THE
LARGE
GLASS

journal of contemporary art,
culture and theory

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The Large Glass is being published again 23 years after its first issue and ten years since its last issue. The journal was first launched in 1995 by Sonja Abadzhieva, who became editor-in-chief, working with Liljana Nedelkovska, Zoran Petrovski, Marika Bocvarovska and many other collaborators to create a journal of art reviews and criticism.

The journal expanded on the initial ambition of the Skopje Museum of Contemporary Art (MoCA) to radiate new ideas and maintain the highest ethical and professional standards, but also signified a new beginning of constant reassessment through criticism and analysis of contemporary art.

With this relaunch it is crucial we are showing that the termination of *The Large Glass* was only temporary and that the pause has only served to complement its history - fractured like the artwork from which it derives its title: Duchamp's *The Large Glass*. For this reason we have decided to mark this new beginning with focus on the current social challenges.

The Large Glass will act as one of the essential mediums of MoCA for the presentation, analysis and discussion of a wide range of current challenges and topics in culture, art and theory. Publishing the journal in English will also give the MoCA the opportunity to reach a wider range of creative and international environments and take part in other cultural, artistic and academic communities. This will extend the international recognition and cooperation of the Museum.

This commitment to contemporary art and international trends in art and criticism is in line with the original ideals and establishment of the MoCA, which was founded in 1964 as a modern museum fully engaged in dialogue with international authors and with a focus on the ever-changing challenges in the sphere of culture and art.

The revitalization of *The Large Glass* as a venture should confirm the reputation of MoCA Skopje as an institution with significant experience and a publisher in the area of contemporary art and critical thought.

Mira Gakina
Director of the Museum of Contemporary Art in Skopje

The Large Glass No. 25/26, 2018

CONTENT:

Cover: Forensic Architecture, Rafah Master Drawing (detail), Pléiades satellite photograph of eastern Rafah, taken on 1 August 2014 at 11:39 am. This master drawing of Rafah includes: viewpoints and plume measurements from every photograph and video sourced; craters from airdropped bombs and artillery as observed on the satellite images; tank paths and armored vehicles on the move; reference points; location of possible tunnels; and the trajectories described in testimonies by civilians in the strip.

Tihomir Topuzovski

Introduction

Reinventing the Horizon of Visibility

Conceiving a vision of a different society, inventing new modes of ethical, political and aesthetic dimensions, is an increasingly difficult but pressing challenge. Artists are exceptional in this regard insofar as they demonstrate an intersection of creative routes and the formation of alternative visions. Artists have long taken an active role both in demonstrating their connections with social movements and political activism and in producing new imaginaries. The importance of such artistic practices can begin to be grasped when we consider what artists are already doing in terms of reinventing possibilities and generating new forms and knowledge - not only what we have already learnt but what we can still learn from their experiences, successes and failures. Working outside of established 'common sense', disputing and disrupting what is 'visible', artists express their strong disagreement and resistance to current conditions and alter our perceptions and understanding of a politically marked spatiality. They act in a field where 'politics is first of all a battle about perceptible and sensible material'[1] - one that revolves around what can be seen and sensed and by which politics is brought to visibility, so that it 'renders an object, event, practice, or person at once visible and available for accountability.'[2] The horizon of visibility in this context is shaped and framed by power relations: 'Foucault illustrates that during different historical periods, distinct modes of visibility are produced by power in order to control society.'[3] Hence state authorities and powerful bodies often develop the technology of a disciplinary order, or in Rancière's words a 'distribution of the sensible', in order to impose their regime over visibility and modes of perception – a regime that 'provides the political life of sensation.'[4] This is enforced by decisions, policies and values driven by governing and powerful bodies. This leads us directly to Berkeley's claim that 'to be is to be perceived'[5] - or in the specific thematic discussion that what is perceived in a society is associated with an 'ontological ground', or in this context into existence within the social sensorium.

This argument can be supported with examples of artists' joint practices and modes of re-configuring sensory experiences, which enable some subject-agents to regulate what is visible and what is not. These practices counter and resist predominant political trends, whatever the political mainstream may be, through various forms of direct intervention. These acts can be delineated as ways and methods aimed at something arbitrarily below a social horizon of visibility, or else at provoking issues proscribed in relation to it. This calls for and entails the creation of a new vision, for perceiving new contours and participating and constructing moments 'beyond and counter to regimes of appraisal that 'customarily organize the world, compelling us to have to reconfigure our own postures'[6] in opposition to the world as it is. This includes reflections that provide an innovative and comprehensive understanding of the role of art, which in radical instances achieves 'a collapse of the representational paradigm, which means not only the collapse of a hierarchical system of address; it means the collapse of a whole regime of meaning'.[7]

Accordingly, the main thematic scope of this edition of *The Large Glass* is that of activist art as a form of political protest. It is a common practice in urban landscapes, manifested in various actions, from the occupation of buildings to the use of walls for displaying messages, creating resistance that transforms public spaces. Examples include artists protesting in key public spaces to raise the visibility of certain communities such as refugees forced to leave their homes 'because of war, environmental waste, and famine, marginalized and simultaneously subjected to a new form of slave exploitation[8] at a time when, as Berardi points out: 'the massive internment of migrant workers in detention centers disseminated all over the European territory dispels the illusion that the "camp" has been wiped out from the world.'[9] The level of complexity of these artistic practices can be interpreted as a result of their being attempts to reassess the current visual horizon and to challenge existing boundaries of spaces of power. To some extent these efforts constitute a critique of museums and galleries as tools that serve to maintain the capitalist system and the ways in which capitalism commodifies artworks and instrumentalises artists. Some examples recently made public seem be the subject of great attention, such as cases where collective artistic groups and individuals have attempted to decolonise the domain of museums through direct interventions. This

mode of acting is most evident in the case of interactions between protesters, artists and audiences in various movements in which artists have protested and occupied cultural institutions along with the movement. Aside from exploring the possibility of occupying museums, artists have redirected their creativity from instrumental participation in the art world to an expanded field of collaborations in order to produce a new vision and political imaginary.[10] What this means is that practices interrupt 'a set of principles by which a given society and art institutions are symbolically staged'[11] and where specific visibility is experienced and meanings are established.

Other papers and reports in the second part of this issue highlight engaged visual methodologies that present an equally important approach, urging the use of visual materials and data to engage in concrete cases of symbolic, political and legal prosecutions. This is one way in which artistic practices can heighten public focus and connect artworks as a tool for visualising data and visions for justice founded upon evidence and intended to achieve profound effects. These actions are anchored in everyday political situations and have both a responsibility and intensity - aiming to challenge and reorganize societal visibility while pushing back what is hidden by official institutions. The ideas examined in this part relate to the recuperation of data and the rebuilding of an 'image' of what was the case before, which opens new possibilities for artists in creating a horizon of visibility, bringing visual data to light for public scrutiny and highlighting official concealment, neglect and distortion, as well as unjust and oppressive acts by state authorities and official narratives. The focus is on achieving a set of new interpretations, as in the case of Forensic Architecture, and this issue considers ways in which artists collaborate with scientists and follow technological developments to present visual data that can play a valuable role in legal forums. These methodologies have been used to highlight violations of humanitarian law and war crimes. This part of *The Large Glass* includes more extensive combinations of present, historical and comparative data and analysis, presenting some recent artistic works as well as theoretical insights that afford a deeper understanding of engaged art in this context.

The third part of this journal presents a sequence of different artistic works developed in relation to certain spatialities, thus contributing to an understanding of the ways in which politics and ideologies are associated with the organization of spaces and visibilities. These artistic examples highlight an important link between regimes over certain spaces as well as their inconsistency throughout history.

Along these lines, this issue of *The Large Glass* presents a range of contexts in which artistic practices coexist with further possibilities. As the following papers, interviews, reports and other materials show, the status of engaged artistic practices continues to raise questions in important debates and practices, especially reflecting on the complex connotations of artistic visions that challenge the paradigm.

1. 'Jacques Rancière: Literature, Politics, Aesthetics: Approaches to Democratic Disagreement (interviewed by Solange Guénoun and James H. Kavanagh)'. *SubStance* Vol. 29, No. 2, Issue 92 (2000), pp. 3-24, p. 11.

2. Davide Panagia. *The Political Life of Sensation*. Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2009. p. 12.

3. Neve Gordon. 'On Visibility and power: An Arendtian Corrective of Foucault'. *Human Studies* Vol. 25, No. 2 (2002), pp. 125-145 and p. 126.

4. Davide Panagia. *The Political Life of Sensation*. Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2009

5. George Berkeley. *Principles of Human Knowledge and Three Dialogues*. Oxford University Press, 1999.

6. Davide Panagia. *The Political Life of Sensation*. Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2009. p. 31.

7. Jacques Rancière. *Dissensus: On Politics and Aesthetics*. London: Continuum. 2010, p. 159.

8. Franco Bifo Berardi. *After the Future*. AK Press, 2011, p. 19.

9. Ibid, p. 19.

10. Yates McKee. *Strike Art: Contemporary Art and the Post-Occupy Condition*. Verso, 2016.

11. Oliver Marchart. 'The second return of the political: Democracy and the syllogism of equality'. In: P. Bowman and R. Stamp, *Reading Rancière*, pp. 129-47. London: Continuum 2011, p. 143.

Artistic Practices and Political Imagination

Kim Charnley

Activist Art and Visibility after Brexit

The fortunes of activist art have waxed and waned since this hybrid form emerged from the aesthetic radicalism and innovative protest movements of the 1960s. Until recently, however, it has usually occupied a marginal position relative to the mainstream museum and gallery culture. In the classic definition provided by Lucy R. Lippard, activist art is a 'trojan horse', bringing diverse political energies into art's citadel, working toward a more pluralistic and democratic manifestation of culture.[1] This subversive border-crossing has required activist artists to maintain critical distance from the ideological networks of contemporary art. Except for a brief period in the early 1990s, the political content of art activism meant that it was overlooked by the critics, curators and opinion-formers who act as the gatekeepers of artistic visibility. Since the financial crash of 2008, however, something has changed. Art activism has come to play an increasingly important role in debates about contemporary art's relationship to the present. The art critic Boris Groys, in 2014, went so far as to describe the 'phenomenon of art activism' as 'central to our time'.[2]

This argument, advanced by a celebrated critic, signalled greater recognition for activist art, although Groys's claim that art activism was a 'new phenomenon' seemed to betray a degree of ignorance about the complex history of this form.[3] Art activism is not new; it is just attaining a different level of visibility. Indeed, one of the most pervasive changes in the status of this form has taken place because histories of art activism have been more widely circulated and embedded into scholarship on the neo-avant-garde. Artists and groups that were once treated as context or background to the key achievements of the avant-garde are now given centre stage in revised histories of the 1960s and 1970s.

The project *Tucumán Arde* (Tucumán is burning), undertaken Argentina by the Grupo Artistas de Vanguardia de Rosario in 1968, is the most obvious example of such a work.[4] The collective brought together trade unionists, artists and journalists, and combined documentary, installation and avant-garde media strategies to reveal the struggle and deprivation of workers in the sugar plantations and refineries of Tucumán. *Tucumán Arde* attempted to create a counter-public sphere under a military dictatorship, a specific political context. At the same time, this work seems to have anticipated many strategies that would come to be identified with art activism in subsequent decades.

The historical repositioning of *Tucumán Arde* and other art activist work of the 1960s has been inspired by the success of a new cycle of artists' militancy expressed in museum occupations, art strikes and the formation of collectives. Projects in the last decade have included Liberate Tate, which successfully disrupted the corporate sponsorship of Tate museums by British Petroleum, and the Gulf Labour Artists Coalition and Gulf Ultra Luxury Faction who have raised awareness of the exploitative labour conditions that affect immigrant workers engaged in construction of the new Guggenheim museum on Saadayit island in Abu Dhabi, United Arab Emirates.[5] The Precarious Workers Brigade, based in the United Kingdom, have drawn attention to the effects upon artists' labour and consciousness of the neoliberal ideologies that have come to structure the experience of cultural workers.[6] W.A.G.E. (Working Artists and the Greater Economy), Debtfair and others based in the United States have organised to raise political consciousness among artists in regard to their labour conditions.

Typically, art activists have sought to use art as a platform to contribute to progressive social and political change. It is ironic then that activist art has achieved unprecedented institutional recognition at the same time as a right-wing insurgency has taken hold of liberal democracies in Britain and America, with the Brexit vote and the election of President Trump in 2016. Indeed, right-wing or even proto-fascist governments have been elected across the globe, including in the United States, Brazil, India, Hungary, Poland and Italy. How to understand the continuing role of art activism now, in the light of these events? In this essay, I will explore the current visibility of activist art by juxtaposing the 2018 Hyundai commission at Tate Modern by Tania Bruguera and the online activism of Mark McGowan, better known as the online activist 'Artist Taxi Driver'. These examples are chosen to represent two poles of the reconfigured zone between aesthetics and politics that art activism occupies. My observations are conditioned by the continuing experience of the chaotic politics of the Brexit negotiations in the United Kingdom; however, to the extent that Brexit is symptomatic of a wider upheaval of global politics, I hope that the commentary may resonate beyond its immediate context.

Art activism at the apex of visibility: Tania Bruguera *10, 146, 058*

The movement of activism from the periphery to the centre of contemporary art debates is symptomatic of a changed configuration of aesthetics and politics in the years since the global crash of 2008. New movements coordinated via social media irrupted in cities across the globe as a direct response to neoliberal policies, or as insurgencies in opposition to dictatorial regimes. The 'movement of the squares' of 2011, and the Occupy protests that it inspired, saw the formation of a powerful new relationship between urban space, its occupation and mediation. The hopes inspired by that period have, to a great extent, been overshadowed by the nightmare of the war in Syria, the rise and defeat of Islamic State, and the migrant crisis. The general tenor of public debate has been defined by the electoral success of the populist right, which has been achieved by fomenting resentment against the economic damage caused by a broken neoliberal model of government. The rapidly developing, cumulative political urgency of these events has been the most striking feature of the last five years.

My first hypothesis is that a certain type of art activism has been integrated into contemporary art because it is capable of maintaining contact with the pace and unpredictable character of these times. Tania Bruguera's Hyundai Commission in Tate Modern Turbine Hall is an example of such a project. The work is entitled *10, 146, 058*, but this number grows constantly because it indicates the number of people who migrated across national borders in 2017 in addition to the number of migrants who are known to have died in 2018. This strange sum, which makes a positive integer from displaced and subtracted lives, is stamped onto the hand of each visitor to the 'crying room' where chemical compounds are released to induce tears in spectators. The work clearly aims to create an alternative circuit of information, using art to reveal political actuality. In this respect, it can be situated in the legacy of the *Tucumán Arde* exhibition, where lights are said to have been switched off at two-minute intervals to indicate the frequency of child deaths in Tucumán. In *10, 146, 058*, a sound system fills the space with sub-bass designed by Steve Goodman (Kode9), intended physically to unsettle visitors. A heat sensitive floor takes impressions from bodies and body-parts pressed against it and, if enough people lie on it together, will reveal the portrait of a young Syrian migrant named Yusef, who came to the United Kingdom and is now studying medicine.[7]

Bruguera's project examines the links based on recognition and empathy that can be formed between people in the context of the migrant crisis. The work tends to situate emotion in physical signs and traces, tears and body heat: somatic experiences that are induced or recorded using technological means. In fact it questions the relationship between bodies, collective action and iconic images. What, we might ask, would be the result if visitors coordinated their actions to reveal Yusef's image? What would this collaborative act mean? In my reading, the conceptual dimension of this work problematizes affect and its representation, in a world that is forming new configurations of affect and technology. At the same time, Bruguera's project also includes community engagement that is intended to destabilise the hierarchies embedded within the art institution. Tate Neighbours, a group of 21 people who either live or work in the same postcode as Tate Modern, are integral to the project. At the request of this group, the Turbine Hall has been renamed in honour of local youth worker Natalie Bell. This renaming has been integrated into all Tate's communication networks for the duration of the project, and Tate Neighbours' manifesto for civic action appears on the log-in page to the Wi-Fi throughout the institution. Tate Exchange, the education programme for the institution, is designated an integral part of the artwork, breaking down the usual boundary between art and education within the museum. Responding to the theme 'movement', and in dialogue with Bruguera, art educational institutions from across the United Kingdom take up short residencies on the fifth floor of Tate Modern. This programme is ongoing at the time of writing, but among these interventions many are taking art activism as an explicit theme.[8]

Bruguera's project is at or near to the apex of visibility provided by contemporary art, installed as it is in the Turbine Hall of Tate Modern. This level of exposure is unusual for art activism, but not unprecedented; it can be compared to previous occasions when activist work has been showcased in prestigious institutions, most famously Martha Rosler's *If You Lived Here*, 1989, and Group Material's *Democracy*, 1990, both exhibited at the Dia Art Foundation in New York.[9] These shows pioneered strategies that sought to turn the exhibition into a space of public deliberation about issues of current political concern. For Group Material, the subjects included democracy, education and the AIDS crisis; for Rosler, gentrification and homelessness, which was then, as now, rampant in New York City. There is always a *quid pro quo* to this kind of exposure: an artist's attempt to allow actual political issues into the institution will be a negotiation, a game of concessions and resistances. As the activist artist, theorist and curator Greg Sholette has observed, 'dallying with the world of museums and galleries remains a delicate, tactical operation.'[10] In the case of Bruguera's work, it is instructive to look at the immediate context of London, especially of the borough of Southwark where the museum is based, to shed light on these tensions.

Southwark council has become notorious for engaging in regeneration schemes whereby working-class council estates have been replaced by new units which, responding to London's febrile housing market, inflate prices entirely out of the reach of local residents. The redevelopment of the Heygate Estate in the Elephant & Castle area between 2010 and 2013 was fiercely resisted by residents and activists, as members of this community were 'decanted' to new homes, with leaseholders even forced to sell properties at prices well below the market rate.[11] Opposition to the Aylesbury Estate regeneration and many other similar schemes is ongoing.[12] Professor Loretta Lees, based at The University of Oxford, suggests that since 1997 a 'conservative estimate' of 135,658 council tenants and leaseholders have been displaced by this kind of gentrification.[13] Typically tenants are housed in cheaper accommodation far from their communities and support networks, sometimes even outside of

London, causing them stress and psychological injury. How do these numbers of people internally displaced by gentrification figure in relation to the questions raised by *10, 146, 058* about emotion, visibility and the migrant crisis?

Tate Neighbours include Counterpoints Arts, which sponsors art by and about refugees, as well as refugee advocacy groups based in Southwark. The group is also holding workshops intending to encourage campaigning and cultural activism. Nonetheless, the role that art itself has to play in gentrification, which affects vulnerable communities throughout London, is a highly-charged issue. Since the millennium, so-called 'creative cities' policies have integrated art into strategies for urban regeneration. The opening of Tate Modern at Bankside in 2000 was an early sign of changes that would come to Southwark, for example. Activist groups document the 'artwashing' that has proliferated alongside urban redevelopment, and argue for a radical cultural policy that would be shaped 'from below'.[14] The housing market in London is now cooling, according to reports, but the speculation-driven boom has created a dystopian situation where luxury developments often lie empty, banked for investment purposes, while homelessness and insecure housing have reached levels that have prompted a report from the UN about the damaging effects of austerity policies in the United Kingdom.[15]

I contextualise *10, 146, 058* in this way not to take a cheap shot at a high-profile artwork, but to explore the implications of the artwork's political content and to illustrate some of the limitations that it encounters. Bruguera cannot be expected to take sole responsibility for the social tensions that are caused by gentrification in the UK; to take this line would be to throw the baby out with the bathwater. And yet, it is impossible now to ignore the context of rampant gentrification in austerity-era London, especially for artworks that are community-oriented. Indeed, art activism has often highlighted the role of art in gentrification, as in Rosler's *If You Lived Here*, and earlier New York-based projects by Political Art Documentation / Distribution. The dilemmas of gentri-

fication have intensified since 2008, as quantitative-easing policies adopted as remedies to the financial crash created an enormous supply of cheap money to be invested in real estate.[16] In this very difficult and polarised climate it seems plausible that large museums, located at a sensitive nexus of insider reputational economies and public accountability, might want to give space to activist artists *because* they can negotiate the contradictions involved in using art as a non-elitist space of public deliberation.

Brexit is widely interpreted as a reaction against urban elites. All the more reason to commission art that is anti-elitist, perhaps. Jair Messias Bolsonaro in Brazil and President Trump have both made attacks on the arts central to their reactionary version of populism. The visibility that art activism enjoys in this context is not without risks, but represents a recalibration within contemporary art to seek to engage those who feel alienated by its enchanted space. Artists who are socially engaged reject art's sanctified status, putting them in a position to negotiate these complex issues. At the same time, they risk bearing the brunt of raw social contradiction and of being attacked from both the left and the right because their work acknowledges, but cannot resolve, the deep divides of class, race and gender that are part of cultural politics. In reference to the political crisis of the late 1960s, the artist Robert Smithson made comments that, because they explore the logic of crisis, are once again relevant:

Direct political action becomes a matter of trying to pick poison out of a boiling stew. The pain of this experience accelerates a need for more and more political actions. 'Actions speak louder than words.' Such loud actions pour in on one another like quicksand - one doesn't have to start one's own action. Actions swirl around one so fast they appear inactive. From a deeper level of 'the deepening political crisis,' the best and worst actions run together and surround one in the inertia of a whirlpool. The bottom is never reached, but one keeps dropping into a kind of

political centrifugal force that throws the blood of atrocities onto those working for peace.[17]

Smithson's commentary seems to speak to a setting where the frameworks for making sense of political action have become destabilised. There are signs of such a situation in the present: in the polarisation of views, in the panic about fake news, and in media debates about post-truth politics. It is notable that, in this context, Bruguera does not affirm the power of collectivity but rather emphasises the spaces of mediation through which any collective action must travel, thematising the *gap* between representation and action. This gap might be coercive, seeking to force visitors to shed tears; or ludic, an invitation to mark the Turbine Hall with the heat of a body; or symbolic, where the name of an institution is confused with that of a local community activist.

Although *10, 146, 058* makes reference to community, in its reference to 'neighbours' for example, there is an element of doubt in the work in regard to the political significance of community at this time. This hesitation is appropriate given the context of Brexit debates, where the 'will of the people', that authoritarian phantom, is routinely invoked by the British government to justify immigration controls after the vote to leave the European union. Tania Bruguera's practice, it is important to remember, takes on the repressive cultural policies of the Cuban government at the same time as it is willing to highlight contradictions in the democracies of the West. At the time of writing this article, Bruguera's involvement with Tate Exchange has been interrupted because she is under house arrest and on hunger strike in Cuba, because of her opposition to decree 349, a proposed law that would require Cuban artists to be registered by their government.

This form of art activism occupies the high-ground of artistic visibility perhaps because it is intensely and self-critically responsive to political actuality. Having said this, the very different approach of a group like Liberate Tate, who deployed direct action against corporate artwashing, should be given credit for sensitising

the museum to its ethical obligations (even though the victory of this group was pyrrhic: the oil-giant BP has been replaced as a sponsor by the car manufacturer Hyundai).[18] Art activism, like any cultural activism, operates within limits. Bruguera's *10, 146, 058* explores community within the frame of the migrant crisis, which is symptomatic of the uncoordinated condition of global capitalism. The vertiginous number that titles the work signals a human tragedy but also, when placed in the context of rampant gentrification, it can read be read as a gauge of the pressure that bears down upon and disperses community, the pressure of capital accumulation.

Art activism from below: Artist Taxi Driver

Greg Sholette's writings on activist art and 'dark matter' have argued very clearly that the subversive challenge of art activism has always been linked to its diversity, its ability to connect work at the top of the artistic pyramid to creative activity 'from below' that is embedded in the anonymous energies that constitute social movements.[19] There is an enormous variety of aesthetic forms that constitute this space, including the DIY floats and banners that garland public demonstrations, Tactical Media pranks, community engagement projects, and direct action in museums and cultural institutions.

