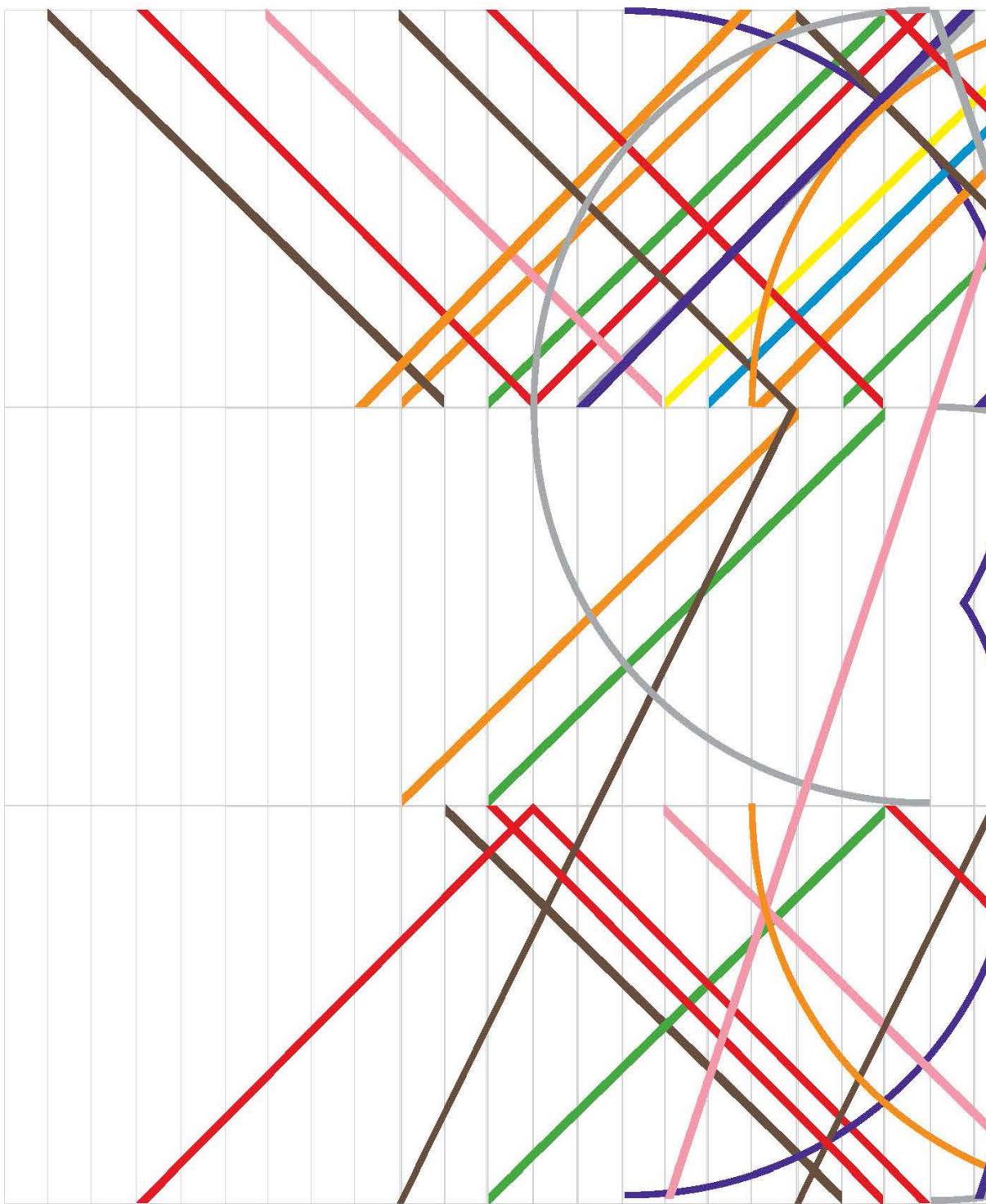
Concerning the Skopje proposal, Hansen envisioned "a transformable structure, electronically controlled by the artist, emerging from underground in the shape of mobile trapezoidal supports lifted by telescopic poles." For him, the form, which followed the idea of a modular repeated fan, made it possible to obtain space combining hyperbolic and non-Euclidean geometry. The result was an "open modular structure" that created, or rather provoked, a growth in space." In Hansen's proposal, the paradoxical "openness" of closed and defined forms was addressed through "better adaptation of space to the changing needs of a person". In an interview titled "Pragmatism of Utopia" published in the monthly magazine "Architektura" (Warsaw, no. 3/4, 1977), Hansen explained why moving away from the cuboid building was a necessity for him. He stated: "One of the criteria for assessing progress in creativity based on the idea of an Open Form is the increasingly better adaptation of space to the changing needs of a person. In Skopje, we

Archive images of Oskar Hansen's Process and Art, 1966, co-authored with Svein Hatlø, Barbara Cybulska, Lars Fasting, and Jerzy Dowgiallo (scans of the only photographs of the model and the technical drawings of the original proposal). Courtesy Oskar Hansen Archive.

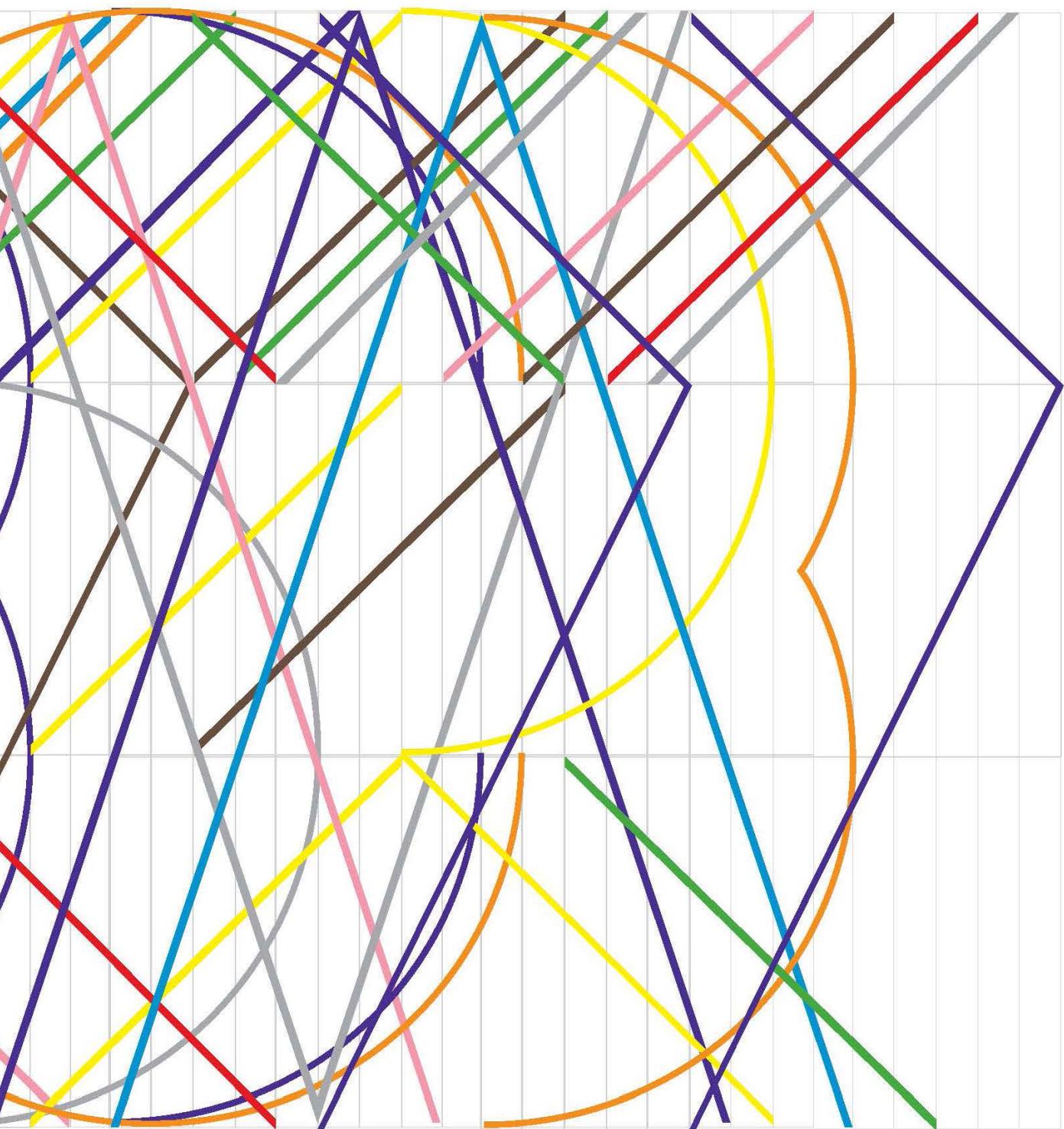


Nine Principles of Open Form, 10 ink-jet prints on acid-free paper, edition of 10 + 2 AP, 2018-19. Collaborator: Iliana Petrushevska. Courtesy the artists