Images are always at stake in politics. This point is thematised in the portrait of Yusef in Tania Bruguera's Turbine Hall commission, but also, at another end of the activist spectrum, in political posters produced by anonymous artists working within social movements. These posters, as Dara Greenwald and Josh McPhee suggest are created 'from a need to express, represent, and propose alternative ways of existing, both within the movement and to society at large'.[20] Images of this kind are icons for a constituency that has been excluded or marginalised; but they also suggest an invisible 'anti-power', as John Holloway puts it - an immense reservoir of resistance that stands outside of representation.[21]

The possibilities presented by new

forms of aesthetic politics have encouraged some critics to view them as an emergent model of political engagement. In 2015, Peter Weibel wrote in an essay examining global activism of 'a growing ennui with politics, dwindling trust in democratic institutions and parties and a desire for more participation, that is for direct, presentistic rather than representative democracy'.[22] The immediate reference points for Weibel's argument are the 'movement of the squares' that swept Greece, Egypt and Spain in 2011, the Occupy movement, and mass protests in Ukraine, Turkey, Iran and India. The weakness, perhaps, of Weibel's argument - which would be shared by most commentary from before 2016 - is that it does not anticipate that the upsurge of democratic activism might mutate into a reactionary insurgency. Yet Weibel's point about a hunger for participation holds good, as does his suggestion that the insurgency might re-energise democracy. Since 2016, democratic politics has been revitalised, in the United Kingdom at least, as a battleground between reactionary and progressive populism: both tendencies have rejected political elites that present no alternative to neoliberalism.

The most striking feature of the new political landscape has been the way that Tactical Media strategies have both disrupted and revitalised democratic politics. During the US presidential election of 2016 it became clear that alt-right accounts used pranks, fictions and other tactics more commonly associated with left-wing politics to tip the balance in favour of Donald Trump. Of course, there has since been an ongoing enquiry into the extent to which state actors, including Russia, may have contributed to this effort. Whatever the extent of Russian involvement, the fact remains that the power of Tactical Media was recognised and appropriated by a reactionary political power nurtured on platforms including 4Chan. This much has been acknowledged by David Garcia, who co-wrote with Geert Lovinck the original Tactical Media manifesto in the late 1990s.[23]

It would be wrong to suggest that Tactical Media has been entirely co-opted by the right, however: the remarkable

result of the snap election called by Prime Minister Theresa May in 2017 suggests otherwise. At this point the Conservatives hoped to turn a 20-point lead in the opinion polls over the Labour Party led by Jeremy Corbyn into a commanding majority in Parliament in order to make it easier to push through their interpretation of Brexit. In the course of a 5-week election campaign, however, this 20-point lead was cut to nothing - an unprecedented movement of the polls in such a short space of time. Corbyn's democratic socialist project gained seats from the Conservative Party, although not enough to form a government. This result was all the more remarkable given that the Conservative party invested millions of pounds in targeted social media campaigns, identifying key swing voters and placing political advertisements into their newsfeeds that were calculated either to supress or incite action and or shift political opinion.[24] Crucially important to the Labour Party's success was a legion of online news outlets and activists who worked tirelessly and voluntarily to counter the Government's attack lines and share alternative perspectives. Current fears about the decline of the mainstream media and the rise of 'fake news' often fail to take account of this knife-edge situation in which both dangerously reactionary and progressive forces have flourished.

Mark McGowan, who is known as Chunky Mark, or as 'Artist Taxi Driver' (ATD), operates within this space. With approximately 100,000 followers on twitter his is one among many voices on left-wing social media outlets in the UK that made possible Labour's transformation of fortunes in the 2017 election. Many of these followers will not be aware that ATD is an artist, in the sense that he has a BA in Painting from Camberwell and a long history of performances and media interventions. Nor do these distinctions seem to have much meaning for ATD, although the persona that he plays - ranting into a desktop camera from behind the wheel of his car - originated in a protest against the Frieze Art Fair in 2010 and is the self-conscious inversion of a comic stereotype in Britain: the reactionary, opinionated taxi driver who imposes

his views on passengers. ATD's rants are virtuosic in their performance of a struggle over language, forming baroque neologisms to describe and re-describe the horrific landscape of austerity inflicted by the Conservative government.

McGowan has previously undertaken performances that thematise endurance, such as *The Withered Arm for Peace* (2006) where he performed for two weeks outside the Brick Lane Gallery over Christmas with his arm attached to a lamppost. The persona of ATD posts a commentary on news events on an almost daily basis. To illustrate the character of these interventions, I will focus on a significant event during the 2017 election. During a televised debate with Corbyn, Prime Minister Theresa May asserted that there was no 'magic money tree' to pay for all of the promises made in the Labour manifesto. This point was clearly presented as an attack line that would be amplified through the print press, which is predominantly right-wing in the UK, to disparage as fantasy the idea that it might be possible to invest significantly more in education, the NHS and social welfare, and to demand more tax to be paid by private corporations.

The theorist Jacques Rancière has written powerfully of the political implications of imagery in a commentary that includes both the visual and the textual image. He states:

> …the image is not exclusive to the visible. There is visibility that does not amount to an image; there are images which consist wholly in words. But the commonest regime of the image is one that presents a relationship between the sayable and the visible, a relationship which plays on both the analogy *and* the dissemblance between them. This relationship by no means requires the two terms to be materially present. The visible can be arranged in meaningful tropes; words deploy a visibility that can be blinding.[25]

The 'magic money tree' metaphor is intended to blind us, in Jacques Rancière's terms, by its substitution of a different framework for understanding the political goals of the Labour Party's campaign. In ATD's filmed response, released immediately after the debate, the metaphor is subjected to multiple re-inscriptions. He begins by laughing and recounting that 'nobody knows' where the 'Tory magic money tree' is to be found. Then he answers, 'You've got it' (to Theresa May), or 'it's in the Cayman islands, it's in Panama', (referring to the 'Panama papers' revelations). Then in a culminating tirade:

> The Tories' magic money tree is called the public - you - your zero-hours contract - you get less, the boss gets more - the magic money tree - rents go up, the Tory landlord gets more - you get poor - the magic money tree - your kids get debt - the City of London? - they get Lamb-er-fuckin-ghinis - the magic money tree. Your library, your fire station, your community centre, your police station - get shut down. Tory Vulture capitalists property speculators get the keys - the magic money tree. Google, Starbucks, Amazon, Apple, the biggest companies in our lives pay no tax - the Tory magic money tree. Banks, credit cards debt, you can't sleep at night worrying about work, feed the kids, paying the rent - that's the Tory magic money tree, like a fucking giant triffid, spreading…[26]

A transcription cannot quite capture the subtle aesthetics in ATD's work, where the visual dimension is always deskilled, filmed on a dashboard-mounted camera. Visuality is suppressed, but the invisible power of words is thematised. ATD's practice is an endless series of reports, a kind of social media reinvention of the 'living newspaper' produced as a kind of 'poor image', addressing an alternative media circuit which quickly resulted in 'Theresa May's Tory Magic Money Tree' being remixed with 'Shutdown', a track by the UK Grime artist Skepta.[27] In this work a circuit is created between an anonymous audience of media producers and the space of precarious work: the locations pictured through the windows of ATD's ever-present car interior change because he does actually work as a minicab driver: his art practice is structured by the space between fares.[28] There is, in other words, an invisible social form to the visibility of his work: that of work and the value-form. This social reality has been built into ATD's art practice, with the fragments of time available to make becoming a kind of endless serial communication, mirroring and re-inscribing the spectacle of political news.

Critics of art activism have tended to suggest that it is a hybrid form that results in no significant political or artistic outcome. This is the position of the art critic Ben Davis, for example, who argues in his book *9.5 Theses on Art and Class* from a Marxist perspective that art and politics should be understood as distinctly separate areas of activity. Davis states: 'the work of "political artists" usually harms no one, and I would defend their right to make it; what I cannot support is the self-serving assumption that it "somehow" has a political effect in the real world'.[29] Peter Osborne has argued that art activism tends toward mimesis of the autonomy of art: it is a quasi-artistic practice, separated from existing forms of social practice but undertaken to look like political action.[30] The result, in Osborne's estimation, is that art activism defaults to a negative conception of autonomy (as an exodus, or freedom from capital or the state) but does not arrive at a relationship to a constructive political action. Both of these criticisms fail to engage with the diversity of aesthetic practices covered by the term art activism. As I have attempted to illustrate here, these forms are responsive to changing political contexts and continue to evolve in an ambiguous zone between art and politics. The criticism advanced by Davis and Osborne, by contrast, seems to derive from an idealised conception of politics where it is possible to say what will have, or has had, an effect in the 'real' world, without taking part in the struggle to define that world.

Art activism grew alongside a haphazard, critical aesthetic pluralism that spanned different approaches to cultural expression while retaining a foothold in the legacy of the avant-garde. That has been its strength. A key lesson of recent times is that the space within which politics takes place is contingent and capable of strange mutations. Marginal positions can emerge from obscurity to reshape wider cultural attitudes. The significance of the existence of a border-land between radical politics and art is difficult to evaluate, but at the very least it has aided the circulation of nuanced approaches to the visibility of politics that are likely to prove useful in these volatile times.

Art activism has played a significant role in resisting the hegemony of neoliberalism since the 1970s. What role might it play now that populist activism is emerging all over the map? From the anti-capitalist movement to Occupy, the Indignados to Adbusters, the goal was to shift conceptions of the possible by intervening within visibility through direct action and alternative circuits of communication. The goal was to undermine the coherence of neoliberalism. But what happens when the global order actually does begin to be uncoordinated?

We continue to live under a globalised capitalist global order, and its instability is not to be confused with its imminent collapse. Evidently, though, the periodic crises that have always marked capitalism are no longer easily contained by the system as a whole. We are now in a situation that resonates with previous periods of political and economic impasse: most obviously, those of the 1970s and the 1930s. Bruguera and ATD show in different ways that the relationship between visibility and art activism adapts in response to this situation. In some respects, activism is more integrated into the art institution, but in others it is more decentralised from it because digital platforms allow an enormous audience to be engaged without recourse to the infrastructure of exhibition spaces, curators and art critics. There is a polarisation but in both of the examples treated here it can be argued that an attempt to situate democracy in a violently contested space of visibility is attempted. In the case of ATD, this practice is undertaken in alliance with a movement embedded in electoral politics. This seems to be a new point of articulation for art activism, as one of the left methodologies that can be used to counter the resurgence of right-wing politics.

Criticism can play its part by looking for new connections in and among the different political constituencies of art activism in order to respond to its legacies and enable a cultural politics responsive to this moment to crystallise.☐

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Stephen Duncombe

The Power of the Imaginary in Activist Arts

I.The Future Republic of the Former Republic of Macedonia

In Spring 2014 I travelled to Skopje with the Center for Artistic Activism to work with activists advocating for the rights of LGBTI and Roma peoples. Upon arriving, I discovered that it was a dispiriting time to be an activist in Macedonia. Since the victory of the conservative VMRO-DPMNE alliance in 2006, the country had lurched to the Right - an 'early adapter' of the conservative nationalist populism that would sweep Europe and the world over the next decade. LGBTI and Roma groups in Macedonia were marginalized at best, and openly harassed at worst. A year prior to our arrival, someone had tried to set fire to the LGBTI Support Centre in Skopje. Meanwhile, the nationalist government was spending its resources on immense monuments to mythologized heroes of the Macedonian people. A newly commissioned statue of Alexander the Great astride a horse dominated Skopje's main square, and hundreds more had been erected around the city as part of the ruling party's controversial Skopje 2014 project. In this Macedonia there was simply no place for Queers, Roma and other 'outsiders'.

The Center for Artistic Activism (C4AA) is a New York based non-profit research and training institute devoted to helping activists create more like artists and artists strategize like activists.[1] At the core of the Center's work are week-long training workshops. To date we have trained over a thousand artists and activists in 14 countries across four continents. The training workshops usually conclude with a collaborative creative action. Together, in the space of twenty-four hours, we imagine, plan, build and execute some sort of public artistic activist intervention. We've erected interactive sculptures with sex workers in Cape Town, South Africa; built a creepy Big-Pharma Carnival with access-to-medicine activists in Barcelona, Spain, made an inhospitable canal into a neighbourhood beach in St. Petersburg, Russia, and staged a pop-up magic show with immigration activists in a subway station in New York City, USA. As our workshop in Macedonia drew to a close, it was time for the group to come up with a creative action.

The Macedonian activists we were working with were experienced, smart, creative and embattled. Feeling themselves pushed out of their own country, their first response was to push back. All the actions initially proposed included some sort of confrontational provocation: the proverbial middle finger stuck up to those who were doing the same to them. These actions might be emotionally satisfying, and could even generate media attention - but with what ultimate result? The right-wing government was selling the fantasy that Queers and Roma pose a threat to Macedonian society, and we would be demonstrating the same thing. Not the best idea.

So we did some more brainstorming and we came up with a lot of wonderfully silly ideas. Since Alexander the Great was famous for having male lovers, we thought of staging a Queer Alexander the Great talk show and broadcasting it on local TV. A fun possibility, but since we only had twenty-four hours to plan, prepare and stage the action, we rejected this proposal along with some twenty others. But through these absurd ideas came the kernel of a good one. Why not create the kind of country we wanted Macedonia to be? A diverse, accepting, loving Macedonia. We couldn't do it for real. But we could act it out for a brief time.

Over the next day and night we built a new Macedonia. Playing off the country's much despised official name at the time - The Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia - we called our country *The Future Republic of the Former Republic of Macedonia*. For our new republic we printed passports offering a spectrum instead of a binary choice of genders, and gave out pencils with erasers so people could change their minds. We erected an entrance to our New Republic complete with a border guard to check paperwork. Whenever a person entered our country, the border guard blew her whistle and the new "citizen" was met with joyous clapping and cheers from the crowd. Since 'old' Macedonia was filled with statues, we built an empty statue podium for people to climb onto and hold aloft signs declaring themselves everyday heroes and heroines of our New Macedonia. We had music, food, and tables and crayons so kids could draw pictures. Brightly painted banners were hung over park benches, inviting people to sit and talk and get to know their Queer and Roma fellow citizens.

For two hours on a beautiful Saturday in the capital city's most popular park we welcomed people into our Utopia. And they came not only activists and artists but also parents with children, old people, teenagers and curious passers-by. More than five hundred people took our passports, entered the gates, claimed their rights as heroes and heroines, and pledged their allegiance to a more open and accepting Macedonia. The local activists informed us it was one of the biggest and most inclusive demonstrations of marginalized peoples in the capital in almost a decade. (And to underscore the principle that no Utopia is ever perfect, we

forgot to call the press - so our Republic was ignored by the Macedonian media.)

Our Future Republic of the Former Republic of Macedonia 'demonstrated,' not what the activists were against, but what we were for. It may have lasted only a little while, but it inspired the activists and the visitors to imagine an alternative Macedonia. It allowed them to ask 'What if?'.

II. The Avant-Garde and the Re-Distribution of the Sensible

To help us think about this action as both an artistic expression and an act of politics I would like to now turn to the contemporary French philosopher Jacques Rancière and his notion of the 'Distribution of the Sensible'. In his own words, this is:

The system of self-evident facts of sense perception that simultaneously discloses the existence of something in common and the delimitations that define the respective parts and positions within it.[2]

In other words, the Distribution of the Sensible is the "making sense" which creates the "common sense" of a social system. It defines what we understand to be good and bad, beautiful and ugly, acceptable and abhorrent, possible and impossible. It delineates what a society has in common, and what is outside that society. It is what reveals (and disappears) what there is to be seen and sensed. And all this sense making and making sense happens not merely in the mind, as conscious activity, but at the root level of human sense perception. As what art critic John Berger calls "Ways of Seeing", the Distribution of the Sensible is a sort of political aesthetics.[3]

For Rancière aesthetics is at the core of any political system of order, or challenges to that order. As he writes:

Politics revolves around what is seen and what can be said about it, around who has the ability to see and the talent to speak, around the properties of space and the possibilities of time.[4]

Politics, then, is not something argued out in government buildings or set forth in laws or policies. It is contested at the very level of how we perceive our reality, and the limits set on our imagination: what can be seen, who can speak, even what we accept as acceptable coordinates of things as fundamental as time and space, not to mention what is an acceptable politics and who is an acceptable political subject. Politics, at its very core, is the delimitation of "the visible, the sayable, the thinkable," a regime of meaning that renders things sensible, or non-sensible.

With his phrase Distribution of the Sensible, Rancière is playing a bit of a word game, as French intellectuals are wont to do. He means us to understand it as a regime of meaning that renders things 'sensible' or not. In any given time, at any given place, what is considered political is that which is recognized as 'sensible': sensible subjects, sensible language, sensible history, etc. Quite simply, a politics that 'make sense'. But this doesn't fully capture what Rancière is arguing here. It's not that other objects, utterances, or meaning-systems outside of the dominant Distribution of the Sensible are recognized and then rejected as nonsense - as one might do with a political system or ideology that one acknowledges yet does not agree with. Rather it's that they are *not sensed at all*.

Here Rancière picks up on the second meaning of the word sensible: as that which can, or cannot, be comprehended through the senses: sight, taste, touch, hearing. The Distribution of the Sensible, he argues,

is a delimitation of spaces and times, of the visible and the invisible, of speech and noise, that simultaneously determines the place and the stakes of politics as a form of experience.[5]

The rational, conscious activity of political *effect* is preceded by political *affect*. "Politics [is] a form of experience": something lived, felt, and above all sensed.

What does this have to do with art? Art is both a reflection of and a model for the distribution of the sensible. It is one of those places in which a given regime of meaning is embodied and communicated. It is also one of those places where it is contested and re-distributed. And, importantly, art speaks to the senses. As such Rancière provides a way of thinking about the political function of art, or rather the function of all art (since all art has a social and political functionality, whether it claims one for itself or not). Rancière's concern here is less with political intent or even content, but aesthetics: what does the art do to, and with, our ways of seeing and understanding. As he writes, "Aesthetics has its own politics, or its own meta-politics."[6]

Rancière divides art into two regimes: the Representative Regime and the Aesthetic Regime. The Representative Regime constitutes art that holds up a mirror to the world as it is or as it is commonly sensed to be. This is art's traditional mimetic function. This mirror can be *celebratory*, reflecting the greatness of great moments in a nation's history (i.e. most of what resides in National Museums), or critical: a revelation of the horrors of these 'great' moments (covering a large proportion of "political" art). The mirror can be *realistic*, in which the material world itself is represented as physically accurately as possible (e.g. documentary photography), or *idealistic*: in which an ideal of the material world is represented as 'accurately' as possible (e.g. Socialist Realism). What all these forms of art share is that they represent - even if in a critical form - the given distribution of the sensible in the society from which it comes and to which it speaks.

The Aesthetic Regime, on the other hand, is art that no longer follows laws, rules or techniques that 'make sense' but instead creates and arranges a new sensibility. Here art's political function is not to represent what is but to imagine what could be, fashioning a new and alternative articulation of "the visible, the sayable, the thinkable". The Aesthetic Regime describes art that does not reflect a Distribution of the Sensible but which, consciously or not, is an articulation of the *Re*-Distribution of the Sensible. This is the political aesthetics of avant-garde art.

As an example of this Aesthetic Regime, one cannot do better than to look at Vladimir Tatlin's Monument to the Third International. Tatlin's tower was commissioned in 1919, soon after the revolution in Russia, by the Department of Artistic Work of the People's Commissariat for Enlightenment. The tower was to stand 400 meters tall, almost a quarter higher than the Eiffel Tower, and was to straddle the River Neva in central St. Petersburg. Tilting at the same angle as the Earth (23.5 degrees) and taking the idea of 'revolution' quite literally, the tower was constructed of three internal revolving levels. At the bottom was a massive glass and steel cube intended to house the Soviet legislative assemblies, rotating once a year. Above this was a pyramid in which the executive committees would meet, revolving once a month. And over this pyramid was a cylinder, set to spin once a day, intended to accommodate the information and propaganda services. This cylinder was to be faced with a giant screen showing the latest cultural and political news and equipped with massive loudspeakers to broadcast revolutionary news. At the very top of Tatlin's tower was a hemisphere to house radio equipment, topped by radio towers capable of transmitting world-wide and a projector with the ability to project images onto the clouds.

Needless to say, the Monument to the Third International was never built.[7] There was not enough steel in all of Russia to construct it, and even if there had been it is unclear whether it was architecturally stable enough to stand. The closest Tatlin ever got to realizing his dream monument was a five-metre model built of wood, tin, paper, nails and glue (and a smaller, cruder, one that was photographed being dragged around on a float as part of a May Day parade in St. Petersburg in 1920).

The impracticality of constructing the monument was recognized and criticized at the time by Tatlin's cultural and political comrades. Anatoly Lunacharsky, who as the Soviet Union's first Commissar of Enlightenment had commissioned the Monument to the Third International and was generally supportive of the early Soviet avant-garde, had this to say in 1922 about the Constructivists with whom Tatlin was affiliated: "They all play at being engineers, but they don't know as much of the essence of machinery as a savage." Writing about Tatlin in particular, Lunacharsky levelled a further related critique: "Tatlin mimics the machine… [but] this is a machine on which it is impossible to work."[8] Other revolutionaries were no less critical. Leon Trotsky, reflecting upon the monument in his book *Literature and Revolution*, wrote:

I remember seeing once, when a child, a wooden temple built in a beer bottle. This fired my imagination, but I did not ask myself at that time what it was for…

But now, regarding Tatlin's monument, he writes: "I cannot refrain from the question: What is it for?"[9] Trotsky, or course, unknowingly answered his own question regarding the function of Tatlin's monument. What is it for? *To fire the imagination!*

Later in his life, Lunacharsky came to understand and appreciate this imaginative function of art and design. Writing about Vladimir Mayakovsky's poems in 1931, a year before Socialist Realism was to become state practice and two years before his death, he bravely defended the revolutionary function of the patently impossible:

…though his works are not in themselves utilitarian, they should provide the stimuli or methods or instructions for producing these utilitarian things. All this will bring about a change in environment and, therefore, a change in society itself.[10]

And Tatlin himself, as much as he wrapped himself in the utilitarian rhetoric of the revolutionary Russian avant-garde, was clear that art could have another function. The ideal of "uniting purely artistic forms with purely utilitarian aims", Tatlin writes in his proclamation 'Art into Technology', is to create "models which stimulate inventions in the business of creating a new world."[11]

III. Utopia

To think through this thinking of the "business of creating a new world" via the "re-distribution of the sensible", I want to go back a bit, about 400 years before Tatlin built his monument and 500 years before today, to Thomas More's *Utopia*, the genesis for so much of our thinking about the possibilities - and pitfalls - of firing the imagination.[12]

When More wrote *Utopia* over the years 1515 and 1516, literary representations of far-away lands that worked according to radically different principles were already common: philosophical imaginings like Plato's *Republic*, fanciful travelogues like those of Sir John Mandeville, and - most importantly - the alternative worlds set forth in *The Bible* (promised lands of milk and honey and visions of heavens where the lion will lay down with the lamb), were familiar models, but nonetheless, More's *Utopia* literally names the practice.

But as the text which gives birth to such a common term, *Utopia* is an exceedingly curious book, full of contradictions, riddles and paradoxes. The grandest and best known of these contradictions lies in the title itself. Utopia, a made-up word composed by More from the Greek *ou*, meaning 'not', and *topos*, meaning 'place', is a place which is literally *no place*. In addition, the storyteller of this magic land is called Raphael Hythloday, and the name Hythloday, or Hythlodaeus in the original Latin, has its roots in the Greek word *Huthlos*, meaning nonsense. So here we are being told a story of a place which is named out of existence by a narrator who is named as unreliable. And so begins the debate that has raged in Utopia studies for half a millennia: Is the entirety of More's *Utopia* a satire, an exercise demonstrating the absurdity of social alternatives? Or is it an earnest effort to suggest and promote radical ideals?

There is suggestive evidence for the sincere interpretation of *Utopia*. The island of Utopia is described in painstaking detail: descriptions of the island, the cities, the people and their institutions, as well as facsimiles of maps and alphabets, are all provided to convince the reader that such a place exists. In one of the letters that accompanied the original printings of Utopia in 1516-1518, More worries that he may have recorded the span of a certain bridge incorrectly and begs his friend Peter Giles to ask Raphael Hythloday for the exact measurement when

he sees him next. Such a public concern with veracity suggests that More wanted his *Utopia* to be taken seriously.

On the other hand, there is much to suggest that More meant *Utopia* to be read as a satire. In addition to the names given to the place and the narrator, More's description of the island of Utopia makes certain aspects (like female equality, an elected priesthood and government, the banishment of lawyers, and lack of private property) that he, in his real personal, economic, political and religious life (as a man, lawyer, property holder, future King's councillor, Lord Chancellor, and dogmatic defender of the faith). He then places these radical political imaginaries within a society where jewels are children's playthings and gold and silver are reserved for, among other things, chamber pots. As such, one might argue, he effectively ridicules *all* these possibilities. One might imagine the argument: "Communal property and elected priests? That's as absurd as taking a crap in a gold and silver chamber pot!"

The ironic asides made throughout the book and the ancillary letters that accompanied its initial printings also suggest that *Utopia* is not to be taken seriously. For an example we need turn no further than the one I introduced above: More's concern over the specific span of a bridge and his request to a friend to ask Hythloday for the genuine measurements. Instead of being understood as a gesture of concern on More's part with the overall veracity of the account of *Utopia*, it might be better interpreted as a big joke: More would not be corrected in his facts regarding the length of a bridge on a far-off isle because Hythloday, his fact-checker, quite simply, doesn't exist other than as a piece of fiction.

Sincere or satiric, earnest or absurd? These are the two sides staked out and defended by scholars of *Utopia* over many years. I believe, however, that this orthodox debate about More's intent obfuscates rather than clarifies, and actually misses the genius of More's book. *Utopia* is both. Written in the tradition of *serio ludere* or "serious play" that More admired so much in classic authors, the story presents itself as both sincere and

satirical, earnest *and* absurd, fact *and* fiction. Utopia is someplace *and* no-place.

More takes pains to convince the reader that *Utopia* is a real place, and it is through the veracity of the description that they can start to imagine a someplace radically different than the world they presently inhabit. Like a theatre piece or an art installation, the audience is presented with a world wholly formed. We experience a sense of radical alterity as we step inside of it and try it on for size. What is foreign becomes familiar and what is unnatural is naturalized. We are not just told that an alternative model for structuring society could be possible; instead we are shown that it is possible. We *sense* it. More provides us with a vision of another, better world.

And then he blows it up.

This destabilization is the key. More imagines an alternative to 16th Century Europe that he then reveals to be a *work of imagination*. (It is, after all, no-place.) But the reader has been infected; another option has been shown. They cannot safely return to the assurances of their own present, since the naturalness of their world has been disrupted. The opening lines of a brief poem attached to the first printings of *Utopia* read:
Will thou know what wonders strange be,
in the land that late was found?
Will thou learn thy life to lead,
by divers ways that godly be?[13]

Once an alternative - "divers ways that godly be" - has been imagined, to stay where one is or to try something else becomes a question that demands attention and a choice. Yet the choice More offers is not an easy one. By destabilizing his own design of an ideal society he prevents us from short-circuiting this imaginative moment into a fixed imaginary: a realizable future. We cannot simply swap ready-made Plan A for ready-made Plan B. We have to generate our own plans, and this is *because* Plan B is untenable, impossible - no-place.

The problem with many imaginaries is that they posit themselves as realizable possibilities. Their designers imagine a future or an alternative and then present it as *THE* future or *THE* alterna-

tive. If made manifest this leads to a number of, not mutually exclusive, unsavoury results, including:
1) Brutalizing the present to bring it into line with the imagined future. (Stalin's Five-Year Plans.)
2) Disillusionment as the future never arrives and the alternative is never realized. (The years that led up to the fall of Communist and Socialist Europe in the late '80s and '90s.)
3) A vain search for a new imaginary when the promised one fails to appear. (The resurgence of Right-Wing Nationalism.)
4) Living a lie. ('Actually Existing' Socialism, or… the American Dream)
5) Rejecting possibility altogether. (Dismissing any alternative as a naïve impossibility.)

But what if impossibility is incorporated into design in the first place? This is exactly what More does. By positioning his imaginary someplace as no-place he escapes the problems which typically haunt imaginaries. Yes, the alternatives he describes are sometimes absurd (gold and silver chamber pots? A place called No-Place?), but this conscious absurdity is what keeps *Utopia* from being a singular and authoritative narrative, that is: a closed act of imagination to be either accepted or rejected. It has to be modified. It is the presentation of Utopia as *no place* and of its narrator as nonsense that *opens up* a space for the reader's imagination to wonder what *their* vision of an alternative *someplace* might be.

To turn to some Biblical analogies: Utopia is the Jewish Messiah who never arrives. But the value of the Jewish Messiah, as Walter Benjamin points out, is not that he or she never arrives but that their arrival is imminent: "every second of time [is] the straight gate through which the Messiah might arrive".[14] Similarly, Utopia gives us something to imagine, anticipate and prepare for. Utopia is not present, since that would preclude the work of popular imagination and action ("It has already arrived, so what more is there to do?"); nor, however, is it absent, since that would deny us the stimulus with which to imagine an alternative ("There is only what we have always known!").

Utopia is imminent possibility.

Utopia as an artwork, however, occupies a different position. It is present. Utopia as an ideal may forever be on the horizon, but More's *Utopia* is a paper and ink book - a sensible object that one can behold (and read) in the here and now. It is like the Messiah who arrives and announces their plan for the world. However, as was the case with the Christian Messiah, the presence embodied within More's text exists only for a moment, its power, glory and permanence undermined by its inevitable destruction.[15] This curious state of being and not being, a place that is also no-place, is what gives Utopia its power to stimulate imagination, for between these poles an opening is created for the reader of *Utopia* to imagine 'What if?' for themselves.

'What if?' is the Utopian question. It is a question that functions both negatively and positively. The question throws us into an alternative future: What if there were only common property? But because we still inhabit the present we are also forced to look back and ask: How come we have private property here and now? *Utopia* insists that we contrast its image with the realities of our own society, comparing one to the other, stimulating judgment and reflection.[16] This is its critical moment. But this critical reflection is not entirely negating. That is, it is not caught in the parasitical dependency of being wed to the very system it calls into question, for its interlocutor is not only a society that one wants to tear down but also a vision of a world one would like to build. (This is what distinguishes the 'What if?' of Utopia from the same question posed by dystopias.) Utopian criticism functions not as an end in itself but as a break with what is for a departure towards something new. By asking 'What if?' we can simultaneously criticize and imagine, imagine and criticize, and thereby begin to escape the binary politics of impotent critique on the one hand and closed imagination on the other.

There is a famous passage in the Bible that those invested in political imagination like to cite. It is from Proverbs 29:18, and the King James Version be-

gins like this: "Where there is no vision, the people perish…" Usually it is only this phrase that is remembered, but the full line continues thus: "… but he that keepeth the law, happy is he."[17] It is the passage in its entirety that reveals the double-edged sword of political imagination. Utopic imagination is necessary: it gives the people something to believe in and hope for. Yet that moment of imagination will - and, for the authors and translators of the Bible, must - become law to be followed if a new world is to be built. This is the Utopian history from which we are desperately trying to awake: Communism, Fascism, Neoliberalism, and now Nationalist Populism. Each one starts out as imagination and each becomes law. It appears an inescapable trap.

But there is a way out: the vision, and the attendant law, must be one that can never be fixed or stabilized. This is what Utopia promises: imagined alternatives that insist on remaining imaginary - noplace. By envisioning impossibilities, Utopia creates an opening to ask 'What If?' without closing down this free space by seriously answering 'This is what'. With such visions the imagined future can never be fixed. There will never be a moment when Utopia can be definitively declared. Instead, these alternative plans for our future exist only as a fiction that we know to be a fiction but which inspires us nonetheless. These utopian visions are something we have imagined and thus can re-imagine at will.

IV. The Future of the Future Republic

"There Is No Alternative" was the mantra of Great Britain's Conservative Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher. To any complaint about the inequity of power or wealth or the brutality of cuts to public services - in short: the ruthlessness of the system - she would simply reply: "There Is No Alternative." Thatcher understood that the job of the powers-that-be is not only, or even primarily, to keep people down but also to deny them the possibility of looking up. The biggest obstacle to social change is the belief that there is no alternative: that the world as it is now is the world as it always was

and will forever be. To catch a glimpse of a different way of living and being can free us from this prison house of grim inevitability. Utopian art projects, be they impossible towers or temporary nations, have this ability to transport people into a radically alternate universe. This is not an alternative we think about or consider but one we can see and feel, and maybe even taste, smell, touch and hear: it is a redistribution of the sensible. It is an alternative we affectively experience - and this is the key to its political efficacy.

But of course Utopia is no-place. We cannot create a real utopia, though with props and people it can be performed. For a brief time, and as a scale model, the experience of an alternative can be created. But only for a brief time, and as a scale model. When we created the Future Republic of the Former Republic of Macedonia it was never our intent to actually realize the nation's future. Our goal was to create a dream. We built a new nation to stimulate the citizens' imagination about what it might be possible to do - and then we took down our banners, disassembled our frontier, carted away our pedestal and left. We created Utopia and made sure it was No-Place.

What we were doing with our Utopian artistic action on that sunny afternoon for a few hours in a Skopje park was, like More's *Utopia*, not meant to be a definitive *plan* or some silly art *prank* but a *prompt*. If there was going to be a real New Republic it was going to have to come from the imaginations and the agitation and organization of the mass of Macedonians. Less than two years later, that process began as the Conservative nationalist government was brought down in a fit of imagination, agitation and organization known as the Colourful Revolution. It is not Utopia, to be sure, but it is the beginnings of a new sense of possibility.□

References
1. Center for Artistic Activism: https://c4aa.org/
2. Jacques Rancière, *The Politics of Aesthetics*, London & New York: Continuum, 2004, p.12.
3. John Berger, *Ways of Seeing* [TK] London: Penguin, 1972

4. Rancière, p.13.

5. Rancière, p.13.

6. Rancière, p.60.

7. Contemporary artists are attempting - albeit in a very conceptual way - to build Tatlin's monument today: http://www.tatlinstowerandtheworld.net/.

8. Cited in Christina Lodden, *Russian Constructivism*, New Haven: Yale University Press, 1983, p. 239, n.165; original source: TeatrRSFSR, Pechat'I revolyutsiya No. 7, 1922.

9. Leon Trotsky, *Literature and Revolution*, NY: Russell and Russell, 1957, p. 247-8. Trotsky does, however, preface his critique of Tatlin by saying that while the first needs of the revolution are to repair the infrastructure and take care of necessities, there will be time to experiment once these needs are met and there is a surplus.

10. Anatoly Lunacharsky, *On Literature and Art*, Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1931/1973; http://www.marxists.org/archive/lunachar/1931/mayakovsky.htm, no page.

11. Cited in Christina Lodden, *Russian Constructivism*, New Haven: Yale University Press, 1983, p.65.

12. For a fuller discussion of *Utopia* and its politics see my introduction in Thomas More, *Open|Utopia*, Stephen Duncombe, ed. Wivenhoe/New York/Port Watson, 2012

13. "Cornelius Graphey to the Reader" in More, *Open|Utopia*, p.13.

14. Walter Benjamin, "Theses on the Philosophy of History," *Illuminations*, New York: Schocken, 1969, p. 264.

15. Alas, poor Jesus of Nazareth was unfortunate enough to be resurrected, stabilized, and institutionalized by the official church, thereby becoming a symbol of divine authority rather than an opening to human questioning.

16. Darko Suvin, writing about Science Fiction, describes a "literature of cognitive estrangement," marked by "the presence and interaction of estrangement and cognition, and whose main formal device is an imaginative framework alternate to the author's empirical environment." This description applies to More's *Utopia* as well. Darko Survin, *Metamorphoses of Science Fiction*, New Haven: Yale University Press, 1979, pp. 4 & 7-9.

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Reassessing Socially Engaged Artistic Practices

Interview with Grant Kester by Tihomir Topuzovski

Museum of Contemporary Art - Skopje, October 1, 2018

We can start with a question about your work. How has your own understanding and reading of art changed through the years? Can you elaborate a bit more on your approach and the theoretical line of work you build upon in conceiving the work of art as a process rather than a physical object?

When I started writing in the mid '80s there was relatively little interest among mainstream critics or historians in activist or socially engaged art practices. Aside from a few key figures like Lucy Lippard or curators like Nina Felshin, most of the writing in the U.S. was being done by artists themselves. Suzanne Lacy is a good example of this, or Diane Neumaier. Even when I was researching my first book *Conversation Pieces* during the mid-to-late '90s this was still the case. The manuscript for that book was finished in 2000, but it took almost three years to find a press that was willing to publish it because none of the editors I approached felt there was sufficient interest in the work I was discussing. By the mid-2000s, however, the field of socially engaged art began to expand dramatically. It expanded both in terms of geographic range and in the sheer numbers of artists and collectives that emerged at this time. In part this expansion can be understood as a response by a younger generation of artist to the dramatically increasing monetization of contemporary art, evident in spiralling sales prices, the expansion of commercial art fairs and the emergence of a new class of entrepreneurial dealers and collectors. As a result, the new forms of socially engaged art practice that developed during this period often had only a tangential relationship to the mainstream art world of biennales, museums, art fairs, private dealers and so on. By extension, most of this work was and continues to be ignored by the mainstream art critics and journals. This is one of the main reasons I founded the journal *FIELD* several years ago - to provide a forum specifically focused on in-depth critical analysis of activist and socially engaged art practice.

Something else happened in contemporary art around the same time. The 1990s and early 2000s are identified with new forms of 'social' or 'relational' art associated with a cadre of primarily male European artists, including Tino Sehgal, Philippe Parreno, Pierre Huyghe, Christian Höller, Santiago Sierra, Thomas Hirschhorn and Francis Alÿs. These figures developed a hybrid practice that combines various forms of performance and temporary installation work with a more discrete, gallery-based mode of production, both of which are almost entirely oriented towards audiences within the institutional art world. The highly publicized process and performance-based projects that you see in biennales, museum commissions and art fairs provide the necessary public corollary to the much less visible economic transactions that occur through the artist's gallery-based practice and on the auction market, where various images, physical objects, sketches and documentation related to these events are commodified and sold. We might even say that the event-based work exists in order to be re-monetized in this manner, in order to "build the brand", as the art dealer David Zwirner has argued. While this work typically claims to embody a critique of existing capitalist reality, it is also defined by a steadfast refusal to engage in any way with forms of social or political resistance that might challenge that reality.

I find the tension between these two bodies of art practice - activist or socially engaged projects, on the one hand, and art world-based relational or 'social' art practice on the other - to be especially important. They reveal some of the key fault lines in the political economy of contemporary art. I addressed this tension to some extent in my second book, *The One and the Many*, and it's an important issue in my current book, *Autonomy and Answerability*. It's significant to me because it highlights a key shift in contemporary art, involving a transformation in the norms of aesthetic autonomy. This is a transformation that is occurring at two levels. First, we encounter a changing concept of artistic subjectivity in terms of the sovereignty of the artist, evident in forms of artistic production that involve collaborative or participatory interaction. And second we see this transformation in the relative permeability or transversal open-ness of artistic production to other, adjacent, forms of cultural production, in particular, political or social activism. One can respond to this shift in one of two ways. Either you acknowledge that something fundamental about the nature of art is changing in contemporary practice, or you assume that this large body of work is simply evidence of misguided individuals choosing to abandon art's unique critical power. This second response has given birth to a 'neo avant-garde' critical discourse, associated with the journal *October* and theorists like Jacques Rancière, which tends to view these disparate forms of activist or engaged art as hopelessly naive. In this view, art practices that emerge in conjunction with forms of

political or social resistance will either be co-opted or degraded to the status of political propaganda.

This position is founded on a much longer tradition in the history of the avant-garde that views the artist as a kind of surrogate or placeholder for a form of revolutionary consciousness that the working class has failed to exhibit. And this, in turn, is based on an even longer tradition within aesthetic philosophy in which the artist, and the work of art, serve as the prefigurative expression of a utopian future society - the *sensus communis* in Kant, or the "aesthetic state" in Schiller. In either case, the only way for the artist to preserve this critical or prefigurative power is by maintaining a rigid segregation between their artistic production and any form of direct social or political action. This is what Adorno disparaged as 'actionism' in the art of the 1960s, as artists naively assumed they could effect some meaningful change in existing forms of social or political domination through direct action. In Adorno's view this belief is misguided. Even if these actions are successful at some level they nonetheless do more harm than good, because they can be used to validate the existing system of domination, which can point to them as evidence of its tolerance. So the only option available to the artist is to remain isolated from the mechanisms of social change, producing instead a decanted or displaced form of critique, within and against the formal or institutional structures of art-making. This level of art-world specific criticality is meant to preserve the protected nucleus of an authentically revolutionary form of consciousness, which will be actualized at some future moment when 'real' change is finally possible.

This is why so much neo avant-garde criticism continues to be centred on notions of institutional critique, meaning the 'institutions' of art, since the art world is the only space within which it is possible to practice criticality without the danger of immediate co-option. Given this schema it is easy to understand why forms of activist or engaged art are so threatening. If the critical power of art is no longer being held in symbolic reserve for some future revolutionary moment during which it might be re-awakened in praxis, then

its only real value lies in the criticality it can induce here and now. Yet precisely this form of actualized criticality is endangered by the multivalent integration of art institutions with existing forms of capitalist domination, resulting in the entirely programmatic *dissensus* evident in a great deal of contemporary art. As a result, the neo avant-garde model is based on both a recognition and a disavowal of art's institutional status, and the hegemonic economic and political systems on which these institutions depend. On the one hand the neo avant-garde requires the existence of conventional art institutions to push off against in order to stage its gesture of critique. In fact the institutional critique paradigm is predicated on an awareness that the sacral spaces of art production are necessarily impure. But on the other hand, the 'conventionality' of the art world, which is produced through its dependence on the market and class privilege, can't be seen as *too* pronounced without admitting that these critical interventions are subject to forms of co-option that parallel those imposed on non-art-world-based practices. As a result, the political imbrication of the art world - its legitimating function relative to various forms of state and class power - has to be minimized or diminished. It must be reconstructed as a space of radical experimentation rather than a showroom for a culturally elevated form of conspicuous consumption.

You've written extensively on dialogical art practices, social overlapping and discursive exchange among co-participants, artists and citizens in creating a common collaborative ground. Can we say that dialogical aesthetics and these practices always have an emancipatory potential, especially in the attempt to construct a model of subjectivity? These practices start as a conversation and identification of societal problems, and through the conversation they can provoke or influence ongoing political action where certain values are spreading. We can look at specific examples - your works *Conversation Pieces: Community and Communication in Modern Art* and

***The One and The Many: Contemporary Collaborative art in a Global Context*. Could you elaborate on the importance of the balance between the 'internal' aspects of a collaborative art practice, i.e. the interaction that strengthens the organizational capacity of various artists which increases the efficiency and synergy between agents, and the 'external' ones, i.e. directed towards the effects they achieve and their transgression in the field of politics and challenge of dominant representations of a given community?**

I would avoid using the language of "internal" and "external" factors, or the movement from questions of subject-formation and identity (via conversation) on the one hand, and social or political action on the other. This tends to naturalize a temporal model that doesn't really capture the nature of social change. In this view new forms of subjectivity are produced through 'conversation' and later deployed in modes of social action. Or we might say that the spatial model of 'inside' and 'outside' is mapped onto a temporal relationship of 'before' and 'after', or 'conversation' - the transformation of self - and the subsequent application of this germinal experience to 'practice'. Social action is thus seen as something that only occurs after new forms of subjectivity are created through 'internal' forms of experience. I would want to argue that the generation of new insight, or the transformation of subjectivity, can occur across a range of scalar or spatial registers. It can occur in the most intimate forms of intersubjective exchange or in the spatially compressed relationship between an individual viewer and a conventional work of art, but it can also occur through the action-oriented context of larger social configurations. I think it's more useful to think in terms of a continuum of practice in socially engaged art.

This takes us back to the issues raised by your first question. The socially engaged art practices of the last twenty-five years share a commitment to the emancipatory vision carried by the neo avant-garde, but they don't accept the corollary belief that any form of social or

political resistance is premature. Nevertheless, I would contend that artistic projects developed in conjunction with concrete forms of activism can exhibit many of the core attributes of conventionally 'mediated' aesthetic experience - the cultivation of a reflective, critical awareness, the facilitation of prefigurative forms of intersubjective experience, and an awareness of the limitations of conventional epistemological forms. They do so, however, through a very different model of artistic production, and a very different social architecture. In particular, they no longer situate the locus of their critical power within a self-enclosed conceptual field - constituted around the formal condition of a given medium or a reified discursive system that they seek to critique - that is sealed off from any reciprocal influence from the external world or other forms of consciousness. Instead, their criticality is produced through an answerable relationship to a dialogically responsive site of resistance, entailing specific institutional forces and counter-forces and concrete interlocutors that can act back on the work in real time. As a result, the production of criticality in these projects must constantly be re-articulated and modified in response to these ongoing exchanges. The work evolves, then, through a series of iterations, each building on the experience accrued from the one that came before. This accounts for the intrinsic plasticity of engaged art practices as they move away from the physical stasis of an object-based aesthetic paradigm. It also accounts for the scalar complexity of socially engaged art projects which seek to socialize the transformation of consciousness that is central to the aesthetic, rather than holding this transformative potential in suspension in the mind of the individual artist or viewer. As a result, socially engaged art practices operate along an expanded continuum that reflects the interdependence (rather than bifurcation) between individual consciousness and social or collective action.

I'll outline this continuum with a series of brief examples drawn from my previous and current research. On one end of this continuum are projects that

are restricted to a handful of participants, with only the most limited extension into a larger social space. This is exemplified by Chu Yuan's *Offering of Mind* project in Myanmar, which I discussed in *The One and the Many*. *Offering of Mind* was produced in 2005-6, at a time when any sort of critical or anomalous public behaviour carried a significant risk of arrest. Chu Yuan worked with several young Burmese to create miniature stupas (in the form of head-pieces) that replicated the large Theravada temples that are a common feature throughout the country. The Burmese military supports this version of Buddhism because it encourages subordination to the rich and powerful, who are assumed to have gained their privilege through exemplary spiritual behaviour in a previous life. Burmese citizens make offerings to these temples to pay for gold leaf and other improvements, accompanied by written prayers. *Offering of Mind* turns this process inward. The stupa head-pieces are constructed of wire and resemble cages that symbolically imprison the consciousness of individual subjects, revealing the repressive function of religion in Burmese society. At the same time, the head-pieces also contain the unrealized 'wishes and thoughts' of each of the participants in the form of small written scrolls - evoking a future very likely not dominated by a military junta. These desires, no longer metonymically linked with the interests of Myanmar's ruling class through the adornment of temples that venerate the rich and powerful, became personalized expressions of resistance that were literally carried into the streets of Rangoon through surreptitious walking performances. While the public or social component of these expressions was highly constrained (the walking performances were, by necessity, very brief due to the omnipresent danger of police and spies), they nonetheless carried both a critical and a prefigurative power.