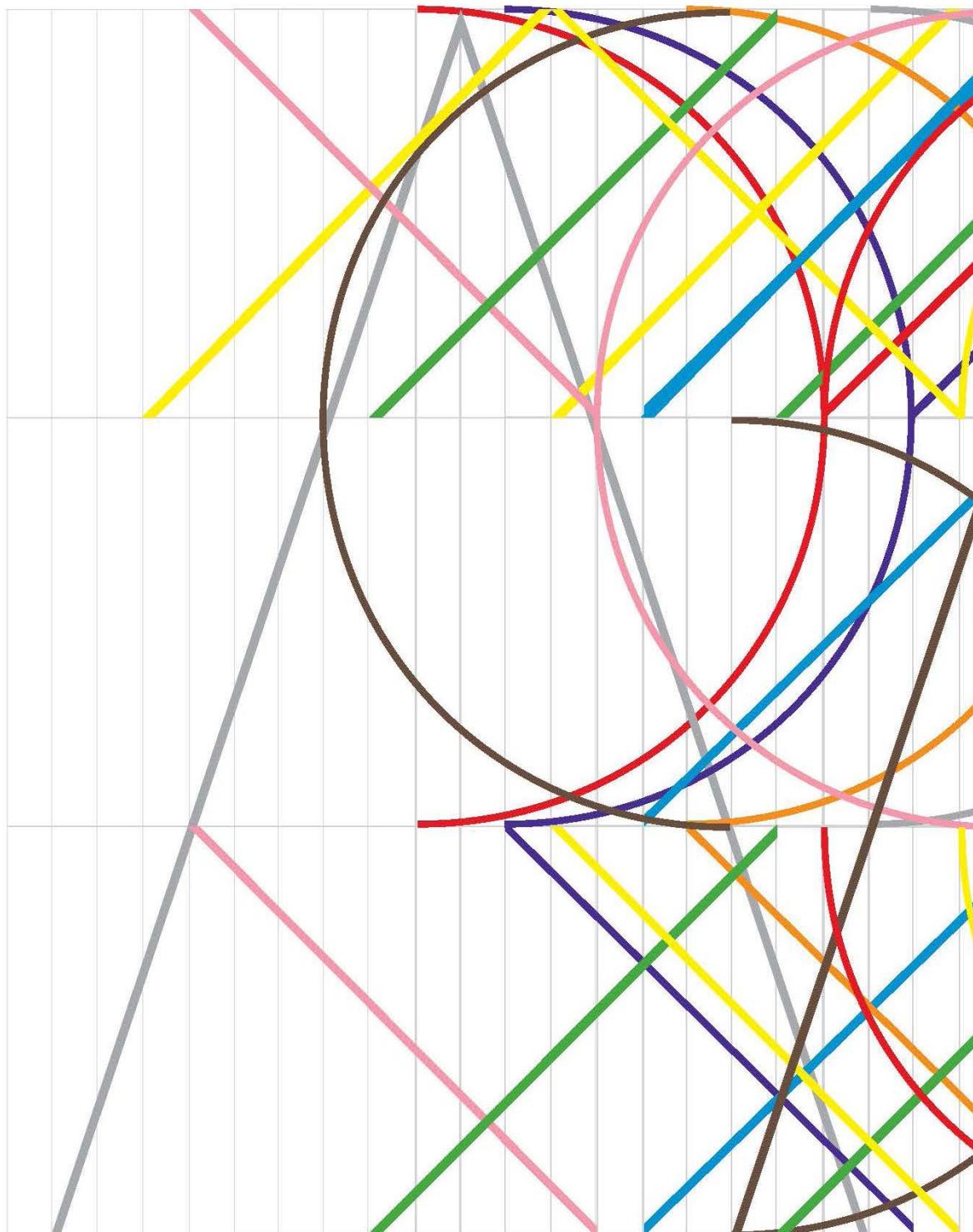




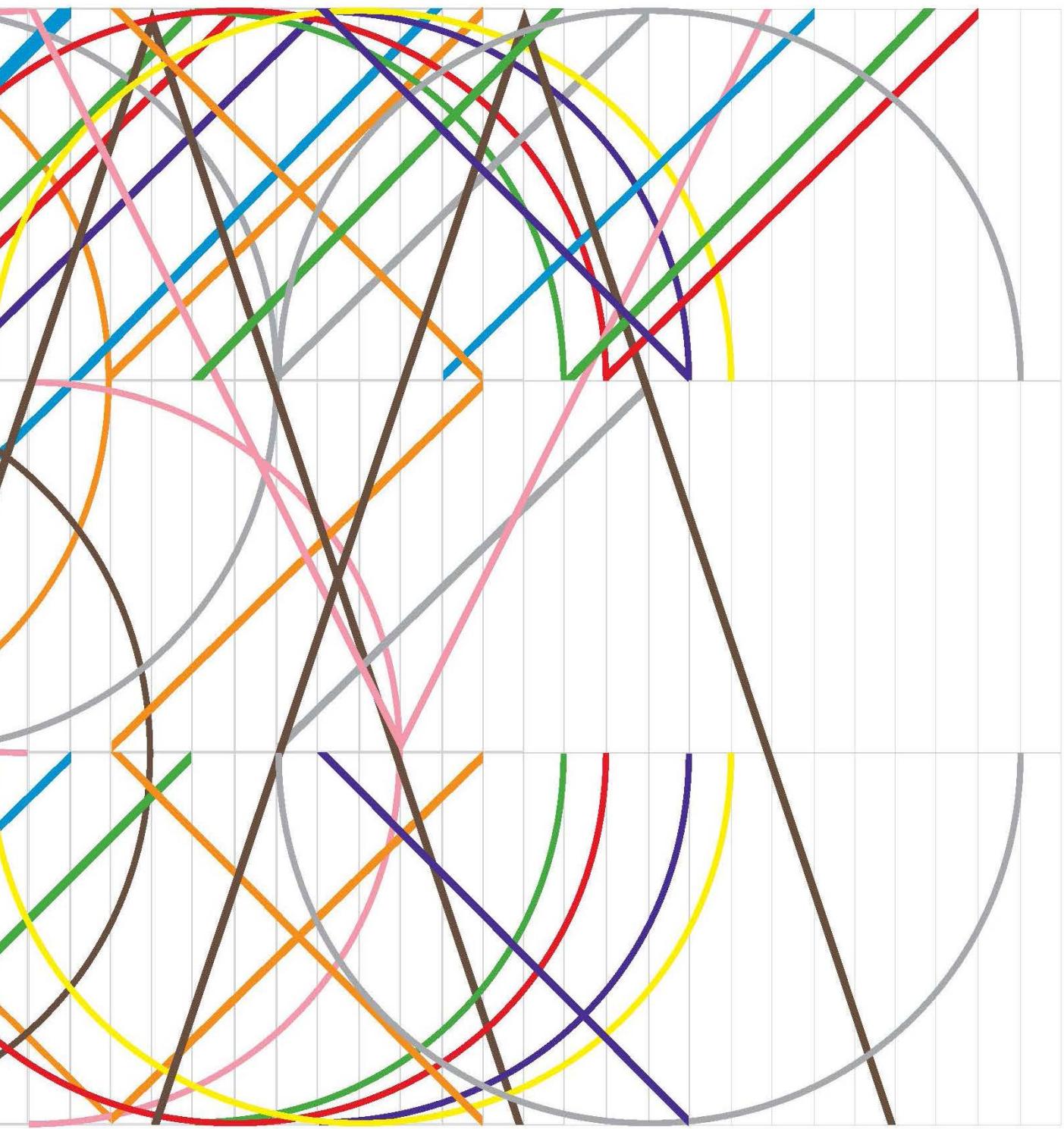
Flexibility instead of Invariability



Flexibility instead of Invariability, graphic application of Archetype Open Form over text and color coding of the Linear Continuous System (LCS), Nine Principles of Open Form , 2021. Collaborator: Iliana Petrushevskaya. Courtesy the artists.



Partnership instead of Domination



Partnership instead of Domination, graphic application of Archetype Open Form over text and color coding of the Linear Continuous System (LCS), Nine Principles of Open Form , 2021. Collaborator: Iliana Petrushevskaya. Courtesy the artists.

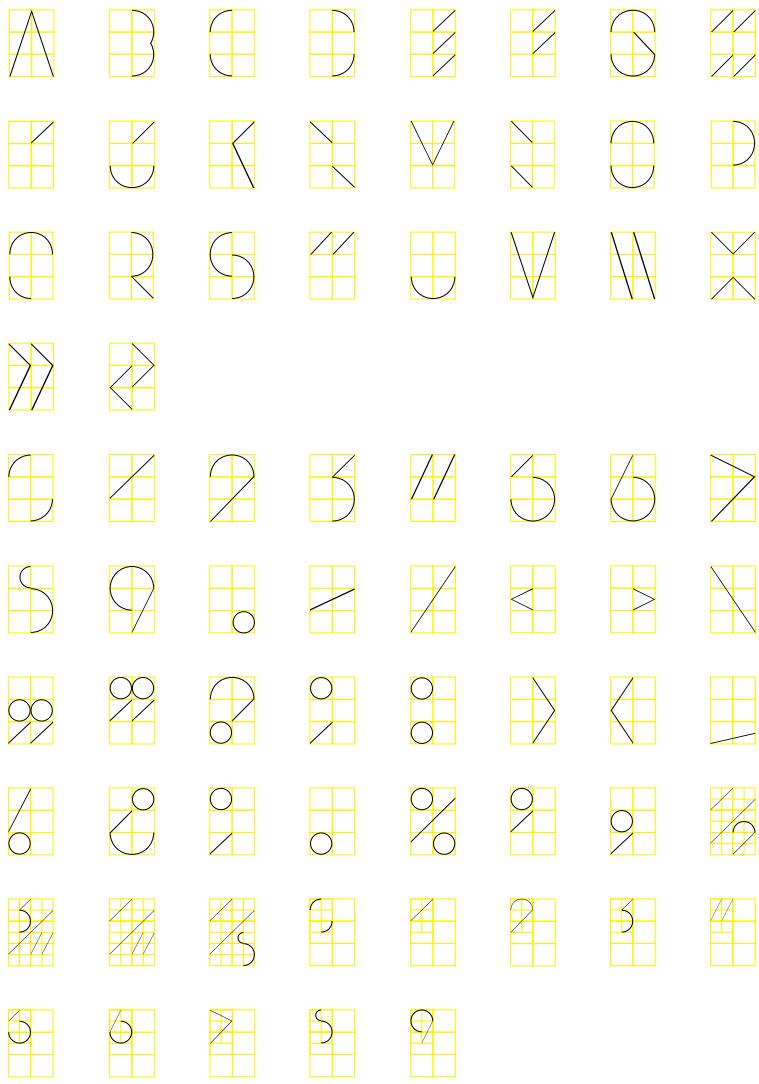
managed – theoretically, of course, because we didn't do it, to eliminate the building. It seemed to us that the housing of art is a form that supports art, and it should be transformable in its entire structure, depending on its content. We wanted the artist to be able to program the bodywork where he needed a closure, an opening, etc. So, it could not be a building, but rather an instrument." The site of Hansen's original proposal is also interesting. The old city of Skopje was, and still is, a multiethnic neighborhood of Skopje, where Muslim, Orthodox and Roma communities coexist. This is important as Hansen always considers the immediate surrounding as part of the process of using and implementing the structure. In this case, the immediate communities could also be involved in the process of 'transforming' the building, or better yet, curating the 'meaning' of the museum.