At the next level we encounter projects which move beyond the intimate, intersubjective sphere of *Offering of Minds*, which consisted primarily of one-on-one or very small group encounters, to encompass larger collective interac-

tions. These projects also involve more extended, quasi-permanent interventions in public space, rather than the ephemeral gestures associated with Chu Yuan's work in Myanmar. This approach is evident in the work of the Dialogue collective in central India, which I also discussed in *The One and the Many*. Over the past seventeen years this collective of Indian and Adivasi (indigenous) artists have developed 'Nalpar' or water pump sites in the villages around Kondagoan. The pump sites were developed as a technical solution to the problem of water collection, which was a gruelling part of everyday life and a burden literally shouldered by young women in the villages. The Nalpar sites were designed not simply to make water collection less physically onerous via new pumps, ergonomically designed ledges, et cetera. They were also constructed around barrier walls or screens that effectively hid the young women from scrutiny. This simple gesture had the effect of creating one of the only spaces in the village in which young women could talk amongst themselves and evade the gaze of the village elders, and especially men who would monitor their movements. In this sense they marked an intervention into the spatial politics of village life and posed a palpable challenge to the authority of men, who actually complained about the privacy and autonomy they provided. Thus, while the Nalpar sites were developed to address a set of pragmatic issues associated with water collection they also had the effect of re-framing gender relationships through a tactical aesthetic alteration of the village's physical structure. This project also entailed a series of direct negotiations with the village's patriarchal power structure (male priests and elders) to secure permission to build the Nalpar sites, and thus marks the movement from a largely symbolic form of internalized resistance, registered in the furtive stupa performances - which could not risk becoming openly intelligible to the authorities towards which they were directed - to more proximate and actualized forms of opposition.

This same movement, towards larger social configurations and more direct

engagement with existing institutional systems, is evident in the work of Park Fiction in Hamburg. And here again we find a project that resulted in a permanent transformation of the built environment - in this case, the creation of a new public park in a location that was initially intended for upper-income housing. Park Fiction works in the immigrant, working-class Hafenstraße neighbourhood on Hamburg's waterfront, which was facing incipient gentrification during the early 2000s. While Hafenstraße has a long history of militant resistance, the Park Fiction collective, working with other groups in the neighbourhood, chose a less direct line of attack to preserve the neighbourhood's autonomy. Instead on staging occupations and demonstrations the group began by turning inwards to the surrounding community. They organized an extended process of consultation with the neighbourhood's residents, structured around the ironic appropriation of the professional apparatus of urban planning. This process was focused on generating a set of concrete ideas for alternative uses for the waterfront property slated for re-development. In Park Fiction's process of "desiring production" the privatized wishes contained in the stupa headpieces of *Offering of Minds* become collective and public. The result was to confront Hamburg's political leadership with a set of coherent counter-proposals, effectively forcing the city government to perform its role as a neutral adjudicator of 'public' interests, rather than simply acquiescing to the ostensibly inevitable forces of commercial gentrification. Part of the success of Park Fiction's work in Hamburg stemmed from the neighbourhood's long tradition of organized activism, including the fortified occupations of squatted buildings by residents during the "barricade days" of the late 1980s.

At the third level we encounter projects in which the correlation between artistic production and broader forms of political activism is not simply sequential or mnemonic (like Park Fiction, building in part on the fear evoked in Hamburg's elites by Hafenstraße's dissident past), but is actualized in real time. This approach is evident in the 'Washing the

Flag' (*Lava la Bandera*) performances staged by Colectivo Sociedad Civil - the CSC - in Peru during 2000. CSC consisted of artists and activists who came together in opposition to the dictatorial behaviour of then-president Alberto Fujimori, who was in power as the result of a coup in 1992. The performances were initially staged in the Plaza Mayor, directly in front of the Presidential Palace in Lima, and entailed the simple act of washing the Peruvian flag in the large fountain at the Plaza's centre. This gesture was directed at the perceived corruption of the Fujimori regime, which was engaging in widespread fraud during the 2000 presidential election. The act of washing the flag - a "patriotic cleansing ritual" as founding member Gustavo Buntinx describes it - was soon replicated in towns and villages throughout the country, providing a powerful visual expression of the breadth of public revulsion at Fujimori's leadership. The government, sensing the threat posed by this performance as a locus of popular discontent, attempted to block or delegitimize the flag-washing through police interventions and efforts to incite violence among protestors. At every step the protestors had to revise and modify their own actions in response to the government's provocations. The proliferation of this gesture couldn't be contained, and it played a key role in building a sense of oppositional coherence and solidarity throughout the country, leading up to Fujimori's downfall.

Would you argue that current socially engaged practices are reflecting the ever more complicated day-to-day politics and the impossibility of acting effectively in other ways, or can they be considered as a possible strategy of authentic action for the future?
The question of "action for the future" is extremely important, but also fairly complex. Conventional models of aesthetic autonomy, from the early modern to the avant-garde, are defined by the bifurcation between art, the privatized domain of representational play and critical distance, and the world of political practice or action, which is seen as entirely instrumental and unreflective.

As I suggested in my previous response, in this model 'action', or political transformation, is always deferred until some future moment. In socially engaged art these two domains are not segregated, and an engagement with symbolic or representational modes unfolds in an action-oriented context. Rather than devolving into propagandistic simplicity, the forms of representational experimentation that occur in socially engaged art projects - the ambivalent form of the stupa in *Offering of Mind*, the banal but subversive gesture of flag-washing in *Lava la Bandera* - can be enriched and complicated by their association with oppositional practice. We might describe this work as marking the transition from an object or image-based aesthetic to an event-based aesthetic paradigm. The art work as 'event' entails an engagement with representational materials that provide a frame within which the participant's critical distance from normative values can be given semantic form. At the same time, these 'mediated' materials are placed in an answerable relationship to actual modes of repression, rather than orienting themselves towards the hypothetical consciousness of a generic viewer and a discursively internalized locus of resistance. Here we must understand symbolic or representational meaning not in terms of fixed semantic units - a meaning created by the artist and handed over to the viewer for interpretation - but as an utterance, a form of speech that is by necessity incomplete, changing and "unfinalizable" as Bakhtin argues. Thus, projects like *Lava la Bandera* are constituted around a symbolic armature that faces both inwards, where it is linked with the recognition of semantic and normative contingency among the participants, and outwards, to an 'audience' consisting of the representatives of the state.

We can identify three discrete but contiguous forms of insight generated by socially engaged art practice. In each case these insights are derived from the new modes of agency and speculative understanding that are opened up by a practical engagement with specific institutional, discursive and spatial articu-

lations of dominant power. Here power is understood to operate on three levels. First, power is manifested in concrete effects at a local or situational level - the deployment of police in Lima's main plaza, the effects of gentrification in the Hafenstraße neighborhood, the surveillance of Rangoon's streets by government spies, et cetera. This situational expression is, however, linked with and conditioned by a broader structural or systemic condition - the political and economic protocols of market-based capitalism, for example, or the civil structure of a military regime. It is linked as well to a series of affiliated discursive components - more specific ideological sub-systems that are both situational and generic within a given socio-economic system. Drawing on the conventions of music theory we might describe the forms of knowledge generated by socially engaged art practices in these contexts as 'praxial', entailing both performance-based learning and new mental or cognitive orientations that emerge in response to the situational matrix of the performance.

The first form of praxial insight involves tactical knowledge, which emerges as participants observe the effects produced on an existing apparatus of power by particular symbolic gestures and physical interventions - the washing of a flag, alternative planning processes, et cetera. These may include changes in public policy, the blockage of certain economic logics, temporary or more lasting shifts in the distribution of power, or transformations in specific ideological fields or value systems. This knowledge is highly situational and includes the capacity to adapt and modify a given repertoire of actions or gestures as they elicit counter-responses from the particular governmental or regulatory structure they are targeting - evident, for example, in the *Lava la Bandera* performances. It should also be noted that this form of knowledge is both creative and pragmatic and carries along with it the capacity to transform the consciousness of the participants or collaborators, as the initial success of a specific set of gestures can produce an enhanced sense of agency and a greater willingness to

project the practice into new contexts or settings in the future.

The second form of insight is associated with new modes of critique and structural analysis directed at a given system of domination. Here critique is linked to the principle of negation, as a process which seeks to destabilize the normative perceptions of specific political or economic institutions and ideological systems. Here, as in the avant-garde tradition, the artist adopts a position external to the surrounding hegemonic culture. But in socially engaged practice the artist does not claim this exteriority as a singular and unique capacity. Nor do they assume that their critical awareness can only be preserved by abjuring any practical resistance to the culture it critiques. Rather, the forms of critical consciousness mobilized by engaged art practices are produced out of a process of collective exchange. At the same time, critique is drawn along with action rather than isolated from it, which has the effect of providing critical intelligence with a far more nuanced understanding of the material nature of domination itself. Domination is not a fixed or static thing, to be analysed in abstraction. It is a living culture that evolves and modifies itself over time and through the exigencies of historical development and ongoing opposition.

The third form of knowledge production entails a prefigurative awareness associated with the modes of consensual decision-making and speculative creativity that unfold in a specific project. This is where your question of "action for the future" comes in. These forms of creativity require highly complex negotiations across the differing epistemological orientations, forms of identity, and political belief systems held by individual participants. We might describe the process of working through these intersubjective tensions as a kind of social labour that partially suspends normative modes of being driven by autonomous self-interest. Here the tensions and discontinuities that exist between self and other are not dissolved but openly thematized, as part of the very material of artistic practice itself. Rather than two fixed selves, each

seeking to defend its a priori autonomy, a space is opened here for a concept of the self that no longer conforms to the ethos of bourgeois sovereignty. It is a space that is defined by modes of self-transformation that are reciprocal rather than unilateral - the artist repairing the viewer's damaged consciousness. The goal is not a finished or finalized version of the self, like Schiller's idealized aesthetic subject or the communist "new man" which will render all subsequent forms of intersubjective negotiation unnecessary. The goal is precisely to understand more deeply and more thoroughly the *process* by which the self is transformed and made more open with the understanding that this process will never be fully complete. This is a process that no longer depends on a fixed notion of identity, which can only ever view external determination as marking the expansion of one's self at the expense of another. Instead, socially engaged art practices call into question the very concepts of externality and interiority on which the schema of conventional aesthetic autonomy is based. What these projects embody, then, is not some final reconciliation between self and other, but rather an ongoing experimentation with the parameters of identity itself. They ask if it is possible to produce a social space that exists apart from both the repressive universality of the community, party or state, on the one hand, and the sovereignty of the monadic self (epitomized by conventional artistic identity as much as bourgeois subjectivity) on the other, through a series of experiential encounters that are both practical and reflective.□

Grant Kester

On the Relationship between Theory and Practice in Socially Engaged Art

Recent debates around socially engaged art have focused on the spatial and temporal nature of social change (the relationship, for example, between an ephemeral event and the more lasting transformation of a given social structure, or between local or situational action and global, or geographically extensive, forms of organized resistance). More specifically, these debates ask how the local, situational or "ad hoc" actions often encountered in socially engaged art practices are related to systematic forms of domination.[1] A typical reproach directed at projects of this nature is that they function as little more than window dressing for a fundamentally corrupt system. The only way to produce real, meaningful change is to engage in the direct overthrow of the capitalist economy in its entirety. This criticism is necessary but not sufficient. The problem with this approach, of course, is that it relies on a hyperbolic model of capitalism (as an entirely impenetrable and fixed system of domination) while also assuming that

artists today actually have the option of aligning themselves with an existing revolutionary movement, poised to launch an all-out assault on neo-liberal capitalism, and have simply refrained from doing so. The conventional avant- garde resolution to this impasse is to withdraw from any direct engagement with the social or political world in order to embody a pure principle of radical negation, assaulting all existing values and systems of meaning. Not surprisingly, these gestures have become almost entirely routinized within the protocols of international exhibitions and biennials (often serving as the necessary scandal that demonstrates the openness of a system predicated on hierarchy and wealth). In most cases they simply allow artists to pose as incendiary critics of capitalism while securing a comfortable living from the investment habits of the 1%, to whom they sell their work.

The residues of this larger belief system continue to inform art criticism. We can identify two related assumptions that

have been especially problematic when directed at the analysis of socially engaged art.

- The assumption that any form of art practice that produces some concrete change in the world or is developed in alliance with specific social movements (via the creation or preservation of a park, the generation of new, prefigurative collective forms, shifts in the disposition of power in a given community etc.) is entirely pragmatic and has no critical or conceptually creative capacity.[2] Or, alternately, that such projects, by suggesting that some meaningful change is possible within existing social and political structures, do nothing more than forestall the necessary, but inevitably deferred, revolution.

- The assumption that any given art project is either radically disruptive or naively ameliorative (trafficking in "good times, affirmative feelings and positive outcomes" as a typical blog posting describes it).[3] This is paired with the failure of many critics to understand that durational art practices, and forms of activism, always move through moments of both provisional consensus or solidarity-formation and conflict and disruption.

This isn't to say that there aren't numerous "social art" projects that are based on simplistic, de-politicized concepts of community. However, if these projects are problematic it's not because they seek to engage in a concrete manner with the world outside the gallery or museum, or rely on processes of consensually-based action. It's because they have a naïve or non-existent understanding of power and the nature of resistance. The most damaging of these assumptions, for a theory of socially engaged art practice, involves the failure of critics to grasp the generative capacity of practice itself - it's ability to produce new, counter- normative insights into the constitution of power and subjectivity.

Is there another way for us to understand the transformative nature of socially engaged art practice? This complex question is made more difficult by the accumulated weight of past art theory and criticism. Conventional forms of artistic practice (installation, painting, sculpture,

time-based media, and more traditional, actor-centered modes of performance art) raise a very different set of questions that are, in many cases, not applicable to socially engaged art projects. Here the "practice" entails the artist devising a particular set of forms, events or objects that are presented to a viewer. In this case the primary generative moment, the moment when decisive choices are made regarding the formal, material and discursive constitution of the work as a unified, apprehensible object, occurs prior to the arrival of the viewer. The situation is, of course, quite different with many socially engaged art projects. Here the act of production ("practice" in the conventional sense) and reception are coincident. Moreover, artistic practice at this level becomes "transgradient" (to use one of Bakhtin's favorite concepts) with other, non-artistic, forms of cultural production, from participatory planning to environmental activism to radical pedagogy. Thus, we have a form of art production that requires us to reconceptualize our understanding of both the "viewer" and the act of reception, and that also exhibits a promiscuous relationship to other modes of cultural action.

This promiscuity opens up an important line of analysis that connects socially engaged art with a larger set of debates over the more general interrelationship between theory and practice. We might recall here the dramatic transformation that occurs in the ambitions of the Frankfurt School between the moment of its founding in the early 1930s and the period during and after WWII. As Horkheimer outlines in his inaugural lecture ("The Present Situation of Social Philosophy and the Tasks for an Institute of Social Research" in 1931) the goal of a properly "critical" theory was to challenge the abstraction and pseudo- transcendence of traditional theory by integrating theoretical production with the empirical analysis of, and practical engagement with, actual social movements. The Frankfurt School was thus organized around a transdisciplinary approach that would unite scholars in the fields of sociology, psychology, political economy and philosophy with the goal of produc-

ing an exhaustive analysis of the nature of capitalist domination and the most effective mechanisms for challenging it. The reciprocal interconnection between theoretical reflection and political action was central to the definition of a "critical" theory. By the mid-1940s the mission of the Frankfurt School had been dramatically curtailed, leading to an often sterile functionalism. Confronted with the failure of the proletariat to unite in opposition to fascism and the emergence of a "totalized domination" that made the capitalist, fascist and communist state systems virtually indistinguishable (at least to Adorno and Horkheimer), the germ of an authentic revolutionary drive had been transferred to the sequestered realm of fine art, where it would be held in trust until a more fortuitous historical moment called for its reactualization.

The key effect of this shift was to uncouple theory from any relationship to the specific, empirically verifiable, effects of social and political resistance. Under the monolithic power of a "totally administered society" outlined in The Dialectic of Enlightenment, virtually every other cultural form except art, and every other intellectual discipline, except a very specific mode of self-reflexive philosophy, had been irredeemably contaminated by the instrumentalizing drive of capitalist rationality. If no real change was possible here and now, then there was no point in cultivating a set of analytic tools for understanding the nature of contemporary political resistance. And if art could only preserve its new role as singular bastion of revolutionary truth by abjuring any direct involvement with the social or political world, there was no reason to reflect on the potential relationship between art, or theory, and practical resistance. Here we encounter two key beliefs that remain a persistent feature of much contemporary art criticism. First, that the artist (or artist qua theorist) possesses a uniquely privileged capacity to comprehend the totality of capitalist domination, standing in for a proletariat that has remained stubbornly indifferent to its historical destiny (Adorno uses the metaphor of the artist as a "deputy"). And second, that art can preserve this remarkable prescience

only be refusing to debase itself through any direct involvement with social resistance or activism. This is the foundation for Adorno's famous attack on what he viewed as the naïve "actionism" of student protestors during the late 1960s.[4]

We can observe here a symptomatic ideological and discursive transference, in which the conventional principle of aesthetic autonomy is infused with a new, revolutionary, rationale (the very distance that art takes up from quotidian life provides it with a privileged vantage point from which to diagnose the over-determination of this life by economic imperatives). This transformed concept of aesthetic autonomy is evident across a range of contemporary art practices, most recently in Thomas Hirschhorn's crude opposition between "pure art" (the foundation of his own practice) and "social work". In his widely publicized Gramsci Monument project, Hirschhorn was able to provide an extraordinary level of economic support (including summer art classes and a computer center for children, as well as comparatively well-paying jobs) to the residents of the Forest Houses complex, located in a chronically under-resourced working class neighborhood in the Bronx. He was able to retain his "purity" precisely by refusing to take any responsibility for the disappointment, frustration or disillusionment of those residents when, after eleven weeks, these resources, and the accompanying outpouring of public concern that the neighborhood had enjoyed, were abruptly withdrawn. The lesson, for the residents of Forest Houses, was that in the absence of the artist's charismatic personality (and funding sources), "art" as such is no longer sustainable.[5] For Hirschhorn, the practices and methods of creative transformation necessary to produce more sustainable or meaningful change in Forest Hills are dismissed as intrinsically uncreative "social work".

I would suggest that, far from violating the purity of the aesthetic, socially engaged art practices often represent a compelling re-articulation of it, involving as they do many of the key features we have come to associate with aesthetic experience, including the suspension or

disruption of habitual forms of thought, the cultivation of an openness to our own intersubjective vulnerability, and a recognition of our own agency in generating normative values. In order to develop a more substantive theoretical analysis of socially engaged art, however, I do believe it's necessary to challenge the singular privilege we've been taught to assign to art and the personality of the artist, and to acknowledge that art exists along a continuum with a range of other cultural practices that hold the potential to produce disruptive or counter-normative insight. Artistic practice certainly carries its own specific methods, protocols and capacities, generated through its extremely complex history, but it also shares points of productive coincidence with other practices. I would also suggest that we need to reconsider the specific ways in which the relationship between the pure and the impure, theory and practice, and art and life, have been configured in existing art criticism. To often each of these is treated as a synchronically fixed, a priori entity, when the space between them is always, potentially, semipermeable. Certainly "life," if fully comprehended, is not the realm of simpleminded habitual blindness that is so often evoked by the canon of critical theory, and art, in its actual effects, is not always its opposite. Autonomy, or the space of autonomy, is produced diachronically, through the tactical shifting of certain material frames and discursive and institutional systems. And in these spaces it's possible to engage in both "practical" action and the generative, distanced reflection that we have come to associate with theory. Action, as such, always contains both a practical moment (in its orientation to concrete change and in the pragmatic feedback loop that must always exist between this change and self-reflection) and a utopian or prefigurative one, expressing in embryo forms of the social that might be reactualized in another space or time.□

Posted on "Fertile Ground," at A Blade of Grass (July 2015)

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2. Jacques Rancière, *The Politics of Aesthetics*, London & New York: Continuum, 2004, p.12.
3. John Berger, *Ways of Seeing* [TK] London: Penguin, 1972
4. Rancière, p.13.
5. Rancière, p.13.
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7. Contemporary artists are attempting - albeit in a very conceptual way - to build Tatlin's monument today: http://www.tatlinstowerandtheworld.net/.
8. Cited in Christina Lodden, *Russian Constructivism*, New Haven: Yale University Press, 1983, p. 239, n.165; original source: TeatrRSFSR, Pechat'I revolyutsiya No. 7, 1922.
9. Leon Trotsky, *Literature and Revolution*, NY: Russell and Russell, 1957, p. 247-8. Trotsky does, however, preface his critique of Tatlin by saying that while the first needs of the revolution are to repair the infrastructure and take care of necessities, there will be time to experiment once these needs are met and there is a surplus.
10. Anatoly Lunacharsky, *On Literature and Art*, Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1931/1973; http://www.marxists.org/archive/lunachar/1931/mayakovsky.htm, no page.
11. Cited in Christina Lodden, *Russian Constructivism*, New Haven: Yale University Press, 1983, p.65.
12. For a fuller discussion of *Utopia* and its politics see my introduction in Thomas More, *Open|Utopia*, Stephen Duncombe, ed. Wivenhoe/New York/Port Watson, 2012
13. "Cornelius Graphey to the Reader" in More, *Open|Utopia*, p.13.
14. Walter Benjamin, "Theses on the Philosophy of History," *Illuminations*, New York: Schocken, 1969, p. 264.
15. Alas, poor Jesus of Nazareth was unfortunate enough to be resurrected, stabilized, and institutionalized by the official church, thereby becoming a symbol of divine authority rather than an opening to human questioning.
16. Darko Suvin, writing about Science Fiction, describes a "literature of cognitive estrangement," marked by "the presence and interaction of estrangement and cognition, and whose main formal device is an imaginative framework alternate to the author's empirical environment." This description applies to More's *Utopia* as well. Darko Survin, *Metamorphoses of Science Fiction*, New Haven: Yale Univer-

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PORTRAIT

Ai Weiwei

The Politics of Shame
Ai Weiwei in conversation with Anthony Downey

From October 2017 to February 2018 the Fotomuseum Antwerp (FOMU) presented the first photo exhibition of Chinese visual artist and political activist Ai Weiwei. Entitled 'Ai Weiwei - Mirror', the exhibition included seminal political statements such as Study of Perspective (1995-2011) and the artist's daily stream of selfies and snapshots on social media. The show also addressed the years that the artist spent under constant surveillance by the Chinese government and his ongoing commitment to presenting work that engages with social and political issues, including the worldwide refugee condition.

In the following conversation, recorded as part of a public event in Antwerp on 25 October, 2017, and transcribed here for the first time, the artist talked to Anthony Downey about his photographic work from the 1990s until today and how those earlier photographs, taken in New York City during the 1980s and early 1990s (but not developed until he returned to Beijing in 1993), in part signal later concerns with activism, image production, and human rights. A central element in Weiwei's concerns is his use of the internet, specifically in his efforts to hold the Chinese authorities accountable for events surrounding the Sichuan earthquake in 2008. The interview also covered the artist's more recent works regarding his subsequent imprisonment and constant harassment. The artist talks frankly about the extent to which shame played a part in his motivations here, both his efforts to shame the government, but also their attempts to shame him and, during the Chinese Cultural Revolution, his father before him.

Anthony Downey: Your show at FOMU is very much based on photography and I wanted to take you back to New York in the 1980s. You lived in New York from 1981 until 1993, and the 80s in NY were an extraordinary time. It was a time of great potential - a time of great possibility. You took apparently 10,000 photographs, none of which were developed until 1993 when you returned to Beijing. I would like to talk about two things to begin with: what it was like in New York at that time, as it seemed to be an important period for you, and also what it was like to be taking photographs on such a regular basis?