While augmenting the potential of speculative design, we have constructed our artistic research methodology in the context of socio-political performativity. Derrida's concept of the incomplete (transient) notion of reality based on the individual's subjective perception has been essential as a theoretical framework of our confluent and process-oriented collaborative practice. We have known, examined, and discussed the potential of Hansen's museum design for Skopje for the last 15 years. Our friend and curator, Sebastian Cichocki, was the first to contact Hansen and informed him of our invitation to visit to us in Skopje. We discussed the opportunity to develop a work that will address the "physically impossible but conceptually real"<sup>13</sup> essence of his proposal. In the publication focused on our first work, "Oskar Hansen's Museum of Modern Art" (ed. Sebastian Cichocki, Hristina Ivanoska, Yane Calovski, 2007), curator Elena Filipovic called our take on Hansen's conditional-perfect museum "a workable model of a building constructed through a hypothetical exhibition program." In our proposal, Hansen's utopian vision becomes a deliberate "counter-proposal" to traditional museum forms. Our initial research had one central question at its core: What kind of artistic and curatorial strategies would have been enforced by the reality of a "foldaway museum"? We curated a very subjective set of graphic works and texts that functioned as a hypothetical program for the hexagonal platform, including authors such as Ad Rainhard, Paul Thek, Ana Mendieta, Susan Sontag, Mladen Stilinovic, Dushan Perchinkov, and Agnieszka Kurant.

As with many of our research-based works, we kept on revisiting Hansen's material and looking deeper into the instability and mutability of the proposed architecture. As Open Form would suggest, the curatorial process has to be integral in the proposed building process. This was our revelation - Hansen wanted the artist to program the transient notion of the museum, which is continually performing itself by not being a building, but rather an instrument.

The interface design of the site follows the image/sketch for the original model and drawings of the elevations of Hansen's museum proposal. It features the hydraulically powered poles that support the folding and unfolding of the spatial planes, suggesting a level of performativity in navigating and interconnecting

Archetype Open Form, typography, technical development of the Latin (English) letters, punctuations marks, symbols and numbers, 2021. Collaborators: Iliana Petrushevska, Nebojsa Gelevski – Bane. Courtesy the artists.



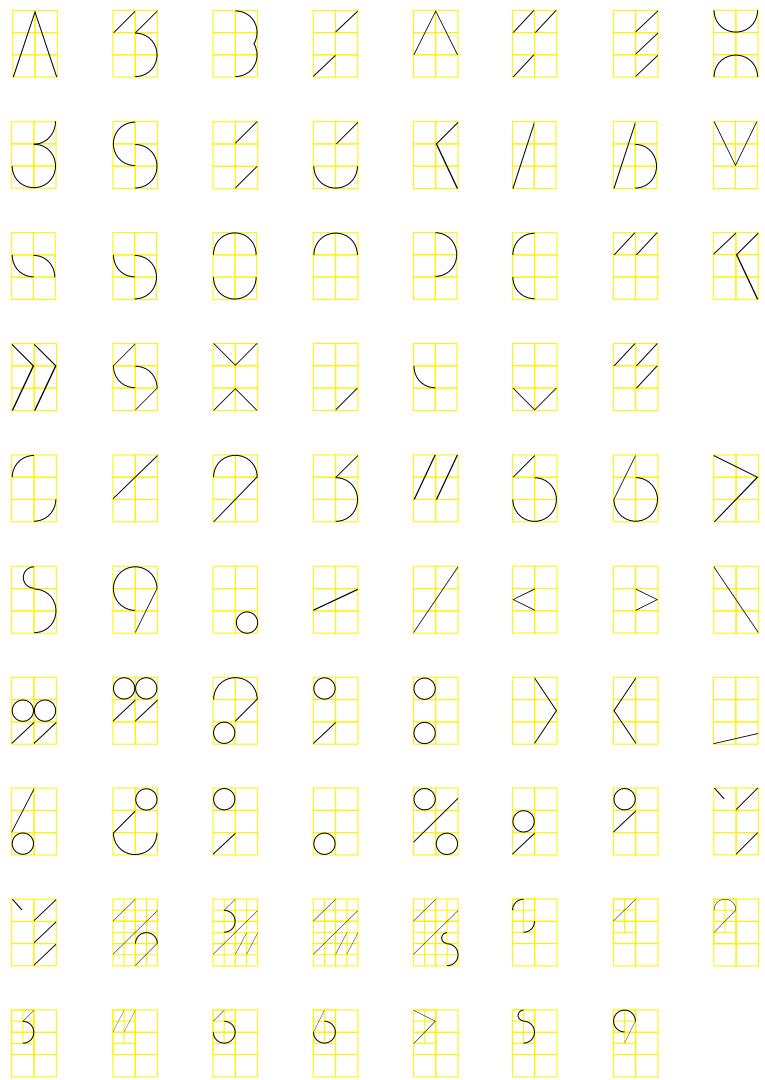
ideas with their spatial configuration. In such case, the visitor can move up and down the landscape of hexagonal spaces. By experiencing the spatial orientation of the original design, in theory, the movement articulates the individual experience of the content. However, this articulation does not mean changing or influencing the content displayed. The digital platform aims to replicate the architecture and display the curatorial content while archiving and distributing ideas of how space and our perception of interactivity and control shift and change.

This significant shift in our perception of his proposal would not have been possible if not for a funded research residency at the Hyde Park Art Center in Chicago in 2018 where we focused on the theory of Open Form. We realized that we could formulate nine principles out of the concept of re-engagement of the viewer with the social parameters of participation, process, and change of hierarchy. The principles that emerged are 1. Reduction instead of War; 2. Sermon instead of Dogma; 3. Commons instead of Egotism; 4. Reciprocity instead of Monopoly; 5. Life instead of Value; 6. Flexibility instead of Invariability; 7. Tools instead of Service; 8. Equilibrium instead of Degradation; 9. Partnership instead of Domination. This realization, along with the notions of fragmentation, discontinuity, contingency, diversity, consistency, and association, helps us to imagine a way forward in readdressing the unbuilt museum as an instrument of the common good and a virtual site of continuous becoming: an extra-temporal platform that lies between past and present, imagination and empiricism.

The initial result led to drafting a typographic work titled "Archetype Open Form" (2016–ongoing). Inspired by Josef Albers's typeface "Archetype Albers" (1926–1931), Ivanoska erased all vertical and horizontal lines while keeping only the diagonals, circles, and semicircles. This erasure of the horizontal and vertical lines challenges the visibility and legibility of the letters' architectural form and their function as primary tools for reading. Initially applied within the print edition "Nine Principles of Open Form" (2018–19), this modus of adjusting our writing and reading habits helps to operationalize the design and curation of digital/modular architectural structures.

Essential to the way our research has evolved throughout the years has been our communication with Hansen's estate. Currently, we are studying additional archival content, and as a result, we are conceptualizing an integrated digital model that will function as an experimental production space. Some of the critical questions that have emerged in our artistic research are: How can a museum expand the constituency of art and form a new understanding of exhibition-making as a collective intellectual shape-shifting process? How can we use our skill, curiosity, and hard-won organizational know-how, to influence the operational modus of institutional ideas on a more prominent public stage? Can a utopian non-building serve as an instrument in this moment of collective awakening (while experiencing a pandemic that will be long lasting) to influence the way our public institutions and our societies operate? Do we

Archetype Open Form, typography, technical development of the Cyrillic (Macedonian) letters, punctuations marks, symbols and numbers, 2021. Collaborators: Iliana Petrushevska, Nebojsa Gelevski – Bane. Courtesy the artists.



dare to build a museum today that will reflect this process of questioning?

The latest chapter of production in our project commenced in September 2020 when in the midst of the global pandemic we moved into a new studio on Karl-Marx Str. in Neuköln, Berlin. This move, which was as much mental as physical, allowed us to set up an operational site and initiated fresh critical dialogue with colleagues on how we could understand the potential of a digital museum design, based on a proposal initially conceptualized by Oskar Hansen. In the past months, we have managed to situate the proposal and do the necessary ground research and work to be in a position to move forward with the next stage of production and public presentations. It has been challenging to determine the methodology and foresee the phases of the project's production, how it is intended to perform and for whom, and at what scale or medium. However, we have passed the most challenging part of the initial period - the critical discussions and solidification of the concept. We have always worked this way, opening our research process to colleagues and relying on each other's camaraderie and solidarity to facilitate the ever-necessary critical self-reflection.

Once we make the prototype of the digital platform operation, we want to invite collaborators to produce new content from an artistic and curatorial perspective and articles that reflect on critical theory and philosophy, socio-cultural activism, and the relationship between art, society, and politics. The collaborations will hopefully lead to new studies considering multiple hypotheses surrounding the reading of art history, manifesting new views on historical analyses involving the documentation of Hansen's unrealized proposal and of the possible exhibition and lecture program. The first such invitee will be the Slovenian curator, Zdenka Badovinac, reflecting on the cryptic notion of the museum. This ongoing editorial process will be evident on ohmoma.org.

We always considered this research to remain open and receptive as our interest in Hansen's work, theories, and pedagogical tools has deepened over time. A better understanding of the collaborative and creative life-long dynamic between Oskar and Zofia (his wife, fellow architect, and collaborator) was fundamental, too. Our recent visit to their home in the village of Szumin has inspired our gradual return to the undeniable values in Hansen's work and philosophy and the main principles of Open Form.

Over past year, the research and production of our project has happened in the privacy of the studio environment. Despite the feeling that social change is moving very slowly, we have believed in our individual and collective perseverance and the conceptual and ethical strength of the project. The main questions that continue to reemerge are: can a utopian non-building serve as an instrument in the unprecedented current moment of collective awakening, and will the operation of our public institutions finally dislodge the "business as usual" concerning our social and political environment. We want to test the digital platform to search for ways to engage and contribute to the discussion.

To move museums away from the vested interest of donors and states and address systematic change benefiting collective needs and all those deserving recognition, we need to reconsider radical proposals. The art and cultural institutions that represent us need to become our instruments of change, our collective shield from retrograde politics. They need reconstituting as platforms (metaphorically and for real) raising new content for shared public consideration. We need to continue considering the speculative, unrealized, utopian proposals such as Hansen's that deserve some form of reactivation. The complexity of questioning and articulating the process does not provide easy answers. Instead, it challenges us to imagine and build a sense of diversity, community, and potentiality that dislodges and reactivates the institutional environments that enable critical exchange.

**References:**

1 "The Open Form, being the form of the sum of events—of the sum of individuals of a given group—should in consequence lead us to the expression of a group form. Taking into consideration the constantly broadening analyses of component elements, their mutual permission as well as the invisible structure of society, we approach the idea of complete, universal, whole, continuous space—space of a different psychology, a different and new morality." Oskar Hansen, Zofia Hansen, "The Open Form in Architecture – The Art of the Great Number," in Aleksandra Kędziora, Łukasz Ronduda (ed.), *Oskar Hansen: Opening Modernism. On Open Form Architecture, Art and Didactics* (Warsaw: Museum of Modern Art in Warsaw, 2014), pp. 7–9.