Ai Weiwei: The '80s were a moment for possibility, but for me it was a *non*-possibility in New York. For someone coming from a communist society without speaking any English, as we were educated by Chairman Mao during the Cultural Revolution (1966-1976), and with no money, you have to make a living. Of course, students were not allowed to work, and very soon I decided I'd either have to quit school or it will be almost not possible to keep school because I had to work. So, I dropped the school, and I became an illegal alien in the United States because it's just very difficult to not attend class, as the teacher feels you are not respecting them. This was the reason I

lost my scholarship from Parsons and then I just moved on, in New York. But it's not easy in New York City… For me it is a very lonely city, and there are a few artists, most time they spend on the street and I know a few poets and musicians. I met Allen Ginsberg at that time because I went to a poetry reading, he was living in the house that his mum left him… with a lot of books and it's just a regular apartment building. So, the '90s in New York. I spent about ten years there and I had nothing to do. I bought a second-hand camera from the thieves who sell these cameras in the night-time on the street. So, now I can take some photos. But I realised that my life was so meaningless because I had no purpose: I never want to establish anything, and I did not know what I can become. So, I said then maybe to record that meaningless it becomes some kind of meaningful act. I did a lot of photographs which is kind of boring and after a few years it became quite accomplished, but I never really developed it because who is going look at this kind of life? But at that time, you kind of think back, it has some meaning in my life because, you know, in agriculture sometimes you have to plant the seeds before the winter comes, and then it goes through the whole winter, then next spring it comes out and even if it's not necessarily that, it has to go through that kind of time, before I look back positively.

Anthony Downey: You were in New York for about twelve years and there are 10,000 photographs taken during that time apparently. You returned to Beijing in 1993 - your father was ill - but then you developed those photographs. Looking back now, even though it's quite some time ago, what was the impression you had when you developed those photographs? Some of the subject-matter of those photographs to a certain extent pre-empts subjects that have become quite important for you.

Ai Weiwei: Life is magical in a way, so it's better to take some photos… and it'll sound very silly why you should take photos of your real life that is just a copy of life. But then very often we don't really understand our own life. It improves - and I hate to look at the photos - but twenty years later people think oh my God, those are traces of what you did at that time which do reflect what you are doing today. Recently I had a show in New York City called 'Good Fences Make Good Neighbours'. The project under the Washington Square Arch generated a lot of discussion, as the neighbours were against it. The reason they were against it is because for the past ninety years they used the arch for their Christmas tree - and the project destroyed that tradition. I really have sympathy for that, but is that a very sound argument? I assume art can be a little bit more interesting than a Christmas tree. Forgive me, I'm not in that tradition. So, with all the procedures and meetings, finally I got the chance to put the

Haircuts, 2006 - 2017

piece or installation there. This turned out to become a very popular photograph, image, across social media. And I kind of found out about the arch in the 1980s. It's only recently I realised that I had a lot of pictures of that Square and the arch.

The time when we were demonstrating - just before the gentrification of parks, back in the 80s and 90s, also in the lower East Side parks, Tompkins Square Park, Washington Square Park - there was a curfew at night-time. So I was demonstrating with the local activists. And they were all kinds of people - people who were homeless, all kind of activists. And we really tried to occupy the parks. But it turned out, in those early photos, that I already had those images, which is impressive if you think about what happened in the next thirty years. So somehow life can become a nightmare, and you really have to go back to where you started.

Anthony Downey: Speaking of going back to where you started, in 1993 you return to Beijing and you develop the photographs. You go back because your father is ill. I would like to talk a little about your father, Ai Ching, who is a renowned modernist Chinese poet, as his experience with you has left traces on what you do. You spent sixteen years with your family after your father was sent for re-education, effectively living in a camp, at first in Dongbei province, latterly in Xinjiang. In interviews, you have already shared that your father never wanted you to become an artist, and he felt that becoming an artist was very dangerous. But it seems that has empowered certain processes in your own work, and his influence seems to be ever-present - increasingly present - in what you do.

Ai Weiwei: Again, I'd say that life is like a nightmare. When I grew up my father was somebody fifteen years or so apart from me. I knew he was a poet, but I know better now that he was also *not* allowed to be a poet. I will never understand why he was forbidden to write words [by the Chinese authorities]. So, the first twenty years I spent with him in a very remote camp in north-west China. The times were very difficult. We had to live underground underground and it was very dark, no light and we dig out a house of sorts which may be twelve square metres or a little bit more. We had bushes above us, and to live under that has some very interesting aspects, because in the winter in the Gobi Desert winter could be as cold as under 40 degrees. And in summer can be above 30 to 40 degrees. So, it's 70-80 degrees apart. But living underground means in the summer it's a little bit colder and in winter it's not as cold. That's the condition, and he - he would clean the public toilet and our school-mates would run after him. Those little kids would just throw stones at him or curse him. Basically, he was almost sixty years old and he never really had physical work because he was always a poet. Even as a refugee, he was still a poet - he was always trying to find a job as editor or a teacher. He never really worked physically. But for such hard labour, to be taking care of cleaning the public toilet for many years, he couldn't even rest for one day for the simple reason that people don't rest when they go to the toilet, so he couldn't take off. If he rests for a day, the next day the job will

simply be doubled - who will help him? It's not possible. That was a punishment, a physical punishment. I think in this kind of society - or almost any kind of society - I think they are dealing with people who are intelligent, intellectuals, as they can never really give them a lesson by making an argument. So the punishment is always very physical, very harsh, and it makes it unbearable for you. At the time, I didn't understand anything. I thought he is an enemy of the State and an enemy of the people, and the sum of that was that I thought we were kind of a bad root in a way. They often say that our blood has some kind of problem and they call us the kind of children that should be re-educated. It means that you are originally bad and you need education. That is why I hate education. As basically the idea of education is that you are not as good as you should be, so you have to be educated. I never simply really agreed with that idea. That's why I never educated my son. I never thought that I could be influenced by my father - I am deeply influenced by my son, but I never thought I could be influenced by my father because he was, in their eyes, an enemy of the State. It's such a dangerous name to be called by in revolutionary China. But he is my father, he was my father - I had no other place to go. I had to stay with him, just keep a little bit of a distance. He would have never, never asked me to become an artist or a writer, because in his generation about half a million writers were punished, sent to labour camps. Even in China where they have almost one billion people, 500,000 intellectuals probably already includes everyone - even professors, or even intelligent students in the schools, all could be called writers. So, I grew up in that kind of life. So, I was hardly influenced by my father, except that I helped him burn his books - as he had a lot of books of poetry. I helped him and we had to burn them. Also books about art. He studied in Paris in the 1930s - modern art mostly. So, we had to burn the books, page by page, because otherwise they will not burn. And if you want to burn a book, you have to do it completely, make every page disappear. And that's basically the influence of my father. I know he loved all those books and he would tell me stories about his early times, the time he spent with Neruda. He was influenced by Rimbaud and de La Mare, Mayakovsky, Hikmet, the Turkish artist, and Lorca, the Spanish poet… but we couldn't really openly talk about it, because all those things are anti-Revolutionary for the Chinese Communist Party. It was a very harsh time. So now I really understand that I am completely and quite influenced by him because I deeply believe that all those people are sectarians - they hate art, they really hate poetry: they will not accept art to exist because art always reflects the kind of liberty of something, and so the censorship is always there. Still today, in China, censorship is strong. There are certain vocabularies you cannot use on the internet. You cannot even see a movie or watch TV only because the vocabulary can reflect another meaning. So, you can see how deeply dictators believed that art can threaten their existence.

Anthony Downey: You returned to Beijing, and I don't want to be too chronological but Beijing had obviously changed dramatically since you had lived there. Deng Xiaoping was

in power, the economic revival had happened, and so forth, alongside the economic move from what was effectively a single-market to a mixed market. When you returned to Beijing, how did you find it? Was it difficult? Because it seems that it also opened up a new period in your work where you felt more comfortable taking photographs - specifically photographs such as June, 1994, 1994, which is again a pivotal work. It looks throw-away, it looks incidental, but it's an extremely important photograph in the progression of your work.

Ai Weiwei: To talk about 1993 I have to talk about 1981, before I left Beijing. On the way to the airport my mum was really worried - this boy that doesn't know a word of English and has no money - has around $300 in the pocket. I told her "Don't worry, you know I am going home now". So, I tried to make her laugh, but she couldn't laugh. I said, "You know in ten years you will see another Picasso". Now, you can see how naïve I am. Of course, twelve years later I came back to China, in 1993. I could never imagine I would go back to China. In twelve years I never even had a moment that I thought I would like to go back to China. Of course, everybody was challenged as Deng Xiaoping opened up markets, and China modernised. But I never had an illusion that China would change. I went back to China and a lot of roads were fixed, a lot of buildings, and they looked quite modern. But some things never changed. And that's true until today. From 1993 till today another twenty years has past. And it never really changed in many ways. It never trusted its own people. After sixty-eight years in power they never let the people to vote, not even once, not in any matter. They have a one-party system. The judicial system belongs to the party, the army belongs to the party, the media all belong to the party: there is no single independent media. Every word, every line has to be checked, you know? So, coming back from the United States I was quite independent, liberal and - as later my interrogators thought - I was "brainwashed through Hollywood movies". This was the sentence they used. And it's very hard for me to find my home. It's not my home. I would never call China my home because those things never changed. But it's very funny, it is my home - my mum is there, my dad is there, all my, you know, relatives are there. So, I became a stranger at my home. And I started to make a few photos, of people - to take those photos as evidence of my attitude or my response to that time. And every June you know, June 4th or around that time, I would go to Tiananmen Square to do some kind of protest, just to be there. This Square, after 1989, after the army crushed the student's movement, has more

underground police than tourists. So, the only thing I can do is take a few photos. Of course, you would never imagine those photos ever could be published because I never considered myself as an artist anymore, because I had no chance in the United States, and again I would have no chance in China. And I started to publish some underground books, trying to do this kind of editing curatorship, to ask people to print down what's happening among the artists, the kind of conceptual activities, so as to leave some kind of evidence for the future. So, I published three books: *White Book*, *Black Book* and *Grey Book*, annually, and then later I curated an art show in the year 2000 called "Fuck Off" and forty or fifty artists participated. That's the short history of that time.

Anthony Downey: In that photo - *June, 1994*, 1994 - your then wife lifts her dress, and obviously it's a wee bit scandalous, but the photograph is not titled after your then wife, it's named after June and the June 4th incident in Tiananmen Square and directly references the fifth-year anniversary of the massacre that happened there in 1989. But it also seems to reference a lot more. Mao Tse-Tung's tomb is in that Square too. This is a site where people would go - Chinese and Westerners - to have their photograph taken. This is also a site that has a history to it, a very specific history to it. It's also one of the most heavily surveilled sites in China, if not the world. And it seems to me that there's quite a lot of playfulness in that image, which you use a lot in your photography - a humorous, playful, parodic approach which doesn't lack seriousness but enables you to do things that perhaps you wouldn't be able to get away with otherwise. I am also thinking in 1995 of the photograph *Dropping a Han Dynasty Urn*, 1995, which was one of the first works of yours that I became aware of. And I'm just wondering what level that playfulness plays in your work, specifically the photography from that period?

Ai Weiwei: I think there's some kind of playfulness or humour. Or mostly you find a moment of contradiction and you cannot cope with the contradiction it generates. Some kind of interest - an argument in the photo itself or in the image itself. So, in China they are full of this kind of moment. China has a long history, but it also has a very brutal contemporary history and all those elements coexist at the same time and my life has been through the most harsh things that happened in the twentieth century - communism, feudalism, and capitalism. All happening in the same life and I've been exiled and escaped, then went back to but couldn't find a self-identity or identity. I

started to make arguments on the internet and then put myself in the same path as my father - I would never imagine that - but my father was put in jail for six years right after he went back to China by the Nationalist party. He was only twenty-one at that time. And I thought that would not happen to me. But later - I was wrong - I was also being put in jail, and then in detention I was beaten and all those things repeated itself. So, photographs... This seems the easiest thing you can do and it requires the private. It's always related to some kind of unexposed or exposed image that can stay in the dark and it doesn't even have to be printed out. So, you can have this kind of safe-box there. So it's easy without doing anything or to exhibit it, but then rather just take one clip and then that's done.

Anthony Downey: It seems, though, at a certain point, that making photographs becomes more politicised - more overtly political - and I want to shift here to works in *Study of Perspective*. Obviously you could suggest that there is a politics to that, giving the middle finger to cultural sites, including your own studio. I note that one of the images has you giving the finger to Mr. Trump's hotel casinos in Atlantic City before Mr Trump became as infamous as he is today. But then they start to become more politically-driven, Weiwei, if I may say, and I'm thinking of *Fairytale*, 2007, in particular, which was a mass exhibition staged in Kassel in 2007 as part of documenta 12, and you photographed every single one thousand and one people - Chinese people - whom you had planned to move from China, the mainland, to Kassel as part of that show. Kassel is also the home of the brothers Grimm who wrote fairy tales. I'm sure there's a connection there? Could you talk a little bit about that movement in *Fairytale* and the *Study of Perspective*, 1995-2011? Because things start to get a bit more edgy. I think you start on a path which, at a certain point, it must have crossed your mind that the Chinese government were going to hold you to account, physically if not legally.

Ai Weiwei: Well I think you know my life better than myself! I really have to follow your instruction. And, that is true: you can easily examine somebody from their traces. I think that's the best way. From 2004, I was taking one photo of my left hand and I have a middle finger sticking out. The series is called A *Study of Perspectives*. In the beginning it was towards some kind of institutions or mostly institutions, which could be political institutions or symbolic monuments. It's just like any tourist's gaze. Anybody, any scenery, would reflect some kind attention or attract some kind of attention or a kind

of interest from the tourist, and I realise I am a bored tourist of life. But I also have to make a mark I am there, you know, so I take that. I gave it a name later, much later. I've suddenly been recognised as an artist many, many years later, so I call it a *Study of Perspectives* because that makes it a little bit scholarly, more acceptable. But it's really very rude or rough, or made up kind of careless images, created out of nonsense. I never believed that it was art but it becomes art anyway. I know if you repeat many many times people will think that that could be art because otherwise why this guy keeps repeating that. You can see the attitude of those images - they are not really very passive but rather a kind of bored images. A lot of them are out of focus, especially the ones taken with the left-hand. Later images from digital cameras could be framed better. And then later I wanted to really gradually become active again in the art world, and two things happened. One is the internet and I got on the internet. A state-owned internet company called SASAC. They said we will have to open a blog because at that time I'd done a lot of interviews in fashion magazines and so on. Because I already practised architecture for quite some time I'd become very well-known in the architecture world in mainland China. Nobody knew - almost nobody knew - I'm an artist but they all knew I'm an architect and I'm allowed to talk about myself or design or new life philosophy or study. So, they said you can open a blog, you're a perfect person to do that. I said I never touched a computer, I don't know how to type. They said we'll give you an assistant. They helped me set up my blog and I think they did something really wrong, horribly wrong, because I immediately fall in love with the blog - I will not do anything else, just keep writing, you know the daily average I would write three blogs a day, and the next morning I would find that blog has been visited by maybe 200,000 people, which is not such a big number in China but I was already very satisfied. I thought, hmm, it's better than having a newspaper. So, I became extremely popular which encouraged me to create my revolution… You can write on the blog every day. So I started to experience that, and at that time China was still not very alert or didn't know how to react to this because China wanted to become a modern society - they wanted to have their own internet and they also sense that's very dangerous but still didn't know how. Now they have a great Firewall which can shut off anybody at any second. It's not a problem for China anymore. But I had about three or four years of totally wild life on the blog. I did write over 250,000 words. It could be the sum

of work that many writers spend their lifetime writing. I gave up architecture. I gave up art, basically. I did a lot of shows but I never really paid attention to making those works. But by 2007 a friend of mine introduced me to a documenta curator, to say this is Ai Weiwei and he was an artist but his work may be interesting. So they included me in documenta in 2007. I said right this is a chance to come forward because I never really see myself as an artist but this is documenta. So I told myself I'm not going to do anything which is sculptural or painting but I would just bring 1,001 Chinese people to Kassel and call it *Fairytale*, 2007. And so on the internet I could select those people easily and very efficiently, because in China it's very hard to even get a passport at that time. But I successfully made the applications and convinced the German ambassador to give a hundred of them a visa. When you plan anything in China, it's very difficult. They would ask if you are working, your banking account, and many people that I invited are farmers or a minority from very poor areas. They never deposited a penny. But the German ambassador, after I explained him about my work, he said I could give you the green light and everyone got their visa. I became also quite well-known in China and then in Germany. China thinks "people can really fly to Germany", which is really a miracle. And you know today it's not possible. You have to do everything very fancy at an early time because later it's not possible. I managed to do that, and in Germany, in that little town in Kassel, they never see two Chinese walking at the same time in their lifetime. When they saw 1,001 people it's like a little earthquake that they are having. But also those 1,000 people, almost nobody understands contemporary art. They just take photos, take selfies, all those types of things. I enjoyed that moment and it became a big event for documenta that year. I feel sorry for the rest of the artists - 150 of them - almost nobody mentioned them. They all talked about the 1,001 Chinese.

Anthony Downey: Kassel is a small town, for anybody that's not been there, and 1,001 Chinese suddenly arriving is definitely going to make a stir. Weiwei, I want to shoot forward because you've talked about - in interviews that I've read, at least - how your incarceration changed everything. It made you what you are today. But arguably, if I may, it wasn't your incarceration that started this shift but the event of 12 May 2008 - specifically the Sichuan earthquake where 70,000 people died. Of those 70,000, 5,000 were schoolchildren who were tragically caught in buildings that were inadequately and illegally built - the so-called 'Tofu dregs' buildings. These buildings were not fit for purpose. They were the result of corruption. More than 5,000 school children died and a further 70 to 90,000 people died, while 4.8 million people were displaced and made homeless. You went to Sichuan in the immediate aftermath of that. I think Tan Zuoren had already started a Citizen's Report Bureau by then, which you were aware of and for which he was later given four years in prison. Could you talk a little bit about it, because I think - personally, if I may - that Sichuan changed everything for you? At that point being an artist is not enough. It simply isn't enough to respond to what's happening in that moment. Could you talk a little bit about the impact of that? Because that impact has definitely informed some of your more recent work, but equally the work that comes out of that, and specifically of the earthquake photographs.

Ai Weiwei: The Sichuan earthquake happened in 2008, which is the year China would hold its own Olympics - an Olympics that China made a great effort, for decades, to gain more recognition through. I know they think it's the best opportunity to establish a modern conversation between China and the West and they want to try and even speak the same language, and they even invited a foreign architect to design their main stadium. For China this is already almost impossible act. Several buildings being designed by foreign architects. One is Rem Koolhaas' building for CCQA, which is the State-owned media group. Back home, it's the Communist Party's hard-core propaganda machine. Now there is a stadium - a National Stadium that reflects national pride, and I happened to be involved with one of the architects involved in the competition - Herzog and de Meuron, architects from Basel in Switzerland. They called me, and since they've never been in China they know I love architecture and also understand contemporary western culture, and so they invited me to be part of the design team. I had to fly to Basel, where we made the schematic design in a very quick fashion. Then after that design meeting Jacques Herzog told me "Weiwei we won the competition". I completely don't understand why we won the competition. There's another thirteen groups - they are all invited from the West - but Jacques is very confident that we had made a conceptual design that no other company would do. And among these thirteen designers probably ten of them would come from the same kind of concept, but we stood out. So I really thought let's see, but as a result when it comes out, yes, I realised we really made a big difference from the others and we won the competition. So that's a year that China was really busy preparing for this celebration, but at the same time right before the opening of the Olympics May 12th, as you mentioned, probably one of the biggest earthquakes that ever happened in contemporary times. Over 70,000 or 80,000 people disappeared, mostly farmers, and in a very remote, poor area. But among them there were about 5,000 students. When something like this happens I feel as if I have suddenly been stoned - I am speechless. People would ask me, *Weiwei you normally would write two or three articles a day, why in the past week you didn't write anything - what's wrong with you*? Because people were really frustrated. But I became speechless because I simply realised I don't have the vocabulary to talk about a situation like this. I am not equipped and I don't have enough words. So I said I have to go to the place. I brought my assistant with me and with his camera we went to those ruins and did the research and did the interviews. Then we realised what had really happened. Then that was not enough. I kept asking questions- who are those children who lost their life? And of course the State will never answer us. We made about 200 phone calls to state government officials, to every level,

college departments, education departments, civil departments, just trying to find how many people are dead, how many students were dead. They said 'It's secret, you are not allowed to ask for the numbers'. 'Who are you, are you a spy from the West?' 'What are you really trying to do?' Why do you have to ask us all these questions?' I said okay, if you don't answer me I will do a citizen investigation, I will send people to the local area. I thought this is very simple so I used my social media power to invite volunteers to take part in the investigation. Over one hundred people answered in one day, so I selected them. I ask them the questions - Did they know how to deal with the police? Did they know the local dialect? Are they eating spicy food? Are you afraid to be alone in the darkness or to walk on the street having no light? I tried to prepare those young people who wanted to get involved. And so we selected a few thousand people who I thought are okay to do this. I knew it's going to be a problem. So, we gradually sent people in but immediately we would get a report back that - after they find out some names - they were seized by the police. They would confiscate all the equipment and delete the photos and send them back. But we said if you send them back we will send more. We always talked about it on my blog. Each day we were putting the names that they found on the blog. So, after those kind of struggles, our people were being arrested, some of them about thirty to forty times. But we finally had all 5,200 students' names, their birthdays, their parents' names, the name of the school they belonged to and which class. So those were all published on my blog until the day the government felt this is unbearable and shut off all my blogs. That is really a very historical moment for me because since then I have disappeared from the Chinese internet, and nobody there can type my name. If they type my name the words would come out like sensitive words that are being used or illegal words - the whole database disappeared online.

Anthony Downey: Because everything changes after that? In 2009, SandWeb closed you down and you effectively become a *persona non grata* in China. But something interesting happens in that process - specifically in relation to Sichuan - and I want to talk to you about something - the notion of shame. It seemed that the Chinese government attempted, in their clampdown on the parents of those children, to shame them into not asking questions. But in effect your blog, the relentless efforts made to list every single child, attempted, using digital means, social media, to shame the Chinese government. And shame in China means something very specific - the loss of face in and of itself is almost incomprehensible if you're a member of the Communist Party, for example. Was it your intention to shame them? Was shame part of the motivation to make them admit responsibility, and at the very least list and acknowledge the children who had died?

Ai Weiwei: You are the first person I spoke to that really gets that vocabulary of shame which is a very important word in China. Because we are living in a fatalist society, the whole Confucian culture there is about the idea you are relating to

- the idea of honour or the idea of shame. Basically, that's it, my argument is related to that. I think that by digging out the facts you put this kind of authority on trial, on public trial, but that trial is only to morally question their legitimacy in being in power - and I was quite naïve in doing so I think. That's the only way to expose the truth, and to make any argument we have to base it on certain truths, and if that truth can never be revealed the argument simply doesn't exist. But later when they arrested me they also used that technique. They said, they accused me of having two wives or that I had married twice - which was not true. They would say that I committed a big crime. 'You don't pay your taxes' they said, which is a very ridiculous accusation, but still they try to use shame as tactics to destroy my reputation. They openly told me 'Weiwei, is it considered a crime in the West if you don't pay the tax?' I said yes, it's a very serious matter because it's like you are stealing property from the common pocket. But of course in China it's different. I asked them 'Do you believe that people will trust you and believe your accusations against me?' And they said 'Weiwei, 90% of people will trust us' and he is very honest in that. That's the way it plays out if you control the media. You're the authority, your voice will be heard. Even that is manipulated but still you can trick the 90% of people into believing in you. But of course not today, in my case they actually failed. And they also realise that.