2 We introduced the print-out in an informal presentation at the current Museum of Contemporary Art (built upon a design of the winning competition entry by the Polish architectural group "The Tigers") and gifted the print-out to the collection. Since then, unfortunately, the large xerox print-out of Hansen's original drawings could not be located within the official archives of the Museum of Contemporary Art in Skopje.

3 "Imagining the Museum: Sebastian Cichocki talks to Hristina Ivanoska and Yane Calovski," in Sebastian Cichocki, Hristina Ivanoska and Yane Calovski (eds.), *Oskar Hansen's Museum of Modern Art* (Bytom/Skopje: Kronika, press to exit project space, 2007), p. 45.

# Retrospective exhibition of Jovan Sumkovski: Water / Wall

December 2020 - February 2021  
Museum of Contemporary Art, Skopje

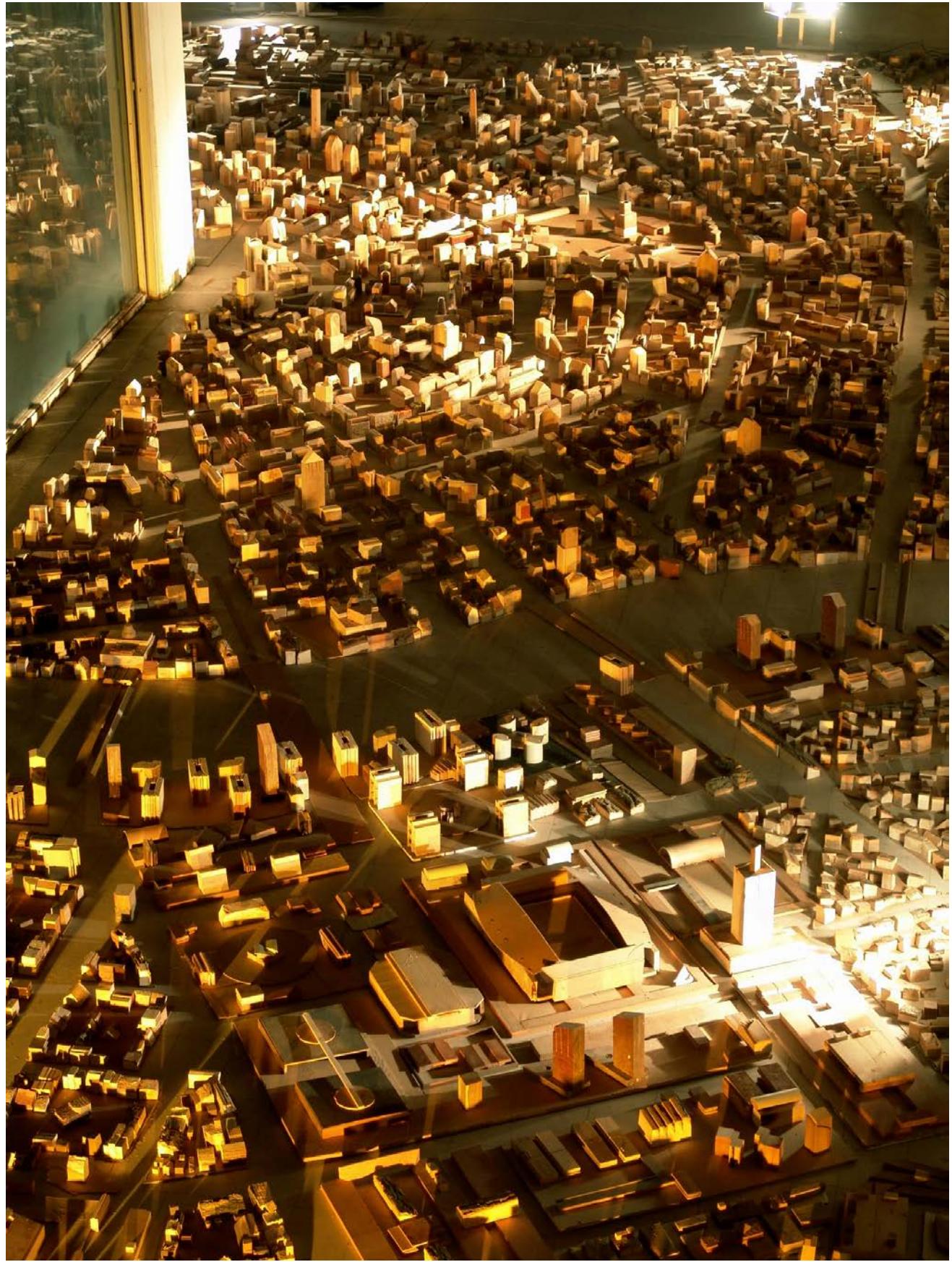
Text by Valentino Dimitrovski

Curated by Zoran Petrovski

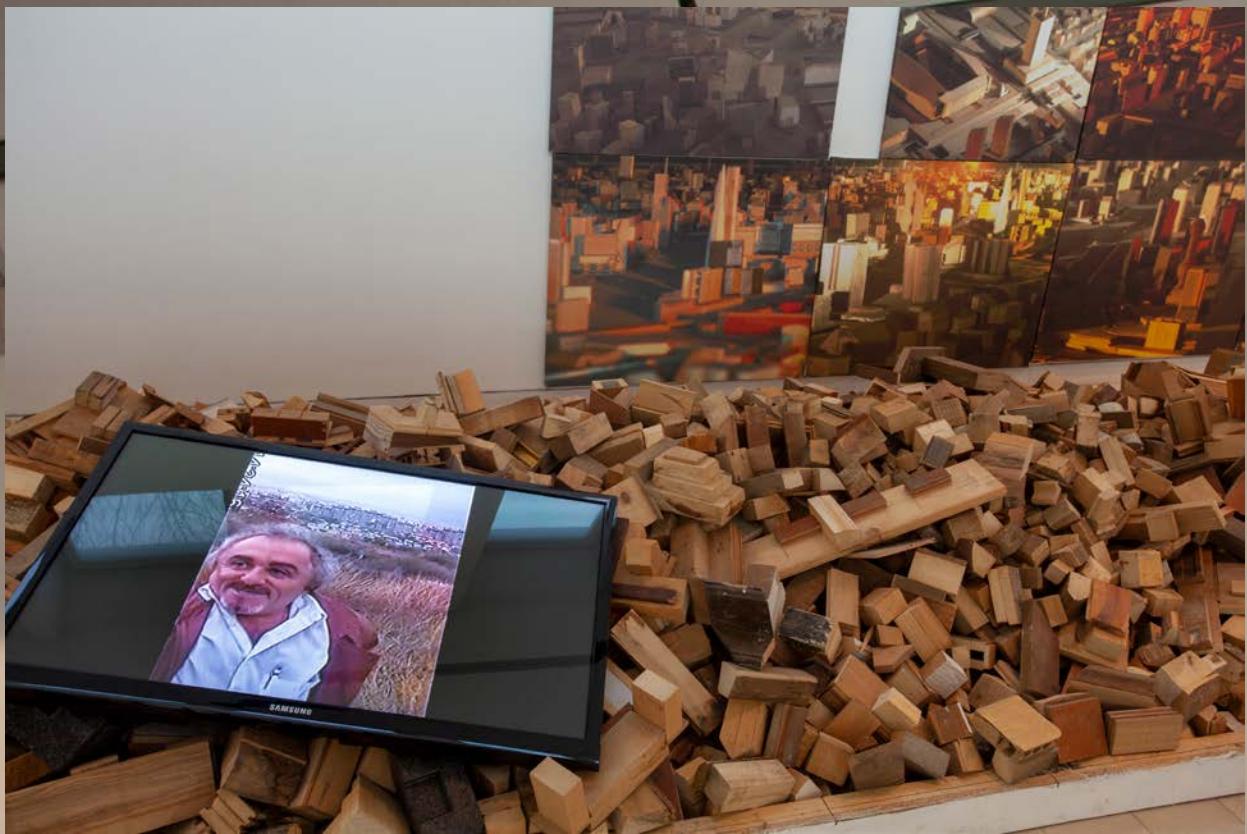
The concept of the exhibition Jovan Shumkovski

Concerning the retrospective exhibition entitled *WATER / WALL*, the curator, Zoran Petrovski, has noted the, that "as intended by Shumkovski himself, the concept of the exhibition, however, is not presented as a linear chronology of that development, but is more of a narrative montage of more heterogeneous and complex thematic planes, but, which, at the same time are connected by the inherent logic of the interrelationships of his forms or content". While agreeing with Petrovski's statement , we would add that the retrospective exhibition is not so much a narrative of the chronological development of Shumovski's oeuvre, but is another of his own projects in its own right, in which he rethinks his magnum opus as a whole, a kind of rethinking in the context of time past and life experience. With this retrospective concept, we can agree or disagree, more or less (his paintings from the 1980s, works that were, and still are, some of the most interesting manifestations of the Macedonian art scene within the then current "New Image", as a significant contribution to the postmodernist tendencies in the Yugoslav art scene are not included). Of course, the artist did not want to conceptualize a classic, exhaustive, chronological narrative of his work, but provide a timely new perspective on the main directions and content of his work in a new context, as an individual "New Project" for older works. In any case, Shumkovski has used a subjective authorial approach and concept, as, in fact, everyone else does, whether as author-artist or curator. Probably, together with the outstanding properties of his works from each period, this approach contributed to the remarkable artistic ambient of the works in the space of the halls of the Museum of Contemporary Art, in which, the symbiosis of his artistic matrix throughout the opus is combined with the unique spatial properties of the Museum, a juxtaposition which Shumkovski successfully and completely realizes.

There is one work by Shumkovski that seems particular emblematic of his art laboratory and his creative layering (although any other work or opus could be used as an ex-



R=1.2, R=1.200, instalation with carpentry parts, MoCA Skopje 2004  
Courtesy of Jovan Shumovski





R-1.2, R-1.200, 2003-2021, instalation view  
Courtesy of Jovan Shumovski

ample): "Canvas that no one paints" from 2010. The piece considers the background, the "carrier" of the classical painting tradition (a flat, impersonal surface of canvas minimally monochromatically hatched) by inserting it in a frame and, thus, raising it to the level of an image, a work, an artifact, giving it the property of "artistic significance". The canvas that no one paints is inserted in a picture, in a black frame, where the lower part is illuminated, and the upper part is darkened, in a kind of mystical staging that transforms the banality of the canvas and raises it to the level of a work, an artifact; a "Canvas that no one paints". At work is the conceptualization of a binary position in which the ordinary, the simple, the impersonal, on the one hand, and the contextual, the meaningful, the artistic, on the other, are confronted. An unobtrusive game is played with two levels of contextualization that Shumkovski permanently exploits by using a variety of materials, technical procedures, artistic approaches and sign patterns. This structural matrix that permeates almost the entire oeuvre, was conceived (and defined) by Shumkovski very early in his career, as a postmodernist play between the "profane" and the "sacred" with multi-layered ironies. At the same time, it is not about a shallow, anachronistic interpretation of this binary concept, characteristic of a provincial jargon. This "playing" in Shumkovski's work is profiled as a complex and multi-layered artistic-linguistic matrix, with conscious postmodernist artistic and aesthetic dimensioning and that have been embedded in the current artistic movements in our country and beyond from the second half of the 1980s until today. This artistic-linguistic and semantic matrix is the structural driver in the two dominant parts of Shumkovski's work, that of the "object" and the "concept".

Shumkovski abandoned the easel, and the medium of painting early in his career (although he is a painter by training) and since the second half of the 1980s he has completely devoted himself to various experiments with numerous found, discarded or produced objects (waste wood, pieces of furniture, sand, metal, epoxy resins, concrete, polyester and other materials from the everyday environment), as well as with several procedures and techniques (painting, sculpting, crafting, photography, video, installation, ambientization, etc.). Shumkovski uses this art laboratory of materials and techniques in the production of works and series of works that progressively follow one another, conceptualized well and carefully embedded in a recognizable art matrix produced over the almost four decades that he has been part of the art scene in our country.

In the second half of the 1980s, Shumkovski produced a series of works that was one of the most impressive cycles of achievements on the then Macedonian art scene. It is a series of assemblies, formed by recomposing discarded wooden objects or pieces of old furniture, in new, unusual compositions that structure the bizarre, discarded objects, into new, unusual wholes, abandoning the traditional artistic approaches of painting and sculpture. This process of recomposing creates a new object, which resembles various early or late modernist experiences from the artistic movements of the 20th century, but in a completely new postmodern artistic and cultural milieu. It does not tend towards the modernist destruction of the work and exposing the reality of the object, but towards an empathetic search for new configurations of the objects in newly composed non-functional and strange structures. The creation of these assemblages is driven by the allure and excitement of the unusual play with the elements-objects, the magic of mastery in the



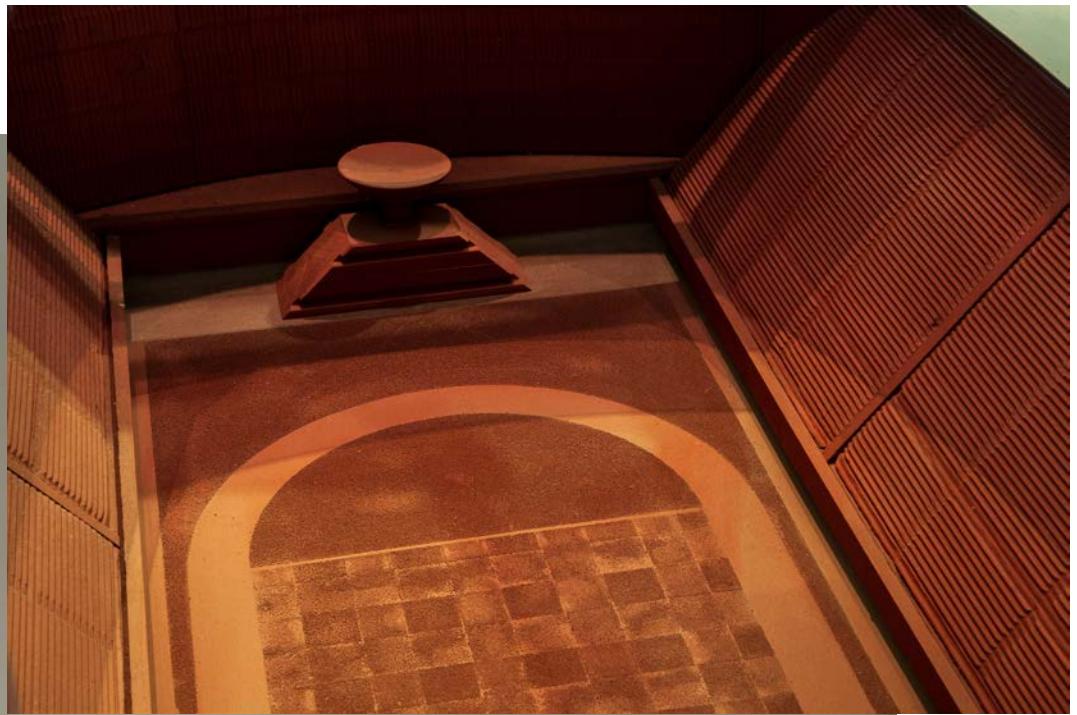
Icons That Nobody Prays, 2015  
Courtesy of Jovan Shumovski



Large objects (Cases series), 1989 - 1992  
Courtesy of Jovan Shumovski



Three Anticipations, 2003  
Courtesy of Jovan Shumovski



Three Anticipations, 2003 (detail)  
Courtesy of Jovan Shumovski



production of new objects, and a new objectness, from which a new "iconicity" radiates. From strange objects and materials, Shumkovski builds new "sacred relics", exciting artistic montages, enriched with unobtrusive monochrome pictorial interventions on the surfaces of the elements. Using this approach, the profane and banal objects are recomposed in new contexts, with meaningful, visual and sensory consonants that build a new objectivity. He manages to produce a "sacred" transformation and transfiguration of strange forms that radiate with unusual energy, a play on the border between the object and its revelation, between the profane and the cultivated, between the insignificant and the significant. The works are grouped into syntagms of a newly created artistic language, codified in postmodernist sensibility and the liberated play of materials, forms and meanings. An undisguised pleasure is apparent in the "crafting" of these objects, in playing with the elements in a new postmodern formativity.

In the mid-1990s (or slightly before that) Shumkovski changed the vocabulary of his artistic expression with a kind of "spatialization" of materials, procedures and techniques, reflecting his interest in a layered social engagement. He abandons the former dominant formal matrix (of the so-called "New Object Art" of the 1980s), approaching an expanded field of artistic practice by installing objects, photographs, models, videos, etc., in new conceptual constellations. Shumkovski finally abandons the formalist artistic expression and directs his interest toward practices of conceiving of conceptual contents, messages and meanings. And his work move in different directions of social engagement, from the cognitive re-examination of certain states of the individual to the wider collective context, always interwoven and mediated by the ironic mode. Some of his most significant installations were performed again at the retrospective exhibition, retaining the basic material, technical and environmental parameters, to re-capture and conceptualize the sensory, symbolic and ambiental meaning of previous projects.

One of Shumkovski's main interests in art production of from the 1990s is related to the making of plates of synthetic materials (epoxy or polyester resin) inserted in unusual installations. These installations are conceived as darkened, astonishing ambient stagings with focused lighting effects that create almost intimate settings, reflections, and echoes. An unreal but still recognizable atmosphere and vision is achieved. From the darkened ambience emerge the illuminated plates in which are "trapped" traces, primordial signs, cryptograms of something missing, threatened, or forgotten. In the magical staging of the ambience, the installation radiates an unusual consonance of something catastrophic but, at the same time, hopeful, a primary dichotomy with distant social impulses. Shumkovski avoids the trap of easy trivialization, playing in a multilayered manner with the elements of the profane and the sacred, the banal and the cultivated. In the installations, *Above the surface* (1997), *Night Visions* (2000) and others, with post-catastrophic and posthistoric ambientization, radiates a kind of dystopian, nightmarish atmosphere from which the illuminated casts of the plates with the entangled cryptograms spring, suggesting something infantile but familiar, primary, and sincere.

In his productions of the last two decades, in a post-ideological state of consciousness, Shumkovski plays with the contradictions of ideological and social expectations, projections and illusions in a highly ironic manner, turning it into a satirical travesty. An emblematic achievement in this sense is the work, *Three Anticipations* from 2006, with



Object, 1991  
Courtesy of Jovan Shumovski

models of architectural projects for impossible international events in our country. Here, Shumkovski plays with the syndrome of greatness in a cultured way, turning into paroxysm the ideological dictate as an impossible mission. The artist incorporates an unobtrusive "subcutaneous" irony with the ideological substrates in the works, *A Jersey no one wears*, (2010), *Canvas that no one paints* (2010) and *Icons that no one prays to* (2015).

This summary reduces Sumkovski's experiences and experiments to only a few stylistic and signification points that have dominated his artistic interest over the past decades. But the range of his artistic (stylistic, technical, signification, socio-cultural) work, which include individual and group presentations at numerous exhibitions and events is significantly larger, more complex and layered. The retrospective exhibition at the Museum of Contemporary Art has given us an opportunity to reacquaint ourselves with Shumkovski's artistic world and re-immerse ourselves in it. This retrospective refreshed our memory, presenting the most significant works and projects of Sumkovski, and once again confirming that he is, and has remained at the top of the Macedonian art scene since the 1980s.

## Zoran Petrovski

Jovan Shumkovski's retrospective exhibition, entitled Water / Wall presents the work of one of the most important creative forces in Macedonian art in the last four decades. Painter by vocation, Shumkovski pursues his creative trajectory in the continuous innovation of visual language that includes various media, such as painting, sculpture, installation, video, and photography. Always ready to experiment with various constructed and found objects, materials and techniques, Shumkovski's forms, and his discourse, are in continuous and extraordinarily consistent development. As he often likes to say, he never starts a piece of work or project unless he can see the possibility of several future projects in it.

It is exactly this developmental thread that is evident in the Water / Wall exhibition, laid out in two galleries of the Museum of Contemporary Art. However, as intended by Shumkovski himself, the setting, is not presented as a linear chronology of that development, but rather as a kind of a narrative medley of several, seemingly heterogeneous and complex thematic plans, while, at the same time, being connected along the line of his development of forms or contents.

The first gallery combined, on the one hand, the early works of the mid-1980s, in which Shumkovski abandons the modernist principles of adhering to the specifics and autonomy of the art media through a series of highly inventive assemblages, made up of objects made of scrap wood and furniture, and in the other gallery on the other hand, the more recent cycle of installations, objects, models and videos created between 2004 and 2017), in which he critically re-examines space as a social sphere and the utopian aspirations of modern-day architecture.