Anthony Downey: I want to suggest something crucial in why they did fail, and I do see shame as a key thing here. Shaming a government, literally shaming, rather than taking up a weapon or, you know, inciting revolt, shame is quite an important thing, and how you use it is crucial. Perhaps one of the reasons why you were able not to give in to what must have been extraordinary pressure, eighty-one days in jail under constant watch, is that perhaps - and you might disagree with me here - that what the Chinese government were trying to do with you, they had already tried with your father - that is, they tried to induce shame in him during the cultural revolution and they were trying to do that to you too. There's a wonderful story that I read from you some time ago. Despite the fact that your father was assigned the lowest job, cleaning the public urinals, he nevertheless 'took a poet's pride in cleaning those urinals'. And I get that, to take a poet's pride in something is quite extraordinary actually because he did it relentlessly and he did it right, which perhaps to a certain extent - and you might again disagree with me - you didn't feel shame, you felt pride in his endeavour and attitude and were able, many years later, to actually resist that shaming device which is a key component in the People's Republic of China, specifically when it comes to dissidents. I don't know whether you made that connection - perhaps I'm over-interpreting it - but do you think there was a connection between what happened to your father and what happened to you?

Ai Weiwei: Yes, I think you are very sensitive and very correct on that matter. But I recognised it much, much later, when I really consciously thought about it. My father worked in that

job which is the most unthinkable job in any kind of labour because they think it's not enough to punish him physically but you have to shame him. So each day he would go to those latrines and it's almost impossible to figure out how to clean those kind of places, but after one or two hours struggle, he would make the room very clean, you know he would use his shovel, so he would cut off all those corners very precise and go and put this dry sand on top of those, how do you call that dis…?

Anthony Downey: Disinfectant?

Ai Weiwei: Yes. And, it's very difficult because there's no water and almost no toilet paper. People just use the grass or sometimes use cotton or a cigarette packet.

Anthony Downey: But never the Communist Party newspaper.

Ai Weiwei: No, no, because you can't use the newspaper because every line mentions Chairman Mao's name. To a degree it is a very, very ironic, but you have to be most serious in dealing with those issues. So my father made those toilets so clean, his job made this look like a sculpture. He really did a good job and the people started to be very proud of this guy - walking into his clean toilets, in those kind of very rough, very rural areas, were more like walking to a church. But still the next day will be a big mess again because there is no roof, if it's raining or it's snowing, it's part of nature, and it would be a mess again. So, day after day, I realised that nobody can destroy this guy because he is so proud of whatever he's doing. He has this kind of method of doing things. It's just nobody can penetrate him. Its only very *later* that I realised that and how important it was for me.

Anthony Downey: That's understandable. I want to move it on from shame, but maybe we'll return to it. I want to talk about calculated risk, the notion of calculated risk, because I think it's played a big part in your life and I think it's played a big part in your work from 2009 onwards when you knew you're being under surveillance, you knew you are being threatened. You are placed under house arrest in 2010. In 2011, you are in prison for 81 days. You are then accused of crimes against the State. You're accused of tax evasion, and your passport is taken away. And yet you continue working. And this notion of calculated risk I think is quite important to your work, as a simple piece of research will reveal the following. Apart from being an internationally-known artist and indeed activist, you were, and I don't know if you still are, a very good blackjack player which is very much involved in calculated risk. You would know what calculated risk is, literally, if you are accredited as a blackjack player. Do you think to there is a notion of calculated risk to these projects? In photos of surveillance, for example, you are literally photographing the people who are surveilling you. That's a calculated risk. The new project that you've embarked upon, *Human Flow*, relating to the condition of refugees, and the Iraqi Project, they all involve calculated risks. Could you talk a little bit about this notion of risk in the context of the work?

Ai Weiwei: It's very interesting when you talk about this calculated risk. Blackjack playing requires that you understand the game - that means you understand the potential loss, what you can lose really. I mean whatever you're doing can end in loss and you know you have to have something to play otherwise you are completely lost. As long as you do still have some stacks then you can get back, it's not a problem, it's a matter of how you rationally analyse the cards. Whether the odds are against you or can be, in theory, up for you, but you have to be very disciplined, you have to be very concentrated, extremely concentrated. We know if you are extremely concentrated it really generates your potential of winning in every aspect in your life. You know most of the time our potentials are not being fully used because we don't have enough concentration. We lose concentration and that means the potential of you as someone who plays or has the potential within the game is not fully being recognised. I'll not talk about those games anymore because I already lost the magic, because I simply don't need to make money anymore… But in the real life, when I deal with extremely complicated political situations and the situation is very dangerous, if you concentrate on the cards you have in your hand, you still can make the best out of it and that means you really have some kind of possibility of revenge. I do not really argue about large principles, but rather deal with the matters, such as surveillance. So, I said okay, you like surveillance if you have to put twenty-five survey cameras around my compound - that means you really have a strong interest in me, so let me put a surveillance camera right above my bed or my working table in my office, which they are shy to do, because they try and scare me. It is intimidating to say you are being watched. So I said let me set up this. I set up a camera right above my bed, and I started to broadcast it online. After I think two or three days, seventy hours or something, the State police called me, they begged me and said 'Weiwei please shut down your camera!' because over a million people are watching it. They start to grab the image which I've made picking my nose, or how the nude body moves in sleep, and I carried on this kind of thing because it's really hard - even if you do nothing very spectacular, it's very shameful to see those images on the internet. But they sincerely said 'Please, shut it down!'. I said 'Is that an order or is that just trying to convince me?'. They said 'This is a State order,' so I said okay. *I thought you wanted to really know me*, I said. I always use their tactics to push it a little bit further, to make them feel that it is impossible to deal with this guy. And after they took my passport, I said okay let me just put a bicycle in front of my door. Every day I will put new fresh flowers into the basket of that bicycle and I take one photo and I put it on the internet. I repeat this exactly, almost to the same second - 9 o'clock in the morning - and after 600 days they returned my passport. They said 'Here's your passport, please stop that!' So, it's just fun that art still can use as a bargaining tool. It's very strange, because the people in this kind of power they don't really understand art, but they think that art is some kind of mystical activity. So, why is this guy, an artist, dancing Gangnam style with one million people

watch him? Anything that becomes ridiculous. When I held my leg as if it was a gun [which started the so-called "leg gung" craze on the internet], and then somebody hold their leg as a weapon to shoot, they realise this man can really generate some kind of revolution by doing ridiculous things… They think that whatever they do, it's not ridiculous. When I take selfies, it's just to show your existence, show you're the being, you've been there or you're still doing those things. For me I think it's very powerful.

Anthony Downey: It also seems that we've embarked upon a new period in your work, dare I say, that has always been present. We could go back and look at the Tompkins Square photographs. We could go back and look at the black man holding the photograph - all those images from '84,'85, and '86. And looking at your new film, *Human Flow*, 2017, which involved filming in twenty-three countries and forty refugee camps, to produce a panorama of what is today the largest humanitarian crisis since the Second World War. More specifically it represents the condition of the refugee. It's not a refugee crisis, and you've been very clear about this. To call it a refugee crisis would suggest that the problem is with refugees. It's a humanitarian crisis and it's probably a crisis in the West liberal democracy and how it deals with this humanitarian disaster. So I just wanted to ask you a question that's perhaps ultimately unanswerable - Is being an artist enough at this stage to address these issues? Because you've already deftly and very cleverly managed to mix art and activism. But it seems to me you're almost fulfilling your father's wish that you didn't become an artist, because you seem to be attempting to reinvent what potentially art can do in relation to these cataclysmic events. So is being an artist enough for you today Ai Weiwei or is there something else to come, is there something else already happening?

Ai Weiwei: It sounds as if I have some kind of conspiracy, but I really don't know that much about being an artist or being an activist. I act the way I do by some kind of intuition and some kind of curiosity. I think of those things, the signs of life, and I talk about how we recognise our life and how we, through our curiosity, discover ourselves and we find a new possibility of being ourselves… I never really found out, until now, and I'm still very confused… So I'm very happy that I got involved, my sensitivity got me involved, to take action in this so-called 'refugee crisis'. I learnt so much through the past year and a half. I made the film and it's very much like you are trying to hold up a mirror, or it could be a broken mirror, already shattered, to what you see before you. But still, even a broken mirror still reflects some kind of reality. Through that we still recognise ourselves. That's the purpose of the film - to have something to reflect ourselves in. It's not about the refugee, about our humanity, about us - it's really about how a society functions and how we look humanity as one. Can we really accept this situation exists? If we do accept that human dignity or humanity is being crushed or being ignored, being totally damaged like this, then who are we? How do we think about

ourselves, or today's life and our future, and what are we going to leave to our children or generations to come? These are the questions that I think everybody cannot afford not to ask.

Anthony Downey: The mirror is also a key source of inducing shame in someone. Shame, I'm sure you well know, is when people try to literally split you in two to make you ashamed of something that you've done, to distance you from that act. Some people can cope with shame much better and it seems the western world increasingly can deal with shame much better these days.

Ai Weiwei: Yes, that would seem to be the case.□

**From 27 October 2017 until 18 February 2018, FOMU presented the first solo exhibition of Chinese visual artist and political activist Ai Weiwei in Belgium. With his radical visual critique of human rights violations, abuse of power, and the unchecked state control of the Chinese government in particular he's one of the world's most important contemporary artists.
Designed by the artist himself, the exhibition at FOMU presents a thought-provoking overview of Ai Weiwei's photographic work from the 1990s until today.**

Ai Weiwei Exhibition Mirror, Fotomuseum Antwerpen (FOMU), 2017 © Guy Voet

Ai Weiwei Exhibition Mirror, Fotomuseum Antwerpen (FOMU), 2017 © Guy Voet

Ai Weiwei Exhibition Mirror, Fotomuseum
Antwerpen (FOMU), 2017 © Guy Voet

Maja Ćirić

'Comrades' & 'Gentlemen'[1] - Contemporary Forms of Activism in the Balkans

(The case of Belgrade)

This cultural rather than class analysis of the characteristics and positions of activists comes full circle with K67, a kiosk designed by the Slovenian designer Saša J. Mächtig and displayed at MOMA's 2018 exhibition *Toward a Concrete Utopia: Architecture in Yugoslavia, 1948-1980.*

To understand this kiosk - a shape-shifting system of modular fibreglass structures - is to understand what it once meant to be a 'comrade' in Yugoslavia, as well as to gain some insight into the symbolic value this term serves today. What was once a symbol of socialism and of the right of every comrade to be active and to indulge in socially integrative design that provided some metaphorical colour in grey socialism has now become a symbol of a past depicted as having enjoyed greater social justice before the newly revived class struggle. The kiosk started out as a functional entity distributed throughout the whole of Yugoslavia but has ended up as a rebranded by-product of neoliberal capitalism. It is said that the renovation of the Kiosk owned by MoMA was extremely expensive and that the museum displayed the kiosk as an iconic symbol of the past without any critical reflection. Just like kiosks, free(lance) artists were previously supported by socialism through artistic associations that defended their rights, but in a neoliberal context have had to reinvent themselves - to become precarious cultural workers or to redefine their function. Following the model of other economic sectors, the Serbian government has progressively increased its financial support to private investors while the basic rights of cultural workers are undermined.[2] As the artist and activist Danilo Prnjat notes, the overlaps between governmental structures and corporate speculators have generated a unique superstructure so powerful that it is completely transforming the field of work, including work in culture.[3]

The kiosk is an ambivalent indicator of the present. 'Comrades' try to reacti-

vate and reproduce socialism in order to preserve society, while 'gentlemen' are driven by purely profit-oriented design that can symbolise the 'high-life' and represent their achievement of high status.

If we want to understand how the social tissue is developing in post-socialist conditions[4] in the Balkans,[5] we need to examine how activism responds in uncertain times of wild transition[6] from a socialist to a capitalist agenda in the realm of culture. Here we will take Belgrade in Serbia as an example. Although the Serbian Ministry of Culture has proclaimed a *Strategy for the Development of Culture 2017-2027*,[7] the fact that further commercialisation of culture will continue to be encouraged indicates a dynamic and rather wild system in which private and public capital and interests are blurred. As part of the dynamics of complex systems, albeit representing opposing poles, both 'comrades' and 'gentlemen' deal with uncertainty. To put gentlemen and comrades in one sentence is to take account of mutual antagonisms. Uncertainty presumes a lack of knowledge about how to deal with the past, present and future[8] and provokes conflicts and struggle.

Analysis shows two opposed and opposing ways of being active in society, in the sense that the only way that comrades and gentlemen coexist is by contradicting each other's perspectives and values. While gentlemen were rigidly excluded in socialist times, comrades are to a certain extent allowed within the neoliberal agenda as long as they do not challenge it. While comrades were and are considered citizens, gentlemen create consumers and are therefore responsible for cultivating servants.

The term 'activism' initially emerged in the USA and the usage of the term there is slightly different to its use in the Balkans. Activism in the USA is a collective term for a variety of social practices, from being active in one's neighbourhood to lobbying for the representation of African Americans and LGBT communities in Congress. In the Balkans, by contrast, activism has at least two different branches and is manifested in social work or in 'political work' within the confines of a party or trades union

(syndicate). All these forms are labelled as activism today and there is no priority in terms of which should be more important than the other. In all the above cases, actions capable of transforming society should be labelled as activism.

When it comes to activism in curation in the USA, which is a driving force behind the articulation of artistic practices, the emphasis is different than in the Balkans. In the USA, "curatorial activists […] address sexism, racism, homo-/lesbo-phobia, and Western-centrism that is endemic in that world" in order to "counter the persistent under-representation, silencing, and erasure of numerous artists throughout the world."[9] In the Balkans, however, curatorial activism has recently become divided between comrades and gentlemen. While comrades are more oriented in the articulation and transformation of newly established class struggles and geopolitics, gentlemen and their curators are bouncing back to the discourse of the fine arts and commercialisation. More specifically, they are resorting to politically unconscious and theoretically blind figuration and abstraction. Co-habiting multiple temporalities at the same time, they are neither are progressive nor regressive.

The institutions and para-institutions providing for action by means of art are discussed here. Belief in a solid artworld is what activates the processes for dealing with uncertainty: both institutional and self-organized, para-institutional initiatives are driven by the need to resolve uncertain times.

Types of Uncertainty

Comrades, being influenced by the socialist ideological apparatus, are locally specific. They depend on state money and on self-organized volunteering. Gentlemen, on the other hand, are in an ambivalent situation: they have tight relations with governmental structures, but also with private interests connected to global flows of capital.[10] Gentlemen exploit the possibilities of wild, uncontrolled transition in the realm of culture and make a profit from the blurring of public and private money. While gentle-

men are entangled with current politics and deal in the field of hypervisibility (media exposure) and have access to information through governmental networks, the ideals of comrades belong to another era. Comrades thus have to cope with a lack of information and have to organize themselves flexibly. Uncertainty among comrades is manifested in their marginal and oppressed position in relation to authoritarian capitalism. Gentlemen's uncertainty is hidden in their shallow attitude and superficial ignorance, both of which are symptoms of problematic ways of acquiring (social) capital (in transition from socialism to capitalism). The agenda of gentlemen is the blossoming of a transparent art market that leads back to the autonomy of the art object and neoconservatism as a result of a dystopia of artistic imagination. The beliefs and aims of gentlemen are connected to the neoliberal agenda and lie in the possibility of using culture to make profit or to gain additional symbolic capital, but rarely to project a vision of a better future. They are not able to resolve theoretical stances that have become visible in new models of community-building. Comrades' actions are embedded in critical thinking and based on social responsibility and accountability.

Gentlemen's exhibition openings are lavish and highly instagrammable, while all praises involved could be described by the Latin expression *similis simili gaudet* ('like rejoices in like'), as they artificially create an unwarranted sense of mutual achievement and belonging. They are activated by a belief that acquiring art can generate symbolic capital that gentlemen would otherwise lack. That is where their passion and aspiration for *culturepreneurship* comes from. But it is important to note that no passion for culturepreneurship would ever be beneficial if it weren't for the entanglement of gentlemen with state infrastructures which, in accordance with the proclaimed strategy for culture, provide for their support. Whereas comrades create action diligently in addition to and in spite of art worldly pleasures, gentlemen adore exposure and are integrated in the world artworld mainly for the sake

of vanity. This new conservativism is generated and disseminated through the new gallery scene in Belgrade that gentlemen are generating, consuming and participating in. They tend to be rivals to comrades only when competing to take over existing and inherited institutions and their resources, including the media. Gentlemen participate in an inaccurate and unjustifiable emotional economy that conceals the current authoritarian capitalist condition and even deprives it of any critique capable of making up for the morality it lacks. The emotional economy of comrades is based on a different kind of solidarity - one embedded in critical thinking.

Uncertain times of undefined or wildly defined cultural politics also generate a strange combination of artists and curators who oscillate between the positions of comrade and gentleman. Not in the sense that gentlemen want to participate in comrades' struggles but rather that they flirt with such positions like chameleons in order to conceal their true intentions, one of which is the disempowerment of actual comrades. Preoccupied with branding and posture, gentlemen ignore critical thinking, while the main concern of comrades is to cultivate socially responsible substance. Gentlemen think that creativity can be narrowed down to impromptu, commercially-oriented policy-making detached from any theory. Context-insensitive and artificial policy-making will instead only produce a reversed effect

Activating Para-Institutions

Comrades are using old and abandoned socialist infrastructures in the sense that they are creating self-organized and self-driven para-institutions. One such example is the NKK Social Centre. This para-institution was formed in a former military hotel in Belgrade. Activists wanted to provide for an alternative institution based on communal shared beliefs and perspectives and whose programme was interdisciplinary and whose discourse was embedded in critical thinking. The building, initially occupied by leftist activists to promote democracy,

solidarity, equality and non-profit, was very quickly taken over by the police. Same activists involved with the NKK Social Center continued their actions by initiating a self-organized University of Svetozar Marković. Amongst other things, they attempted to rethink the ideas of Herbert Marcuse and Kornelius Kastoriades. The drive behind this self-organized university was embedded in socialism: knowledge is not the privilege of elites and all people should have access to certain knowledge, experiences and skills that can voluntarily be shared. According to the organizers, instead of hierarchical relations and pre-established authorities, the self-organized University of Svetozar Marković, bearing the name of a famous socialist, cultivates equality, aspires to breaking down the barriers between teachers and learners - with the emphasis on dialogue and exchange of ideas. This self-organized University is open for all areas and contents, including many topics that are under-represented in the mainstream media and the formal educational system. It is embedded in the interdisciplinary approaches that aim to overcome rigid borders between humanities and sciences. One of the key aims of the self-educational University is the development of critical consciousnesses and opportunities to learn from other people's worlds, as well as how to connect theory and practice and ultimately become creators of social change. Collective self-organized artistic practices have emerged out of a concern for community cohesion that cultivates leftist ideals within and through para-institutions. These artistic and activist interventions are primarily concerned with civic dialogue.

In order to avoid indirect oppression and exploitation by gentlemen's brutal commercialisation, comrades self-organize themselves around notions such as radical solidarity and volunteering.

Another example of a para-institution is *Magacin* - a self-organized common space that operates outside of the mainstream public or commercial sectors. Magacin started off as an idea to provide a working space for the independent cultural scene (*druga scena*) in Belgrade, since there was no such resource avail-

able. It is an attempt to create a new type of institution based on civic-public partnership, reusing urban space for community purposes. Magacin accommodates communities and is of great social and cultural value for the city.

What was initially a warehouse, a property of the city of Belgrade, is now being run by various organizations, some of which are very active within an umbrella body called the Independent Cultural Scene of Serbia. They have renovated the warehouse together with help from local participants and the support of a radical international grants body called FundAction, which consists of activists exploring how existing relations of donors and recipients can be improved.

The Belgrade-based artistic duo Rena Rädle & Vladan Jeremić are critical of the use of the word 'activism' when it comes to labelling their practices, since they consider the term to be an Americanisation of a syntagma that can have many different forms. Activism, for them, should be a very precise political agenda communicated by the means of visual arts. Like comrades, in their practice they have tackled a vast array of issues from human rights violations and hatred while advocating values such as solidarity, love and conviviality.[11] They are in close connection with communities to which they provide support with the means they have. According to Rastko Močnik, theorist and activist, the artistic duo Rädle & Jeremić have produced a specific artistic transformation in their Workers' Collective (Bor, 2013). What Močnik considers to be transformational is the taking of workers' daily life situations and elements (newspapers, public library) into the realm of arts and revitalizing their programmes, integrating the social tissue into artistic action. Their attempt to find a transformative practice of art, in a way to overcome history and representation in favour of life and practice, has continued ever since.

On the other hand, examining the shift from institution to a platform in contemporary society reminds us that the word 'institution' has stayed true to its Latin root in the sense that Instit- means to give action, to instruct, to fix[12] what

one believes is in need of support and requires action.

Belgrade Raw is a collective that is self-assembled around communal practices of making and sharing photography in and about the public space via FLICKR as a platform. The attribute '*Raw*' stands for the collective idea to confront unembellished urban realities, following the principle of YIMBY ('Yes, in my own backyard') as an attempt to initiate new political realities and meanings at local level. This principle, defined as an expansion of influences and risks, does not entail a complete decentralisation of communal services but a network of thinking that uses economies of scale.[13] It also entails connections between all systems, art and society in this case, and a necessity to create a vibrating whole.

Their collective has gained a much larger impact as the years have progressed. They have managed to gather and mobilise people around the medium of photography in 13 cities of Serbia and to gather them under the label Serbia Raw.[14] In this way they have managed to establish social horizontality by assembling people from different generations, class, gender and educational status to produce both photography and communities. Expending from Belgrade Raw to Serbia Raw, the production of photos is getting closer to the places where it is consumed. Closeness established through FLICKR through files and likes, mutual discussions and distributions have influenced not only this online community but have also shifted from the platform, stimulating dynamics in provincial cities.

Uniting and integrating a diverse public in the project, as a sign of urban collective intelligence is founded in the joint signature on their photographs. Although rawness is based on impulsiveness, a joint signature implies that nobody is rejected or 'dissident' within the project.

In terms of collective authorship, Belgrade Raw shares some similarities with the self-organized Croatian performance collective BADco, a "nameless association of authors".[15] All of the characteristics of BADco - including rotated

responsibilities, variables in wishes and concerns, transformed roles within the work process, avoidance of established competencies - can be found in Belgrade Raw, with the sole difference that Belgrade Raw is working in the field of visual arts.

Belgrade Raw is still co-dependent on financial support from the government. As a vital and dynamic collective they are contributing to the programme of governmental institutions. However, as a collective they have succeeded in politically mobilising crowds by producing unambivalent political meanings and alternative contexts (e.g. photography in other cities or in the public space).

Another question that arises in the midst of uncertainty is that of which beliefs require actions and by whom? Both para-institutions and artists are driven by the idea of a more equal society, a better community, and the nurturing of alternative critical thought. Whether their means are para-institutional governing or artistic action, comrades are aligned in the sense that they tend to use action to promote social justice.

The exhibition '*We Have Built Cities for You*: An Exhibition on the Contradictions of Yugoslav Socialism', curated by Vida Knežević and Marko Miletić and held at the Cvijeta Zuzorić Art Pavilion in Belgrade in 2018, is based on 12 months of research into the legacy of socialism. According to Nebojša Milikić, an activist and cultural worker who has produced a theoretically embedded critique of this exhibition, the exhibition is a sign that comrades today are diversified and narrowed down to a kiosk economy on a small scale. Milikić argues that comrades function as if they were serving from their own kiosk. In what Milikić metaphorically describes as 'the kiosk economy', each kiosk selfishly cares only for its own goods and customers, forgetting that other kiosks even exist. This comment is an indicator of the divisions between comrades and the characteristics of the 'kiosk' type of distribution of socialist ideas in the present.[16] Huge research efforts were finally presented in an exhibition that appeared as a narrowed down illustration of research without establish-

ing new audiences (customers).[17]

While comrades are searching for ways of integrating the past in the present, the above-mentioned para-institutions and activists do so with the goal of simultaneously transforming contemporaneity. As there is insufficient capacity to activate people through revisionism alone, there must be a transformative element as a reference and as a contribution to the present condition.

The Yugoslav economy began its fragmentation through the kiosks of the 1980s. Whether because of entanglement with the ideological apparatus or governmental structures in the practices of both comrades and gentlemen, the past is still very dominant in the sense that fragmentation is ongoing. Today, almost all galleries still focus on their niche while depending heavily on government support.