Some of the most significant achievements of Shumkovski were his impressive ambiental installations, such as *R = 1: 2 / R = 1: 200* (2004), *Above the Surface* (1997), and *Night Visions* (2000). As unique and unrepeatable events, some of these installations were presented not only partially through video and photos, but also as a sort of re-enactment, i.e. not as repetition or restoration, but rather as their re-creation, that is to say re-invention in a different context. He achieves this re-creation of his older installations through the amassing or accumulation of objects used in their making (scrap wood, architectural models, polyester and epoxy tiles, etc.), thus highlighting the specific physical, as well as the symbolic properties of the accumulation as a process of creation and - at the same time - its entropic, chaotic and anarchic deconstruction.

What increasingly emerges with the introduction of glossy and, at the same time reflective and transparent, synthetic materials, like cast epoxy or polyester resin boards, in Shumkovski's work dating back to the mid-90s, are dimmed spaces with multiplied light reflections, mirror reflections and echoes of distorted, blurry, at times unreal, and at other times disturbing, images and representations resembling a dystopian, post-historical setting. In the narrative context of these works - housed in the second gallery, and even more so and more directly in his work between the 2000s and the present, Shumkovski depicts the loss of values and contradictions of the world in the global, post-ideological era that was created following the fall of the Iron Curtain, the brutal wars in Yugoslavia, and especially the traumas of the never-ending transitional state of the Macedonian society (*Canvas No One Paints, Jersey No One Wears*, 2010, and *Icons No One Prays to*, 2015). The biting irony and humour in *Three Anticipations* (2006) - architectural models of facilities for future major international events in Skopje, as well as the satirical model and video for the Macedonian space program to the moon in *The Fourth Anticipation* (2008), speak clearly enough of the critical edge with which Shumkovski confronts the utopian expectations for a better future with the hopeless travesty of political reality. The title of the exhibition is taken from one of the works of the artist, as a metaphorical synopsis of the themes and content included in the work of Jovan Shumkovski.



Large objects (Cases series), 1989 - 1992  
Courtesy of Jovan Shumovski

**The MoCA's Exhibition**

# All the Love

**December 2020 – March 2021**  
**International exhibition**  
**Curated by Mira Gakjina and Jovanka Popova**

**Contributing artists:** Carlos Motta, Coco Fusco, Shirin Neshat, Velimir Zernovski, Keti Chukhrov, Rena Rädle and Vladan Jeremić, Nora Turato, Agnieszka Polska, Heather Dewey - Hagborg, Nikola Uzunovski

All the Love is an exhibition that explores the potential of art to create a community. Through specific art works and practices, the exhibition presents the ethics, aesthetics and politics of love as radicalism addressing the connection between love and politics in the context of inter-subjective asymmetrical power and violence-structured relations.

The extreme right-wing limit the potential of love to a heteronormative inclination towards care. Love in neoliberalism, where consumption is the foundation, is reduced to a product. Capitalist "productivity" alienates labor, bodies, and life. In times of capitalism, affective labor and care disappear. The discrepancy manifests itself as violence, a mediator between self and others, self and body, man and nature, the capitalist way of life and culturally differentiated communities.

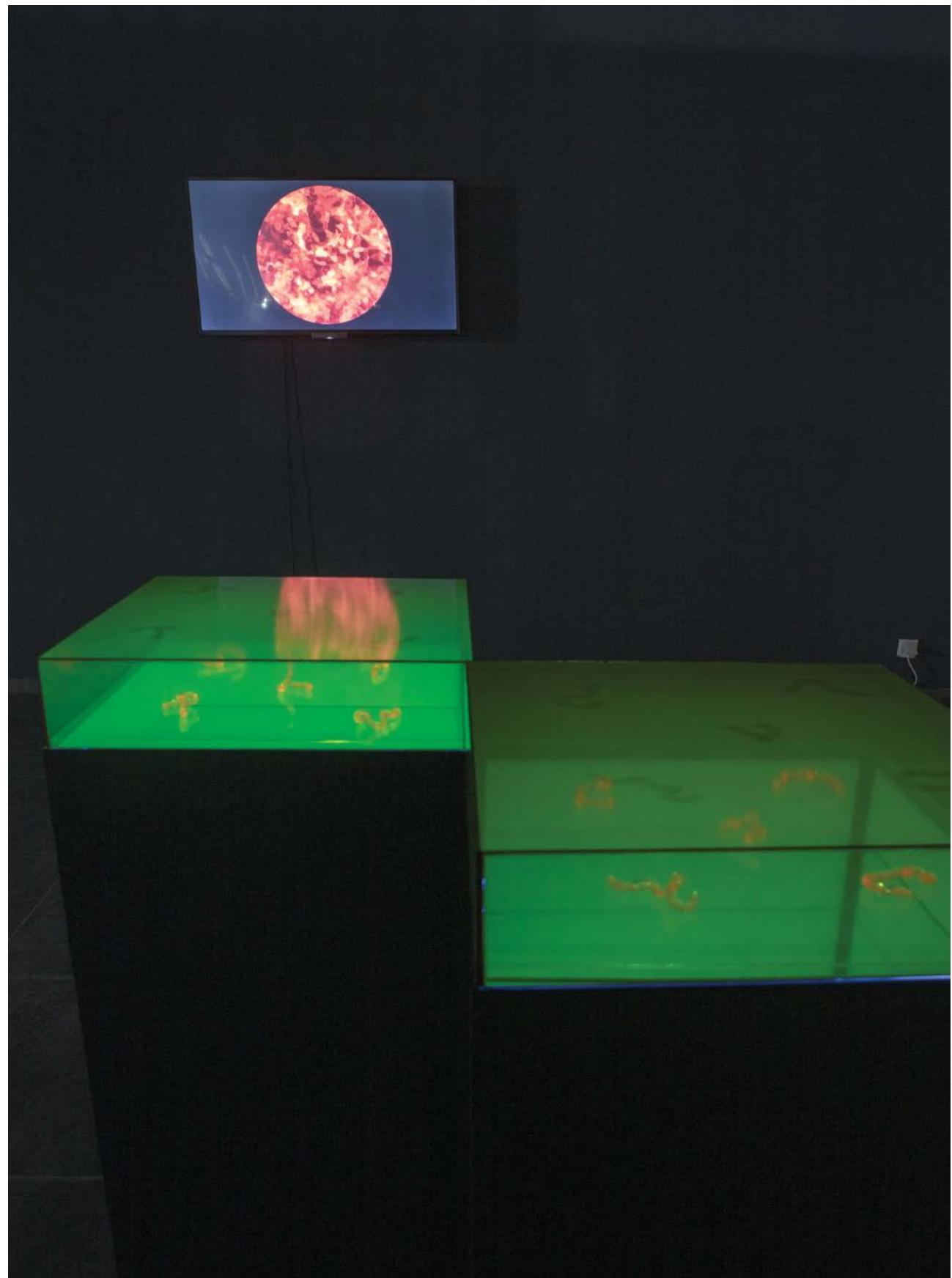
At the same time, these questions arise: How can love oppose the worst aspects of the market and the current political hegemonic violence against difference? What are the ways in which love can be a point of resistance against capitalism and systemic violence? Does it have the potential to create a new common order with new ways of living that capitalism makes impossible? Should equality be replaced by a radical, fluid and open distinction, and is radical distinction sufficient? Should we perhaps look for opportunities of solidarity?

The avant-garde and radical policies of the last century show that the discourse of Love is at the center of political and social change driven by women's rights, LGBT community rights, and various other forms of social resistance. Hence, the exhibition points to specific artistic practices that mobilize love for political effect. The artists explore not only alternative methods of politics, but also a completely different model of what constitutes politics in general, as opposed to government processes that are either unable or unwilling to deal with severe social and economic injustice. The themes include love as an alternative economic system; love as alternative ethics; love as a subcultural and a queer form of politics; love as an intensely political act.

It is about creating spaces, systems and structures in the present moment for participants in such subcultures to determine their own morals, values and hierarchies; to establish their own conditions for identification and subjectivization; and to exist without being subjected to direct supervision and correction by any dominant culture.

Therefore the exhibition raises questions about the possible viable and positive alternatives of action in the domain of the so-called "third space", between the political and the private. Each artist individually emphasizes social activity as an agent that has the power to analyze, explain and influence culture in general. The selected artists explore this territory, using the available human and physical resources, towards the common good imagination and also unification in new forms in the face of the global domain of uncertainty.

The primary goal of the exhibition is to offer both an artistic interpretation and a deeper analysis of radical leftist action policies and practices that can help in the understanding of both local and global level diversity and solidarity.



Heather Dewey - Hagborg, Lovesick: The Transfection, 2019, Installation  
Courtesy Museum of Contemporary Art, Skopje

**WE  
WHO  
FEEL  
DIFFERENT**



Carlos Motta, *We Who Feel Differently*, 2012, Installation  
Courtesy Museum of Contemporary Art, Skopje





Shirin Neshat, *Fervor*, 2000, Video  
Courtesy Museum of Contemporary Art, Skopje





Agnieszka Polska, *What the Sun has Seen*, 2017, Video  
Courtesy Museum of Contemporary Art, Skopje

# СЕТА ЉУБОВ ALL THE LOVE

КЕТИ ЧУКРОВ - КЕТИ ЧУКИРОВ  
ХЕДЕР ДЛУЙ - ХАГЬОРТ  
HEATHER DEWET - НАДСОРГ  
САВОС МОТА - КАРЛОС МОТА  
СОКО ФУСКО - КОКО ФУСКО  
ШИРИН НЕШАТ - SHIRIN NESHAT  
АГНЕШКА РОЛСКА - АГНЕШКА ПОЛСКА  
РЕНА РЕДЛ И ВЛАДАН ЈЕРЕМИЋ  
RENA RADL AND VLADAN JEREMIĆ  
НОРА ТУРАТО - НОРА ТУРАТО  
НИКОЛА УЗУНОВСКИ - NIKOLA UZUNOVSKI  
ВЕЛИМИР ЖЕРНОВСКИ - VELIMIR ZHERNOVSKI

Velimir Zernovski, Distilled "Twinkle, Twinkle", 2014 , Installation  
Courtesy Museum of Contemporary Art, Skopje



**The MoCA's Exhibition**

# **Major Milestones of the Macedonian Fine Art in the 1970's and 1980's**

**December 2020 - September 2021**

**Curated by Marika Bochvarova Plavevska**

**Photography: Stanimir Nedelkovski**

Artists: Rodoljub Anastasov, Todorche Atanasov, Tome Adzievski, Violeta Blazeska, Bogdan Grabuloski, Vladimir Boroevikj, Zaneta Vangeli, Vasil Vasilev, Ivo Veljanov, Kiril Gegoski, Jordan Grabul, Miroslav Grchev, Bozidar Damjanovski, Evgenija Demniewska, Marin Dimeski, Aleksandar Ivanovski Karadare, Risto Kalchevski, Milosh Kodzoman, Dragoljub Bezan, Marina Leshkova, Tanas Lulovski, Petar Mazev, Dimitar Manev, Dimitar Malidanov, Blagoja Manevski, Darko Markovikj, Stefan Manevski, Petre Nikoloski, Stanko Pavleski, Boro Pejchinov, Dushan Perchinkov, Dragan petkovikj, Vlado Plavevski, Lazo Plavevski, Ana Temkova, Aneta Svetieva, Gligor Stefanov, Vele Tashovski, Biljana Unovska, Slobodan Filovski, Gligor Chemerski, Nove Frangovski, Simon Uzunovski, Petar Hadzi Boskov, Simon Shemov, Tomo Shijak, Jovan Shumkovski.