Gentlemen are more driven by belief in the legalised art market and accordingly have organized themselves in a system of new commercial galleries in Belgrade. Many new galleries, art consultancies and foundations, including U10, Drina, November, and the Balkan Project, have emerged in recent years and each represents the new understated alliance between governmental structures and private interests.[18]

As has been pointed out by Danilo Prnjat, an important additional effect of the new gallery system has occurred: the logic of production has shifted from non-instrumentalised free artists to workers producing objects according to a specific capitalist matrix, which is a result of the direct intervention in the field of work by the new gallery system.[19] In that sense, gentlemen as gallery-owners, contrary to their apparent intentions, prevent the freedom once celebrated by free(lance) artists who were supported by the state. This will not only produce future art workers whose critical thinking is discouraged but might also lead to precarious conditions for art workers.

This gallery system also spreads its influence through the old institutional infrastructures. In 2018, the renowned biennale of the Pančevo Cultural Centar served as a showroom for private gal-

leries. The director of the Drina Gallery became a board member of the Belgrade Museum of Contemporary Art. Commercial galleries piggybacked on the October Art Salon by showing their artists in their gallery spaces. Such conflicts of public and private interests are a direct threat to the Code of Ethics of the International Council of Museums. However, just as in sport, the model of merging businesses and art is threatening to prevail, utterly ignoring the significance of uncontrollable factors in both sports and the arts.

No Radical Change: Delayed Devotion Once Again (differently):

The timeline and the dynamics with which art from the Balkans is recognized, absorbed and preserved within Western institutions of art should be taken into consideration. The kiosks mentioned at the beginning of this text had already been exhibited once at MoMA in 1970 as part of the opening of a show of recent acquisitions, albeit beyond the confines of the institution on the sidewalk of 53rd Street.[20] It took more than 45 years for the kiosk to get inside the museum itself. Given how long it took for a kiosk from the relatively powerful state of Yugoslavia to gain recognition, it must be asked how long it will take for all the numerous and fragmented kiosks of contemporary Balkan art to gain recognition within Western structures and under what conditions such recognition might occur. What emancipation will happen? While the kiosk is not an activist work, it stands as a symbol of socialist ideas, beliefs and values and their consequent fragmentation. One cannot help but notice that Western institutions devoted to exhibiting activist art from the Balkans do so with delayed devotion. It seems that mainstream institutions only recognize activist potential once it has been rendered impotent.

On another level, both gentlemen and comrades share one thing in common: they do not participate in new meanings. Nor are they building new kinds of communities. They distance themselves from new actualities - a stance akin to what Bojana Cvejić rightly refers to as a 'deferred action' in relation to the dif-

ferent temporalities in Eastern Europe.[21] Gentlemen are entrapped in pursuit of profit and fame while comrades are stuck preserving horizontal communities. Comrades do show a tendency to conceptually transform society through art; however, almost none of them are activating attitudes towards notions such as hypervisibility, algorithmic domination or progressive forms of collective intelligence. Such avoidance of innovation and contemporary narratives is again a sign of delay in the Balkans, preventing all sides involved in participating in current debates and creating a new culture with post-post-humans involved. It seems that both comrades and gentlemen are more regressive than progressive. What are the political reasons and characteristics of this new conservativism and what are the repercussions for art? The very concept of utopia in Belgrade is regressive. Instead of fostering a future-oriented society and art, it promotes a new conservativism in the sense that neither gentlemen nor comrades are able to emancipate themselves.

At a time when the Serbian government has made the digitalisation of Serbian society one of its main goals, it is crucial to learn from historical examples such as Nazism. Technological advancement without active critical thinking can produce barbaric acts. Those who are capable of emancipatory practice by means of state-of-the art technology will be able to move things forward. It is more likely that comrades, who are familiar with transformative potential and art based on critical thinking, will use digital technology with more meaning and purpose than gentlemen who are not used to thinking in terms of transformation.□

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Bojan Ivanov

On the Current Thematizations of Crisis in the Social Superstructure

1. The spectre of crisis

The determination to translate the *usual* sensory stimuli of our cultural environment into some kind of collective experience of the *common* assumes involvement with situations rendered in that which is *customary* - or, more to the point, assumes involvement with the narrative of the foundational commonplaces of contemporaneity and its interpretations. The basic conceptual, methodological and relational framework of these commonplaces is imposed by the procedure of thematization - a procedure which, over these past fifty-odd years, has been the way of making sense of essentials such as contemporaneity without modernity, the life-world without history, nowness without future.

Naturally, the very sequence of metaphors and proverbial forms that stand for the incitations, experiences and situations that mediate the reception and perception of the contemporary moment is already indicative of the space occupied by the principal (one and only) subject of these current thematizations. Namely, it is to do with a certain universally shared sentiment that there is

a crisis in the social superstructure - or more precisely that all instances and institutions of social life are in deep crisis: culture, politics, education, science and technology, law, as well as all their respective organizational forms - here and everywhere.

2. The dialectic of the critical mind

Before I present my own considerations on the *nature* of current thematizations regarding the crisis in the social superstructure, it is necessary to elucidate the origins of my own preferences, habits and expectations. Here I am referring above all to cultural criticism as a decisive, formative heritage in my approach to professional - and many other - challenges in life. Thematizations of the crisis in the social superstructure, therefore, are for me just part of the problematics of a historical process to which I myself can bear witness-primarily in the domain of artistic creation and criticism. I shall clarify once more: it is to do with a historical process of a certain (sufficiently wide) time span wherein events and characters of the past are becoming irrelevant and unrecognizable in a whirlwind of transitions from one

(relatively) stable historical situation to another.

Therefore I do not see a real interest, except perhaps in passing, in asking questions about *how* (socially) committed art is being turned into artistic activism. Rather, I am conditioned to seek the answer to this kind of question within a certain (consistent?!) knowledge about *when* the crisis takes place, *when* the art is made, *when* the resistance occurs, or *when* the culture emerges. Hence, access to knowledge on spatial relations in social time - of the time confined by history as a discipline and literary form - will be opened through few brief reconsiderations of the meanings of the words used in the title of my immediate topic.

3. On the usage of language

At the beginning stands what is current, or in other words that which - from the vague impression of simultaneity - is rising to consciousness as a clear and explicable correlation of successive events constituting the long moment of reality. In my view, and I believe in the observations particular to my generation as a whole, there are really no doubts: the current - the very grasp of what is *now* - occupies the space that is preserved in memories of and absorbed in the experience of the past fifty odd years.

On the other hand, the partial thematization of the endless life-world represents the culmination of a long-standing tradition of affirmative thinking that transforms words into objects and relationships of a new material world. In other words, thematization is an evidential procedure - an empirical record of the autonomy of a topic which (in some ?!) decisive way, either mediates the truth about the situations or, in a recursive process, adapts and draws reality closer to the image created in the reified thoughts. Actually, the representation of the current is concurrently the origin and product of the thematizations of that which is real but not true.

And here, at last, enters crisis in the form of the problematics delineated by the operations of thematic restructuring and interpreting of the essences of

contemporary history at a standstill. I remember the first occurrences of the word in certain shorthand abbreviations: missile crisis, political crisis, oil crisis, debt crisis... At first these were only incidents, occasional local disasters or deviations from the postwar developmental paradigm to which there was a most appropriate solution that - subsequently - is rightfully to be demanded and (of course!) developed. From the mid-1970s onwards, however political philosophy and social theory were already entertaining with confidence the notion of a crisis of the historical system (endless accumulation) - that is to say a crisis of its economic rationality (the exploitation of labour and nature). In response, as the decade was nearing its end, social activism turned in a completely contrary direction: by dividing and reshaping the cultural, political, educational and, in general, creative superstructure, the system's inertia denied the necessity of and rejected the need for a new re-examination of its own economic base. Today's current and ongoing understanding of the situation continues to seek solutions to the crisis, either by resisting or bypassing the social dynamics that are pushing and leading the historical system towards its own end.

4. Self-portrait in three colours

Contemporary fine arts, as well as current culture as a whole, are both the object and expression of a half-century long transition of the social superstructure into an extension of the impaired and neglected economic rationality. In this upturned reality, a (ridiculously!) small number of artists, authors and cultural activists trade with the legitimation of state quasi-monopolies, either directly (through participation in competitions) or indirectly (through acquisitions, residencies, programmes and projects). Next, there is a significantly larger group of artists acting beyond the myth of the free market - artists who are mainly engaged in the construction of parallel, alternative networks of institutions (informal groups, civic associations and co-operatives, small private and personal initiatives). This group also includes artists who (in

one part?) unconditionally contest and reject the legitimacy of any kind of institutional intermediary structures (art academies, museums, galleries, critics, corporate and state funding). They are usually recruited and migrate from the immeasurable, inert and depressing mass of graduates trained in the application of useless and unusable formative techniques and procedures. This vast throng of art outcasts struggle for bare subsistence, locked in the precarious embrace of film, television, print and digital network media, fulfilling the new *production* tasks of visual culture (marketing, animation, graphic design... editing). In such an environment artists without art are born, grow and come of age.

Recounted in this way, the crisis in the social superstructure as seen through the prism of contemporary art may appear to be a worryingly well-ordered place - a sort of clearly exposed, harmonized pyramid of creative engagement: at its top is the anti-market (career); one stair below is the market (profession); while the nether region is relegated to material life (calling, that is to say, mission). And yet that mental image of the situation in contemporary fine arts, with its newfangled (developed, adopted, imposed?!) identity and status of artists, is but a tell-tale sign of a deep current crisis of representation. It has no bearing on the interpretation of the current mistrust of the indecisive historical finality of the world of cultural, political or legal institutions - of uncertain (artistic!) language as the only intermediary between reality and autonomous, rational individuality.

Above I have outlined the principal commonplaces in the current thematization of the crisis in the social superstructure: the crisis of legitimacy, the crisis of legitimation, and the crisis of the subject in collective linguistic practice.

5. Modernity and modernization

Interest in public consensus is the motive and starting point of cultural criticism. This means that the critical approach taken to the commonplaces of this or that particular cultural entity

(community) seeks to discern, expose and interpret the symptoms and indications of an epochal geocultural trauma (society). In this respect, current thematizations of the crisis in art, in creativity and in the cultural domain need to be approached, in my view, within the complex problematics of the relationship between modernity and modernization.

However, the relationship I would like to outline here is already a commonplace in itself, or more precisely, is already thematized as a crisis of the modern project. In order to circumvent the essentialism of thematizing thematizations, I will offer a structural analogy which, without explanation, will hint at possible mediations between modernity as hegemony and modernization as domination.

So *when* is modernity a hegemony?

In a certain historical space (1848-1968) the modern project is a placeholder inside the ideological framework of the universal class, i,e, the real historical subject (of social change). The destination of modernity is a liberal Utopia - a place reached with concessions, reforms and gradual advancement of the social superstructure and its institutions. Excluded from this project are the revolutionary and reactionary - so-called dangerous - classes. The contradictions of this geoculture are manifested and intensified as its disputed (and contested) expansion is played out. It is a process that monitors, creates and encourages the dynamics of its own economic base, that is, of violent modernization as the driving force of the expansion of the historical system (endless accumulation).

Then, *when* is modernization domination?

The lack of authority of the geoculture and distrust in its mechanisms for securing legitimacy, legitimation and mediation suggest that the historical subject of (social) change is either no longer in its place or that does not exist at all. The empty space and vague role of the social superstructure is consequently replaced by modernization, which by itself *has no* social goals.

Finally, *when* is (will there be) art?

I have already attempted to answer this question. Therefore, I will not restate

my position in its entirety.

Being an art critic lacking knowledge, my preference is for artists devoid of art. Who are those artists I am referring to and what are they doing?

Well, in brief, these artists are my people - the only people I am interested in knowing better. Their interest, on the other hand, is either in attending to the production of a contemporary political space or in bringing about cultural strategies for the production of social goals - or both. Come to think of it - political space, social goals - may well be the only redeeming features of modernity at this time. Moreover, those art-less artist may just now be the only ones holding the answers to the questions that lie ahead of us.☐

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1. 'COLD WALL - A collective answer on fences and men' was a collective exhibition by Ferenc Gróf, Vladan Jeremić, Rena Rädle and Volodymyr Kuznetsov, curated by Róna Kopeczky at the Studio of Young Artists' Gallery in Budapest in November 2015.
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Rena Rädle & Vladan Jeremić

Fragile Presence, Time for Movement

Today, with the neoliberal trimming of public institutions of art, artistic work has become an entrepreneurial activity within a restrictive framework that is conditioned by the exploding art market, creative industries and the political agendas of governments prescribing a certain canon of art.

The question of how to organize the (re)production, distribution and reception of art beyond the frameworks of the market and reactionary art institutions is crucial to art practices that support emancipatory directions of change. From the viewpoint of artistic practice as a means of social transformation, this can only be done in coalition and cooperation with others - with groups, organizations and entities that want to bring forward emancipatory change in society. Such artistic practice is not hermetic but in interaction with the surroundings in which it is created, and its value is measurable insofar as the work is recognized by others as a relevant contribution to a certain cause, i.e. as an articulation of a demand within the society.

In this essay we will describe our artistic practice in the context of the refugee solidarity movement, including self-organized collective exhibitions, works commissioned by art institutions, and protest actions. We will show how art can contribute to the visual language of a new collectivity and how art can become a means of empowerment and solidarity by creating time and space for collaboration and collective action.

When large numbers of refugees arrived in Serbia in 2015, solidarity groups were formed to provide clothes, food and other assistance. Many people helped with assisting refugees to get shelter and medical help, or simply spent time together organizing joint activities like cooking, sports, concerts, films and visits to exhibitions, as well as making friends with people on the move. A network developed among local people, migrants and activists from all over Europe along the Balkan route.

In autumn 2015, together with other artist friends and a curator, we organized an exhibition called 'COLD WALL' at the Studio of Young Artists' Gallery in Budapest.[1] This exhibition focused on Hungary's recent closure of its border to refugees travelling from Serbia. A second exhibition followed in Ljubljana at the Museum of Contemporary Art Metelkova[2] when Slovenia fenced off its border in the same way as Hungary had done. At the Museum of Contemporary Art in Novi Sad, artists and solidarity groups organized a third COLD WALL exhibition in 2016.[3] This was both extended and transformed by the participants of 'NEW mUSEum F.A.C.K.' as part of an experiment at the Novi Sad museum in how to make use of a cultural institution.[4] Within the frame of this event, the group called for a 'F.A.C.K. borders meeting' to be held in support of migrants and against the policy of closed borders. The group discussed how to use the museum in ways that might be useful for their struggle and activities, including networking, work meetings, discussions, workshops, performances, projections, presentations and assemblies. Later on, activists used the visual materials created for the exhibition in a solidarity action held in a park in Belgrade where most of the migrants were camped at that time.

For the 2016 October Salon exhibition in Belgrade we made a large wall painting with cardboard sculptures and takeaway newspapers scattered across the space. This work, which we called 'Fragile Presence', is a visual interpretation of the March of Hope that took place in late summer 2015 when migrants set off on foot from a train station in Budapest to the German border. That long journey was taken to escape the threat of being detained in camps, and so 'Fragile Presence' shows scenes of liberation from the camps and a central composition with people breaking through the walls of 'Fortress Europe'. This breakthrough depicts the moment when a new collectivity is brought about that succeeds in overcoming obstacles in spite of its own fragility - the moment when the dynamic of human bodies breaks down the border regime of the European Union. This movement of refugees creates its own time that transcends local temporalities. Their struggle becomes part of other struggles that likewise seek to occupy, open up and transform space against the linear chronologies of restriction and oppression.

The reception of the people migrating on the March of Hope was made possible by an extensive network of solidarity along the route and among the host communities. In the years since that journey was taken, state-organized structures have taken control of managing migration and the issue is now brutally instrumentalised in election campaigns by right-wing politicians. Today, parties of the New Right have established themselves in parliaments throughout Europe, gaining votes through xenophobic propaganda and the spread of fascist conspiracy theories. In their countries of refuge, migrants are physically attacked by fascist vigilante groups. New Right governments actively seek to criminalize organizations or individuals helping refugees through juridical means.

This is why, when we were invited in June 2018 to develop a space for meetings and workshops at the <rotor> Center

Protest. Credits: Christian Punzen Gruber

Protest Action Graz. Credits: Rena Raedle

Oslobodjenje. credits: Thomas Raggam.

for Contemporary Art[5] in Graz, Austria, we decided to create sculptures related to the struggle for solidarity as monuments of resistance and liberation. The space, called 'Fragile Presence - Action Space', was designed as a space of solidarity and empowerment in which people could gather to discuss and organize against the ongoing anti-humanist, anti-egalitarian, anti-feminist and anti-democratic turn in our societies. The space can be transformed by its users, as the sculptures can be disassembled to serve as chairs and tables during meetings and other activities.

Several months later, as part of an exhibition in the framework of *steirischer herbst* at <rotor>, we created a series of banners and posters with slogans in the space in preparation for a protest action in the city. Banners and flags have long been attributes of societal institutions and organizations, whether political, religious, social or economic. They symbolize the ideological and political power of a group in a moment of struggle. The images we created for the banners were our contribution to the iconography of a social movement that is forming a new collectivity. They represent stories, collective experiences, performances and knowledge that are meaningful for migrants and the refugee solidarity movement. We say a 'new collectivity' because this collective is not being formed through identitarian concepts such as nation, culture, ethnicity, gender, and claims on individual rights. Instead it overcomes the individualization and fragmentation of life and working relations imposed by today's methods of production and shows how new transnational alliances are formed through the unjust distribution of work and wealth in the world.

On 24 September 2018 we organised an hour-long action in front of the main station in Graz together with <rotor> and local artists and activists, protesting against the criminalization of solidarity with refugees. For this protest we tied together the banners and posters we'd prepared at the workshop and spread them across the whole square. A speech was given and everybody joined in,

shouting slogans like "Saving lives is not a crime!" and "Stop the causes of war!". Although we were relatively few in number, our artistic protest action made a clear and powerful statement. We hope we encouraged people in Graz to keep on protesting and publicly condemning inhuman policies towards refugees, especially at a time when right-wing ideology is becoming normalized in public opinion in Austria.

To conclude, we see our practice as having contributed to various interlinked fields of struggle. One of these is the field of artistic representation, where our work developed an iconography of refugee solidarity - a visual language that is part of and meaningful to this movement. This leads to the field of the distribution of art work and the participation of others in its creation and reception. Here we seek to make our art accessible and reproducible in non-white cube situations by using flags, banners, newspapers, printed reproductions and usable objects, etc.

Institutions do also have an important role to play in the distribution of art. Their function first needs to be reshaped, however, since institutions have largely become disconnected from social and political life. In the meantime, producing politically clearly articulated works within art institutions can help open them up for the causes of social movements.□

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above: Postavka. credits: Thomas Raggam.
below: Discussion action space. credits: Rotor.

MTL COLLECTIVE

From Institutional Critique to Institutional Liberation?
A Decolonial Perspective on the Crises of Contemporary Art*

The past decade has witnessed an intensive politicization of the art system, one that goes beyond the ubiquity of political themes in the work of high-profile artists, critics, and exhibitions. Rather, this politicization has involved a far-reaching crisis of legitimacy for major cultural institutions among the publics they claim to serve, as well as the cultural workers upon whose labor they depend. Museums, galleries, biennials, nonprofits, universities, and public agencies have been targeted with protests, demands, and grievances concerning the ways they are governed, the agents who govern them, and the ends to which they are governed. Numerous initiatives have subjected art institutions to public scrutiny, highlighting their complicity in perpetuating, concealing, or neglecting unjust and oppressive practices within and beyond the institution in question. Frequently making creative use of the architectural spaces and brand identities of such institutions, these activities have involved a variety of tactics, including petitions, pickets, strikes, boycotts, disruptions, occupations, shutdowns, callouts, hacks, and infiltrations. These initiatives have used the visibility of institutional platforms to hold institutional actors accountable to their own stated commitments, and have often involved demands for new commitments altogether.

Art institutions have thus been subjected to a double movement. On the one hand, their authority as gatekeepers and sanctifiers of cultural value has been significantly bypassed by cultural workers acting on their own accord without requiring institutional permission. On the other hand, the prestige of the institutions in question has proven valuable for leveraging visibility, publicity, and pressure relative to political aims and movements that straddle the artistic and extra-artistic realms.[1] Even as their authority as guardians of artistic legitimacy decreases, such institutions find themselves subjected to increasing demands for accountability in light of - and often exceeding - their declared values and missions. This "infrastructural turn" by artists and activists is informed, in part, by a classic principle of what is known

Banners unfurled at the Beaux-Arts Court of the Brooklyn Museum during action by Decolonize This Place, April 29, 2018. Photographs by Decolonize This Place and collaborators.

in art history as institutional critique: that art is not autonomous from the economic systems, ideological apparatuses, and institutional spaces within which it is produced, presented, and circulated.

Here we present a decolonial approach to these recent developments. This approach starts from a different place than the art-historical discourse of institutional critique, even while it may sometimes resemble or intersect with it. It resonates, for instance, with strands of that discourse that have highlighted cultural institutions as "spaces of subjection" involved in the reproduction of white supremacy, heteropatriarchy, and settler-colonialism, as embodied in the work of artists such as Renée Green, James Luna, and Fred Wilson.[2] It also finds affinities with direct-action groups from the late 1960s, such as the Black Emergency Cultural Coalition and Black Women Artists and Students for Black Liberation, that called for the radical overhauling of white-dominated institutions through measures of democratization, reparations, and redistribution.[3] However, as an analytic and a practice, decolonization is a distinct approach to the crises of contemporary art, and it extends far beyond the art field and its associated institutions and forms of knowledge. In the most general sense, decolonization guides our efforts to become free through struggle - not as a ready-made program, but as a form of

"epistemic disobedience," an immanent practice of testing, questioning, and learning, grounded in the work of movement-building.[4]

First, it is important to define "decolonization" and its corollaries "decolonial," "decolonize," and "decoloniality." As Eve Tuck and K. Wanye Yang have noted, in recent years this terminology has taken on an inflated status in the arts and humanities, providing a radical shell to familiar ideas and practices of multiculturalism that operate well within the comfort zone of established institutions.[5] However, the term brings with it a set of histories and principles that themselves resist being reduced to an academic buzzword or intellectual trend. Decolonization is not an appeal to liberal tolerance or feel-good diversity; it is rather a combative process that has as its horizon another way of being in this world, one more amenable to our collective existence. While combative, decolonization is also creative. Working in the midst of the Algerian revolution, Frantz Fanon wrote, "Decolonization truly is the creation of new people... The 'thing' colonized becomes a person through the very process of self-liberation."[6] While thinkers such as Fanon remain a crucial point of reference, the "classical" definition of decolonization handed down from twentieth-century national-liberation movements, which centered on a "nation-people" taking control of the state, is

not the end point for contemporary decolonization.