The idea behind this project (as part of the series of MoCA's exhibitions of problem-related artworks commenced in the middle of the '90s) focuses on the challenging transformations, partially incorporated from the 1960s, highlighted throughout the 1970s and embedded in the 1980s, with their continuation being significant for the 1990s, as they promoted the unanticipated, exciting and transparent art scene in Macedonia. The project is aimed at searching for relations between the two decades, for a possible continuity and, most importantly, at establishing the desired fragmentarity of the work.



Exhibition view: Petre Nikoloski (front), Gligor Stefanov, Violeta Blazeska & Bogdan Grabuloski.  
Courtesy Museum of Contemporary Art, Skopje



120 Exhibition view: Tomo Shijak (front)  
Courtesy Museum of Contemporary Art, Skopje



Petar Hadzi Boskov, *Infinity*, 1988/89  
Courtesy Museum of Contemporary Art, Skopje

## **Exhibition Review**

# **Nada Prlja: Adan in the city of fire**

December 2019 - February 2020  
Museum of Contemporary Art, Skopje

**Liljana Nedelkovska**

One of the key questions that Nada Prlja wants to address with the exhibition "Adan in the City of Fire" is how to create and make art when faced with a radical twilight of Nature, where all the natural resources have been almost completely used? She uses a science fiction narrative to answer this question that she articulates as an archaeological and museum exhibition of artistic objects from the past "excavated 50 layers under burnt ground, created prior to 20.02.2020 when the civilisation of Adan disappeared forever" <sup>1</sup>: the past is our present and possible future. The exhibition takes us to the distant year of 3030 in the city if EJPOKS (palindrome of Skopje) where a retrospective exhibition Adan (pseudonym of Nada) is taking place in the museum. The exhibition consists of a juxtaposition of various objects: buildings, images, photos, graphic novels (Call to Borrow, Reuse, and to De-Artify), murals, videos, copies, several paintings created by her grandmother, images, paintings and sculptures from the Museum of Contemporary Art collection and bits and pieces collected on the streets of Skopje. All these objects are used in the context of the artistic concept of borrow, reuse and de-artify. Or as written on the "invitation" to the Museum of New Art, that celebrates the New Year of 3030 with the opening of the retrospective exhibition Adan, presenting pieces that have been "created by the artist in times when all the resources have been exhausted and the production of new resources/goods was banned. During these critical times, the artist Adan had turned to "recycling" her own art so that she could continue to create, thus indicating to other artists that this was the only way to create new pieces "at the end of all times"<sup>2</sup>. With this concept in mind, the exhibition entirely points to appropriation as a procedure for artistic creation and an artistic procedure that aims to "reject the future utilisation of other materials to create new artistic pieces, as one possible way to solve the world crisis that has hit the artistic creation".<sup>3</sup>

In a world of global expansion and multinational capital that is callously ransacking the last remaining natural resources and threatening the sustainability of the environment, this policy of appropriation (borrow, reuse, de-artify) introduced by Nada Prlja is an approach which today's artists should adopt as a way of rethinking and changing the current social and cultural forms of living and creating. This is particularly true if we consider the ever-present feeling of exhaustion and disarmament, the feeling that "historical alternatives to capitalism have proved to be unfeasible and impossible and that no other social and economic system can be imagined, let alone practically attained"<sup>4</sup>. It is furthermore true especially if we accept that every type of resistance and criticism today ends up absorbed and neutralized, something that the capitalist system and its market

machinery have successfully implemented. It is precisely this realisation that is considered as crucial to change the artistic concept of creation and, as Nada Prlja points out in her interview for *Kulturen Pecat*, it is connected to her participation in the 58 International Art Exhibition at the Venice Biennale 2019, an art event that has grown into a spectacular show of cultural production, with the help of "the invisible hand of global capital". In relation to this she states "At the Venice Biennale, I witnessed this competition between countries that did not spare any expense to achieve recognition and success, and seeing this, I thought this world of excessive consumption, use of natural resources, services etc. as really dangerous."<sup>5</sup>

At the Biennale 2019, Prlja presented the interdisciplinary project *Subversion to red*, conceived as a sort of agonistic and artistic platform, an intersection for various procedures and practices, which involves the re-examination and deconstruction of important pieces from the 60s (works from the collection of the Contemporary Art Museum, Skopje, with modernist provenance, which were created in the ideological context of the socialist system of the former SFRY), and by revisiting the idea of Solidarity (a key leftist idea, which was also a founding principle in the building of the Contemporary Art Museum in Skopje), and all the way to the live, immediate and intense discussion, *The Red Discussion II*, of famous leftist theorists and curators (Charles Esche, Maurizio Lazzarato, Vlad Morariu, Chantal Mouffe, Laura Raicovich and Artan Sadiku) about the alternatives to the current neoliberal system and possible critical and subversive action to change the social reality.

She has put her experience at the Biennale in fabular form in the graphic novel 'Call to Borrow, Reuse and to De-Artify', in which the ghosts of the production discourse and the ghosts of "the figure at the end" seem as though they are playing their final, fatal game of confrontation, illustrated in the statement made by the theorist Artan Sadiku, one of the participants in the discussion: "F\*\*k your daily eco-ethical routine of FB. Without changing the ways of production, this entire planet will go up in flames".<sup>6</sup>

In *Adan in the city of fire*, Nada Prlja has upgraded and expanded the culture of criticism and resistance, articulated in *Subversion to red*, with cultural policy and environmental thought and responsibility. If artistic techniques are not considered as some special, separate area of procedures and means, but instead are viewed as part of the production technique and ideology, organised and enabled by the capitalist system, based on the systemic utilisation of natural and human resources, then the only way to show responsibility and push for change, (not only in terms of creation, but also concerning the concept of production itself), is to refrain from using new materials and resources. This means rethinking and reusing already existing materials and resources, refraining from supporting, and subordinating, the production concept of the general value system, and devising new revolutionary perspectives.

If we want to create conditions to really change things, then, as suggested by Jean Baudrillard in *The Mirror of Production*, we have to question "the illusion of production" and its "romanticism of production", to which all aspects of social life are subordinated, we must resist the terror of the production value system so that we can finally dare to "break the mirror of production."<sup>7</sup> In the world of endless production and accumulation, the artist should demonstrate opposition by radically changing the approach to the production of art and cultural values and take responsibility by introducing practices that would enable a transition from the culture of production. This is reflected by Nicolas Bourriaud in his book "*Postproduction*" who states "consumption in a culture of action, from a passive stance in terms of the available resources to signs of the practice of accountability. (...) Instead of bowing before the works of the yesteryear, we can use them in a different way, (...) we can look at world culture as a tool box, as an open space of narration, as opposed to a single narrative and line of production."<sup>8</sup>

The idea of appropriation as a model of artistic creation advocated by Nada Prlja refers to the failure to sustain the capitalist logic of overproduction and hyper-consumption in conditions when catastrophe is spreading everywhere and the resources that have so far provided the driving force of social development are almost exhausted.



Nada Prija, Disaster Diary, 2019, installation 200 x 1400 x 1 cm (Acrylic Paint on Offset Printed Newspaper)  
Courtesy Museum of Contemporary Art, Skopje



If all of our freedoms (including the freedom of artistic expression and creation), all our values and achievements as a civilisation (both material and spiritual) are based on the use of natural resources, then the need to reconsider and re-examine the ways and models of production inevitably arises, equally for the material and in terms of cultural production. Appropriation is an important critical and subversive strategies, which has been used as creative process in the art in the 20th Century. It is "a key tool of radical change of artistic rules that takes art as its main subject of research and the way it exists in the world"<sup>9</sup> and which has been used to ask a series of crucial and essential questions, to help us understand the ontology, axiology and epistemology of the artistic piece<sup>10</sup>. Nada Prlja has radicalised the concept of appropriation giving it an ontological and ethical dimension of incredible significance. It concerns not only aspects related to the essence of the artistic piece (such as the original work, the reproduction, authenticity, authorship, the aura, the fetish of the beautiful, exclusivity etc.), which in itself signifies a radical change of the artistic concept, but also the radical change in the use of the materials, technical possibilities and conditions that enable the artistic creation as is. And, as Nada Prlja states, because the "artistic industry" is no different than any other industry (textile, wood, etc) that poses danger to the world."<sup>11</sup>

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- 10 Ibid.
- 11 Тони Димков, Ibid.



## CONTRIBUTORS:

**John Paul Ricco** is an art historian and queer theorist whose interdisciplinary research, teaching, and writing, draws connections between late 20-century and contemporary art and architecture; continental philosophy; and issues of gender and sexuality, bodies and pleasures, pornography and eroticism. He is widely recognized for his engagement with the work of French philosopher Jean-Luc Nancy.

**Paula Serafini** is Lecturer in Creative and Cultural Industries at Queen Mary University of London. Her research is situated in the field of cultural politics, and her interests include extractivism, social movements, art activism, cultural policy and alternatives to development. She is the author of Performance Action: The Politics of Art Activism (Routledge 2018) and the forthcoming book Creating Worlds Otherwise: Art, Collective Action, and (Post)Extractivism (Vanderbilt University Press, 2022).

**Jonas Staal** is a visual artist whose work deals with the relationship between art, propaganda and democracy. He is the founder of the artistic and political organization New World Summit (2012–ongoing). Together with Florian Malzacher, he co-directs the training camp Training for the Future (2018–ongoing), and with human rights lawyer Jan Fermon, he initiated the collective action lawsuit Collectivize Facebook (2020–ongoing). With writer and lawyer Radha D’Souza, he founded the Court for Intergenerational Climate Crimes (2021–ongoing) and, with Laure Prouvost, he is co-administrator of the Obscure Union. His latest book is Propaganda Art in the 21st Century (The MIT Press, 2019).

**Florian Malzacher** is an independent performing arts curator, dramaturg and writer. He was artistic director of the Impulse Theater Festival (2013–2017) and co-curator of steirischer herbst festival (2006–2012). He has (co-)curated numerous projects on the intersection of art and politics, such as Truth is concrete (2012), Artist Organisations International (2015), Training for the Future (since 2018) and The Art of Assembly (since 2021). His publications include Truth is Concrete: A Handbook for Artistic Strategies in Real Politics (2014), Not Just a Mirror: Looking for the Political Theatre of Today (2015), Empty Stages, Crowded Flats: Performativity as Curatorial Strategy (2017, co-edited with Joanna Warsza).

**Shiraz Grinbaum** is a photographer and editor, working with the Activestills collective since 2012. She is the co-editor of the book ‘Activestills: Photography as Protest In Palestine/Israel’ (Pluto Press, 2016). She is also the founder of To Light Up A Home, an independent forum that facilitates support groups for sons and daughters of military veterans with PTSD in Israel; and the editor of the online magazine Leafing.co.il featuring local artist books.

**Oren Ziv** is a reporter and photographer of Local Call and +972 Magazine. Co-founder of Activestills Collective. Since 2005 he has been documenting social and political issues in Israel and in the Palestinian territories.

**Fares Chalabi** obtained his BA in philosophy in 2002 from the Lebanese University, and a diploma in architecture from ALBA in 2004. He continued his studies in philosophy at Paris 8 where he obtained a Master’s degree in 2008, and his PhD in 2017. Today, Chalabi teaches philosophy and art theory at AUB and teach in ALBA and USJ. His main fields of interest are the study of ontological argumentation, ethics and aesthetics – in line with the Deleuzian approach.

**Alfredo Cramerotti** is Director of MOSTYN, Wales UK and Adviser to the British Council Visual Arts Acquisition Committee and the Art Institutions of the 21st Century Foundation. He has curated radio and television formats in Germany and Denmark, three national pavilions at the Venice Biennale, the EXPO Film & Video in Chicago, and the biennials Sequences VII in Reykjavik, Iceland and Manifesta 8, in Murcia, Spain. He holds a PhD in Communication Design and Photography and has published over 200 texts published on art, media and curatorial practice, contributing to a large number of books, catalogues, monographs and online journals.

**Igor Štromajer a.k.a intima** is a pseudo-internet/post-artist researching tactical, intimate guerrilla, and low-tech strategies. He has exhibited at more than 250 exhibitions, festivals and biennials worldwide, among others the transmediale, ISEA, EMAF, SIGGRAPH, Ars Electronica Futurelab, V2\_, IMPAKT, CYNETART, Manifesta, FILE, Stuttgart Filmwinter, Hamburg Kunsthalle, ARCO, Banff Centre, Les Rencontres Internationales, and the Wrong – New Digital Art Biennale. His works are included in the permanent collections of the Centre Pompidou in Paris, the MNCA Reina Sofia in Madrid, the Computer Fine Arts in New York, and the UGM in Maribor.

**Boris Groys** is a philosopher, essayist, art critic, media theorist and an internationally renowned expert on Soviet-era art and literature, specifically, the Russian avant-garde. He is a Global Distinguished Professor of Russian and Slavic Studies at New York University, a Senior Research Fellow at the Staatliche Hochschule für Gestaltung Karlsruhe, and a professor of philosophy at The European Graduate School / EGS. His work engages radically different traditions from French poststructuralism to modern Russian philosophy, yet is firmly situated at the juncture of aesthetics and politics. Theoretically, Boris Groys’s work is influenced by a number of modern and post-modern philosophers and theoreticians, including Jacques Derrida, Jean Baudrillard, Gilles Deleuze and Walter Benjamin.

**Mira Gakjina** is an art historian, art critic and senior curator at the Museum of Contemporary Art in Skopje. She received her PhD in Art Management from Cyril and Methodius University in Skopje. She has curated a number of exhibitions in the country and abroad and published in art books and magazines such as the “Large Glass”, “Art Republic”, “Brooklyn Rail”, “From Consideration to Commitment: Art in Critical Confrontation to Society” among others. She was the commissioner of the North Macedonian Pavilion at the Venice Biennale 2019 and she is a coordinator and curator of the upcoming parallel program for the MANIFESTA 14 Pristina Biennale in MoCA Skopje. From 2017, Gakjina has also been a director of the MoCA Skopje.

**Catherine Nichols** is an arts and literary scholar, curator and writer based in Berlin. Since completing her doctorate at the University of New South Wales in Sydney, Australia, she has curated a broad range of cultural history exhibitions at institutions across Germany. She has also mounted numerous monographic and thematic art exhibitions including Beuys: We are the Revolution, The End of the 20th Century: The Best Is Yet to Come and Capital: Debt – Territory – Utopia for the Nationalgalerie im Hamburger Bahnhof – Museum für Gegenwart – Berlin (in collaboration with Eugen Blume) and most recently Everyone is an Artist: Cosmopolitan Exercises with Joseph Beuys (in collaboration with Isabelle Malz and Eugen Blume) at K20 Kunstsammlung Nordrhein-Westfalen in Düsseldorf. She has published widely on contemporary art as well as editing numerous catalogues and books. She is currently the artistic director of beuys 2021, a year-long centenary programme. In 2022 she will curate the 14th edition of Manifesta, the European Nomadic Biennial, in Prishtina.

**Vladimir Jančevski** is an art historian and curator at MoCA Skopje, working simultaneously in the field of contemporary art and visual studies. He is interested in interdisciplinary art practices and image theory, art and politics, iconoclasm and 'image wars'. Since 2004, he has co-organized, curated and participated in numerous events: group exhibitions, collaborative projects, lectures and public discussions. He was a core member of the art initiative KOOPERACIJA (2012-2015). Since 2011, he has been collaborating with CVS-Skopje, and has participated in several international conferences as well as organising public lectures in Skopje. He has authored more than 50 texts on contemporary art and visual culture.

**Nemanja Cvijanović** graduated from the Accademia di Belle Arti di Venezia with a degree in painting and earned his postgraduate degree in visual art design and production from the Department of Architecture and Arts of the IUAV University in Venice. His works address social and political issues by establishing connections with events from the recent past as a product of his fascination with the phenomenon of collective memory. By emphasising the role responsibility and awareness in relation to the anomalies of contemporary society, he engages observers in an intriguing relationship with memory, changes to value systems, propaganda, consumerism and mass media.

**Kim Skjoldager-Nielsen** is a lecturer and researcher affiliated with Stockholm University. Kim is also a performance artist, working with the company the name is o, former Poste Restante and Osynliga teatern. He is also working on a intermedial performance art solo-project A LifeArt. He is fouding-co-editor of the on-line research journal PRS – Performance, spirituality, and religion under the auspices of the International Federation of Theatre Research (IFTR). Elected member of the Executive Committee of the IFTR. Board member and former president of the Association of Nordic Theatre Scholars. Member of the working group Performance and Science of the Performance Studies international. Participant in the Performance Studies Space Program.

**Yane Calovski and Hristina Ivanoska** work individually and collaboratively, animating multi-layered conceptual possibilities, inspired by accumulated knowledge, intuitive references, and historical and present-day political concepts. Their ideas derive from architecture, literature, theory, art history, and socio-political events. Ivanoska's research interests are suppression, control, and construction of collective memory. She is a PhD-in-Practice candidate at the Academy of Fine Arts Vienna. Calovski's interdisciplinary practice looks into the potentials of converging, augmenting, and archiving modernist materialities in the site-specificity of cultural and political ecologies. They live and work in Skopje and Berlin.

**Zoran Petrovski** is an art historian and curator. He graduated from the University of Skopje from the History of Art and Archeology Department. From 1993 until 2000, he was director of the Museum of Contemporary Art in Skopje and also one of its founding members, and he continues to be on the editorial board of the Large Glass journal. His important curatorial projects include: Abstraction in the Macedonian Art 1960/1990; 9 ½: New Macedonian Art; Small Talk (with Luchezar Boyadjiev); Street-Milcho Manchevski/Night Vision-Jovan Sumkovski in Stockholm; and retrospectives of Dusan Percinkov and Dragan Petkovic. He has also participated in several international projects, including: In the Gorges of Balkans in Kassel; Bound/less Borders in Belgrade; and Regards projetés: art vidéo dans les Balkans in Strasbourg. In 1993 and 2009, he curated the Macedonian pavilion at the Venice Biennale, and in 1996 at the 23rd Sao Paolo Biennial.

**Valentino Dimitrovski** is an art historian and art critic. He graduated from the University of Skopje. From 1978 to 2004 , he worked at the Institute for Protection of the Cultural Monuments of the Republic of Macedonia. Since 2005, he has worked at the Ministry of Culture - Cultural Heritage Protection Office, Skopje. He has published numerous articles and monographs on the topics of the history of art, architecture and other subjects.

**Ljiljana Nedelkovska** graduated from the Department of History of Art and Archeology at the University of Skopje, where she worked as an assistant professor from 1980 -1985. Since 1985, she has worked as a curator at the Museum of Contemporary Art in Skopje. She has curated numerous exhibitions of Macedonian artists and participated in several international projects ("The Unifying Gift: The Macedonian-American Art Relationship", 2003; "Cataclysm and Creativity: Art in an Age of Uncertainty", a collaborative exchange project (MoCA, Skopje and The Weil Gallery at Texas A&M University-Corpus Christi). She has published numerous essays and several monographs. She has received a fellowship from the Getty Foundation for Scholars from Central and Eastern Europe for her research in Abstract Painting in Macedonia.

**Jovan Shumkovski** is an artist and a professor at the Faculty of Fine Arts in Skopje. He received B.A. and M.A. from the Faculty of Fine Arts in Skopje. He has exhibited widely in Belgrade, Sarajevo, Sofia, Ljubljana, Stockholm, Paris, New York, Alexandria, etc. Shumkovski represented the Republic of Macedonia at the Biennale in São Paulo in 1995 and at the Venice Biennale in 2001.

**in this issue:**

**John Paul Ricco**

**Paula Serafini**

**Jonas Staal and Florian Malzacher**

**Shiraz Grinbaum and Oren Ziv**

**Fares Chalabi**

**Alfredo Cramerotti**

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**Kim Skjoldager-Nielsen**

**Yane Calovski and Hristina Ivanoska**

**Valentino Dimitrovski**

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