Today, in fact, there is no blueprint for what decolonization looks like. It is a process that is necessarily context - and place-specific. It requires a constant questioning of one's own location in what Mignolo calls the "colonial matrix of power" - a matrix that is inherently linked to heteropatriarchal rule, as Maria Lugones has insisted - whether that be in places in the Gobal South that have undergone the uneven processes of formal decolonization, post-imperial European powers, or settler-colonial states such as Israel, Canada, Australia, South Africa, and the United States.[7] Thus, for example, as we write this essay in New York City, we acknowledge that we are living and working on occupied Lenape land that was taken by force in the seventeenth century by the Dutch, a process coinciding with the introduction of chattel slavery to Manhattan Island.[8] Indeed, much of the politically engaged art that has risen to prominence in recent years takes place on this same occupied territory, even though the relation of such practice to this ongoing history is typically erased or taken for granted. Aman Sium, Chandni Desai, and Eric Ritskes frame the stakes of decolonization in this way: "The mental, spiritual and emotional toll that colonization still exacts is neither fictive nor less important than the material; but without grounding land, water, and air as central, decolonization is a shell game. We cannot decolonize without recognizing the primacy of land and Indigenous sovereignty over that land."[9]

Indigenous land struggles are thus essential to a decolonial sense of history, and the precondition for the difficult work of constructing decolonial solidarity. As Tuck and Yang write, "Settler colonialism and its decolonization implicates and unsettles everyone."[10] They continue:

The United States, as a settler colonial nation-state, also operates as an empire - utilizing external forms and internal forms of colonization simultaneous to the settler colonial project. This means, and this is perplexing to some, that dispossessed people are brought onto seized Indigenous land

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Julian Brave Noisecat speaks at a NYC Stands with Standing Rock rally at Washington Square Park, September 9, 2016. Photograph by Erik McGregor.

through other colonial projects. Other colonial projects include enslavement… but also military recruitment, low-wage and high-wage labor recruitment (such as agricultural workers and overseas-trained engineers), and displacement/migration (such as the coerced immigration from nations torn by U.S. wars or devastated by U.S. economic policy). In this set of settler colonial relations, colonial subjects who are displaced by external colonialism, as well as racialized and minoritized by internal colonialism, still occupy and settle stolen Indigenous land. Settlers are diverse, not just white European descent, and include people of color, even from other colonial contexts. This tightly wound set of conditions and racialized, globalized relations exponentially complicates what is meant by decolonization, and by solidarity, against settler-colonial forces.[11]

Tuck and Yang's framing of US settler-colonial conditions is crucial for the approach to art institutions developed by the group Decolonize This Place (discussed below). Another important point of reference is the Zapatista rebellion since 1994 in Chiapas, Mexico, widly recognized as the first revolutionary movement of the post-Cold War era beyond the frame of the nation-state. For nearly twenty-five years, in the face

of state repression, the Zapatistas have defended and sustained an autonomous Indigenous territory that has become an inspiration and physical meeting place for radical movements around the world.

Decolonization is grounded in the practice of living, encompassing both daily acts of resistance, refusal, and sabotage, on the one hand, and economies of love, care, and mutual aid on the other. In other words, the ethos of decolonization is inseparable from process and practice rather than an ultimate outcome posited in advance. Mignolo suggests that decolonial practices involve a "delinking" from the normative political categories of modernity, reorienting struggle away from the state as an ultimate horizon (which is not to say that they could or should ignore the force of state power).[12] The "decolonial option" that emerges with this delinking from the state creates space for the sharing of "colonial wounds" across borders and movements.[13] As Nelson Maldonado-Torres writes, "Decolonial movements tend to approach ideas and change in a way that does not isolate knowledge from action… For them, colonization and dehumanization demand a holistic movement that involves reaching out to others, communicating, and organizing. A new kind of knowledge and critique are produced as part of that process. That is, decolonial knowledge production and

critique are part of an entirely different paradigm of being, acting, and knowing in the world."[14]

Over the past decade, movements that have shared these decolonial characteristics, on varying scales and durations, include Idle No More in Canada (2012), Black Lives Matter and Movement for Black Lives (2014-), Rhodes Must Fall and Tuitions Must Fall in South Africa (2015), No Dakota Access Pipeline at Standing Rock Reservation (2016), and the ongoing struggle in occupied Palestine against the Israeli settler-colonial project. Decolonization as an analytic enables us to highlight intersections between such struggles without collapsing them. We see this when Angela Davis suggests the need to see the black uprisings in Ferguson against police terror alongside the intifadas of Palestinian youth, when Steven Salaita notes the historical connections between settler-colonialism in the United States and Israel, when black and brown communities take up the language of decolonization while defending neighborhoods under siege by real-estate capital and its state facilitators from the South Bronx to Boyle Heights in Los Angeles, or when movements against the criminalization, detention, and deportation of Latinx, Muslim, and other immigrants proclaim: "No ban on stolen land."[15]

Several guiding principles have emerged thus far in characterizing decolonization, which is always grounded in the specificity of place and process. First, it articulates a sense of the historical present distinct from the unfinished project of decolonization in the twentieth century focused on the nation-state. Second, it is anchored in the centrality of land, and Indigenous claims to that land, unsettling the space and time of settler-colonial societies while seeing the process of colonization, in the Americas at least, as intimately connected to the institution of slavery. Third, it generates knowledge and creativity in the course of practice, opening space for a "decolonial option." Fourth, it is intersectional, highlighting affinities and building ties between apparently different struggles. Consequently, the process of decoloniza-

tion seeks to reorient the questions and terms of our conversations about politics, knowledge, and art. If, as Mignolo suggests, modernity can be seen as deriving from coloniality, how does that change our relation to and interaction with the exemplary modern institutions of the museum and the academy?[16] And how does that affect, inform, and challenge at a structural level the entire complex of culture in which contemporary art is produced, displayed, and experienced? In turn, how does this transform our sense of what is at stake in the proliferation of activism targeting art institutions in recent years, and indeed the entire trajectory of what is known as institutional critique?

Activism Targeting Art Institutions

In general, the resurgence of activism around artistic institutions in recent years has aimed to alter their conduct in light of their own stated commitments to civic engagement, cultural education, and aesthetic enrichment beyond the dictates of the market. However, these practices go well beyond Holland Cotter's call to "make museums moral again," that is, to restore a foundational set of liberal values, which have supposedly been distorted or lost, through improved governance of institutions as they exist.[17] Unlike the professionalized paradigm of "social practice art" increasingly adopted as official policy by museums, city agencies, and non-profit organizations, these campaigns have been unafraid to forcefully antagonize the institutions with which they are engaged, often deliberately creating publicity crises and decision dilemmas for institutional governance.[18]

Such work is not limited to acts of negation or censure. Rather, it involves what Kuba Szreder calls "productive withdrawals" from business-as-usual in the art system by actors who supply the labor and ideas that keep that system running.[19] While taking aim at specific policies and practices of institutions, such work often results in the temporary re-functioning of the institution, prefiguring what the institution could or

above: Global Ultra Luxury Faction and the Illuminator. Projection on the Guggenheim Museum, April 15, 2016. Photograph by G.U.L.F.
below: Liberate Tate. *Hidden Figures*. Performance, Tate Modern, September 7, 2014. Photograph by Martin LeSanto Smith/Liberate Tate.

should be beyond its current form. At its best, it reimagines the nature of artistic production, spectatorship, and institutionality itself, giving rise to some of the most striking analysis, imagery, and performance in contemporary art over the past decade.

Consider the Gulf Labor Campaign (GLC). Founded by artists including Walid Raad, Hans Haacke, Rene Gabri, and Ayreen Anastas, it has aimed to pressure the Guggenheim to redress the oppressive labor conditions of South Asian migrant workers at the construction site

of its new branch on Abu Dhabi's "Happiness Island."[20] The group has involved *networking* through the social ecologies of the art system, *researching* the conditions of Abu Dhabi, and *performing* through creative actions directly targeting the museum.[21] The last has been the province of the Global Ultra Luxury Faction (G.U.L.F.), an autonomous offshoot of GLC known in part for its iconic projections on the facade of the flagship Frank Lloyd Wright structure, placing unauthorized propaganda on the walls of the museum, and ultimately shutting it down

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on May Day 2015 with a sit-in that drew its visual language from the On Kawara exhibition on display at the time.[22]

Another example is Liberate Tate, which after a five-year campaign succeeded in pressuring the Tate museum to end its sponsorship agreement with oil giant British Petroleum.[23] Over the course of the campaign, the group developed an extensive performative repertoire, often making art-historical citations. These included reanimating Malevich's *Black Square* during a blockbuster exhibition of the artist's work, transforming it into a participatory mass icon held aloft in the famous Turbine Hall as a cipher of both ecological apocalypse and revolutionary potential. Allied with Liberate Tate in its call for a movement of "fossil-free culture" are groups such as the Natural History Museum (whose deadpan name, logo, and pedagogical displays *détourn* those of the official institution). Inspired in part by the work of Haacke and Mark Dion, the Natural History Museum targets the worlds of science and museum professionals, and has forced US cultural institutions to remove climate-denying donors like the Koch brothers and, most recently, the Mercer family from their boards.[24]

Other groups, such as W.A.G.E., Arts and Labor, and the People's Cultural Plan, have over the past decade taken on the precarious working conditions at the heart of the art economy itself. They have scored important wins, such as the adoption of W.A.G.E. compensation standards by an increasing number of institutions and the unionization of art handlers at the Frieze Art Fair.[25] Meanwhile, art students have mobilized around their own conditions of precarity. This includes the resignation of USC students in response to the elimination of graduate teaching stipends, as well as the Free Cooper Union campaign, which blasted the hitherto unspoken politics of student debt in the art world into media visibility.

Of course, the election of Donald Trump precipitated a wave of action in and around the art system, beginning with the J20 Art Strike, a call for "collective noncompliance" addressed to art institutions for Inauguration Day. The call re-

above: Pamela Sneed addresses the J20 Anti-Fascist Speak-Out at the Whitney Museum, January 20th, 2017. Photograph by Occupy Museums.
below: Nan Goldin leads the "Pain Sackler" action at the Metropolitan Museum, March 11, 2018. Photograph by Sandi Bachom.

sulted in a wide range of responses, from the shuttering of galleries to the waiving of admissions fees at museums to special programming addressing the crisis, including the "Anti-Fascist speak out" organized by Occupy Museums in collaboration with the education department of the Whitney Museum.[26] As the organizers of the strike put it in an anonymous statement, "Despite its contradictions, the art world has significant amounts of capital - material, social, and cultural - at its disposal. The time has come to imagine and to implement ways of redirecting these resources in solidarity with broader social movements leading the way in the fight against Trumpism."[27]

Since the election of Trump, campaigns targeting the nexus of what Andrea Fraser calls "philanthropy and plutocracy" have developed, with the intent to "challenge the trusteeship of patrons who support art institutions financially while also supporting politicians who undermine the values on which those institutions depend."[28] This line of work resulted in an early win with the resignation of Steven Mnuchin, Trump's treasury secretary, from the board of LA MoCA. Other actions have taken aim

Chinatown Art Brigade protest outside the Omer Fast exhibition at the James Cohan gallery, October 27, 2017. Photograph by Elena Goukassian.

at the presence of Trump advisor Larry Fink on the board of MoMA, while Nan Goldin recently launched a campaign targeting the Sackler family, which made its fortune through expanding the deadly opioid industry across the US and whose name appears on dozens of cultural institutions.[29]

Finally, dovetailing with the energies of the post-inaugural Women's March of 2017, the #metoo movement targeting sexual assault and gendered inequality in the culture industries has ramified into the art system as well. Far from a single-issue campaign, #metoo has been a system-wide indictment. It has utilized popular anti-sexist outrage against high-visibility predators from Trump to Harvey Weinstein to Knight Landesman in order to amplify deep-rooted feminist calls to combat the patriarchal violence that permeates institutions and relationships of every kind, while at the same time facing challenges to the default whiteness that has long characterized mainstream feminist culture in the United States.[30]

Immediately after the election, artists such as Chitra Ganesh and Hannah Black pointed to the ways in which liberal shock in the face of Trump's white nationalism often served to efface deep, foundational structures of white supremacy in the art system and in the US at large.[31] Two months after the J20 speak-out, the Whitney Biennial itself became a locus of conflict with the campaign launched by Parker Bright and Black calling for the destruction of Dana Schutz's *Open Casket* (2016) - a forceful invitation to the artist and the institution alike to set an example of how to redress enactments of white violence on the part of even well-intentioned actors in the art world.[32] Soon after the controversy at the Whitney, Indigenous communities in Minneapolis successfully called for the deconstruction of Sam Durant's *Scaffold* (2012) at the Walker Art Center, a work originally intended to highlight traumatic settler violence that, from the vantage point of protesters, ended up recommitting such violence. Durant and museum director Olga Viso entered into a productive process of collaboration with those making the demand that ultimately resulted in the burial of the work. Rather than an abhorrent act of censorship, the process of dismantling and burying the work became a critical and creative process in its own right, and would later lead Viso to pen an influential *New York Times* article calling for the "decolonization of art museums," arguing, "If museums want to continue to have a place, they must stop seeing activists as antagonists. They must position themselves as learning centers, not

impenetrable centers of self-validating authority."[33]

Recent initiatives have also brought attention to the use of culture as a tool of "artwashing" by predatory real-estate developers and urban policymakers in facilitating the gentrification of US cities. The most visible case is Boyle Heights in Los Angeles, where local groups from the Latinx neighborhood have adopted a combative stance toward art-world actors, calling for a moratorium on new galleries and even for the community takeover of already existing ones.[34] In New York, the Chinatown Arts Brigade (CAB) has taken similar aim at the conjunction of art and displacement; this came to a head with a series of actions targeting an exhibition by Omer Fast at James Cohan gallery that involved the artist redesigning the space in the guise of a dilapidated local Chinese business - a smugly ironic commentary on the demographic shifts of the neighborhood that CAB and its allies labeled "racist poverty porn." At the same time, the use of art as a "weapon of mass displacement," to use Shellyne Rodriguez's term, has come under fire in the South Bronx, where developers and celebrities have attempted to draw on the "gritty" history of hip-hop culture in their marketing of the area as a newly rezoned ultra-luxury enclave.[35]

The diagnosis of artwashing has been taken up by artists and activists working to advance the Palestinian Boycott, Divestment, Sanction (BDS) movement into the international art system as well. In this context, artwashing means the use of art and culture by the state of Israel to bolster its international reputation as a cosmopolitan and enlightened society even as it perpetuates violent policies of ethnic cleansing against the native Palestinian population dating back to the foundation of the state in 1948. In *Assuming Boycott: Resistance, Agency, and Cultural Production*, Kareem Estefan, Laura Raicovich, and Carin Kuoni note that boycott, in inviting participants to withdraw from interacting with oppressive regimes, is a matter not of negative restriction but of affirmative solidarity and creative opportunity.[36] Of all the arenas of arts activism in recent years, BDS

has proven to be among the most agonistic given the power of the pro-Israeli lobby in the US, and Raicovich's explicit and implicit gestures of solidarity with the movement likely played a role in her ouster as director of the Queens Museum.[37] These campaigns are diverse in their tactics, aesthetics, and political horizons, but in each case we find a simultaneous decentering of institutional authority and intensification of accountability. What are cultural institutions for? Whom do they serve? How are they funded? How they are governed? What is to be done with them in the face of intensifying political emergencies? Such questions have been especially resonant for those working inside the targeted institutions. These actors sometimes have the opportunity to transform institutions in response to or in collaboration with outside agitators. They may partake in such campaigns with varying degrees of discretion and visibility, protection and risk, tacit support and overt engagement. In general, the line between "outsiders" and "insiders" in the art ecosystem is often blurred or ambiguous; indeed, this line is a site of political organizing in its own right. Of course, inequalities among those working in institutions are always potential areas of antagonism as well, especially as the structures of patriarchy and white supremacy that continue to define the labor that sustains these institutions come under increasing scrutiny.

All these projects amount to a historical phenomenon larger than the sum of its parts. However, they have yet to receive a sustained art-historical treatment, even as they often display a great deal of art-historical self-consciousness in their own right. What would constitute an adequate critical language for these phenomena in theoretical (rather than simply anecdotal) terms? Yates McKee has described a general impulse to "strike art" over the past decade, one that involves tactically moving between the world of social movements and the infrastructures of the art system; Kuba Szreder, as we have already noted, employs the figure of "productive withdrawal." Another recent concept that aims to define the kinds of work outlined above is

"institutional liberation."[38]

What could "institutional liberation" mean? Would it mean liberating the institutions in which many of us work - and if so, how, by whom, from what, and to what end? Would such a liberation itself be somehow institutional or institutionalized, or is it a liberation *from* institutions as they exist in favor of a new practice of anti- or counter-institutionality? As Samuel Weber once noted, "institution" shares an etymological root with "state," "statue," and "establishment."[39] It implies the setting up, arranging, and consolidating of people and power in a fixed place with an enduring temporality. Although it may begin with an active event of positing, an institution typically tends toward the reproduction of a reified status quo through symbolic rites of authority, divisions of labor, distributions of resources, and normative forms of conduct.[40] Liberation, on the other hand, implies the de-establishing of fixed arrangements of power. It suggests the unleashing of people and places from enduring structures and fixed boundaries that are unjust or oppressive.

It is precisely this tension between institution and liberation that makes "institutional liberation" worth interrogating beyond the brisk manifesto published last year by the group Not an Alternative calling for "liberating institutions from capitalism." The group writes, "The various projects we see combining into an emergent movement for institutional liberation do not value critique *qua* critique. They turn the institution against itself, side with its better nature, and force others to take a side." This "movement," as Not an Alternative calls it, sees "institutions as forms to be seized and connected into a counterpower infrastructure. They activate the power that is already there. More than a critique of institutions, institutional liberation affirms the productive and creative dimension of collective struggle. Our actions are not simply against. They are for: for emancipation, equality, collectivity, and the commons." Not an Alternative understands institutional liberation as the "commandeering" of institutions, and in the process they polemically define themselves *against*

what they see as two other positions. First, they call the building of new institutions "naive," and they resist "overburdening ourselves with the overwhelming task of inventing entirely new political and social forms."[41] Second, they posit institutional liberation as a definitive surpassing of institutional critique, a plural and contested art-historical tradition that they reduce to a circular ethos of "critique for its own sake."[42]

It is true that the imaginative charge of "institutional liberation" comes from its alteration of the familiar term "institutional critique." It intimates a transition from a familiar operation to a newly dynamic one, and certainly the principle of liberation is an urgent one to reactivate in the present moment.[43] However, any such reactivation must grapple with the legacies that the term brings with it, including those of national liberation, black liberation, and women's liberation in the 1960s and beyond. These overlap with the resurgent discourse of decolonization, especially in the case of Black Lives Matter, which has insisted, according to Keeanga-Yamahtta Taylor, that black liberation is the precondition of liberation for everyone.[44] Without such a perspective, appeals to "liberation" are liable to result in the reproduction of settler futurity, entrenching rather than unsettling institutions that have been targeted for action in recent years.

In what follows, we retrace a history of institutional critique and consider the ways in which the overlapping trajectories of decolonization and liberation can inform the stakes of this art-historical concept and practice in the present. More pointedly, we push at the limits of what has emerged over the past few years as a growing mainstream consensus that institutions must be variously democratized, diversified, and improved in light of their stated ideals. The current crises of institutional authority can be tumultuous and even traumatic, but they also provide opportunities for ongoing radicalization when it comes to rethinking what institutions are or could be, especially as they might intersect with the work of movement-building. The latter is always a matter of testing and exper-

imenting, training and learning over time, as much as it is the pursuit of an immediate and finite goal. This is especially the case in an arena as contradictory as that of contemporary art, situated as it is along the fault line of the elite ultra-luxury economy on the one hand and the radical aspirations of artists, critics, and curators invested in the liberatory possibilities of art on the other. The depth of these contradictions was put in harrowing terms by Helen Molesworth in an article published just weeks before her own firing from LA MoCA:

The museum, the Western institution I have dedicated my life to, with its familiar humanist offerings of knowledge and patrimony in the name of empathy and education, is one of the greatest holdouts of the colonialist enterprise. Its fantasies of possession and edification grow more and more wearisome as the years go by... I confess that more days than not I find myself wondering whether the whole damn project of collecting, displaying, and interpreting culture might just be unredeemable.[45]

What Was Institutional Critique?

As an art-historical category, institutional critique has often been broken down into a sequence of generational "waves," largely focused on institutions in Europe and the United States after the events of 1968 (with important counterexamples including Latin American avant-gardes like Tucumán Arde).[46] First, artists such as Michael Asher and Hans Haacke began to move from a strictly phenomenological concern with the embodied dynamics of perception, space, and architecture within the art institution toward a concern with the ideological structures and frames of the institution itself. Such work developed techniques of laconic spatial alteration (Asher's literal removal of the boundary between display and commerce, Daniel Buren's generic system of stripes), sociological mapping (Haacke's data displays and visitor polls), ironic fiction (Marcel Broodthaers's *Département des aigles*), and performative or process-based intervention (Mier-

le Laderman Ukeles's feminist staging of the otherwise invisible maintenance labor sustaining the space of the gallery). By and large, this practice offered its critique from within the institution under scrutiny and was authorized by it.

At the same time, a cluster of self-organized groups beginning with the Art-Workers Coalition (AWC) and the Black Emergency Cultural Coalition in 1969 began to frame the institution itself as the target of demands for democratization

in terms of governance; accessibility; inequities of race, class, and gender; and the redistribution of art-world resources. Emerging from this ferment were smaller groups such as the Ad Hoc Women's Art Committee and Black Women Students and Artists for Black Art Liberation. Such groups, while making specific demands on the institutions in question, also overlapped with the broader political imaginaries of the time like those of the antiwar movement, black liberation, and

Michele Wallace (center) and Faith Ringgold (right) at the Black Emergency Cultural Coalition (BECC) protest at the Whitney Museum, New York, January 31, 1971. © Jan Van Raay.

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women's liberation, and often involved the activation of antagonisms *within* the activist landscape as well in order to challenge dynamics of patriarchy and white supremacy therein.[47]

The decade following the legitimation crisis of art institutions in the late 1960s saw the emergence of the alternative-spaces movement, with its own spectrum of structures, funding, and programming.[48] Influenced in many cases by feminist critiques of the exclusionary nature of mainstream art institutions, as well as by AWC's earlier call for artists to be central to the governance of institutions, groundbreaking alternative spaces at this time included now-familiar organizations such as Artists Space, White Columns, the Kitchen, and El Museo del Barrio. These new institutions afforded unprecedented support for experimental, ephemeral, and non-commodified practices, including performance, video, and pedagogical projects informed by radical political currents of all kinds.[49] The alternative-space ecosystem overlapped in some cases with more overtly activist social centers combining art, community organizing, and urban subcultures of punk and hip-hop such as El Bohio and ABC No Rio on the Lower East Side.[50]

The next wave of institutional critique was a subset of critical postmodernism in the 1980s, and involved a heightened attention to the violent colonial and racial histories underlying cultural institutions. This period witnessed James Luna's *Artifact Piece* (wherein the artist "played dead" by lying prone in a display case at the San Diego Museum of Man), Coco Fusco and Guillermo Gómez-Peña's *The Couple in the Cage* (a mimetic exacerbation of ethnographic display conventions during the 500th anniversary of Columbus's "discovery" of the Americas), and works by Fred Wilson, such as *A Guarded View* and *Mining the Museum*, concerning the epidermal economies of race in US museums.[51] Coinciding with the rise of postcolonial theory in the humanities and social sciences, these developments prompted curators, educators, and audiences alike to rethink the very idea of the museum itself, and they have continued to ramify in the present.

The late 1980s also saw the emergence of the Guerrilla Girls, whose works targeted the gendered and racial inequities of the art system. Revivifying avant-garde legacies of anonymous agitprop and confrontational collective performance, they enacted a politics of representation that addressed the psychic and visual structures of patriarchy - including in the discipline of art history itself.[52] Embedded in ACT-UP as a direct-action movement, Gran Fury developed highly effective forms of agitprop during this same period as well. Interwoven with the development of postmodern art and the emergence of queer theory, the work of Gran Fury involved skillful collaboration with sympathetic artistic institutions and platforms such as Dia, the Kitchen, and the New Museum for the purposes of movement-building.[53]

By the mid-1990s, ACT-UP had largely folded into the work of professional advocacy, and there was a lull in social movements in the face of Clintonite neoliberalism. At this point, institutional critique confronted two possible deadlocks. The first, identified by Miwon Kwon, was the potential domestication of critical gestures, such that the artist became less an unsettling provocateur than a traveling professional service-provider, formulaically enacting critique-for-hire at one place after another.[54] The second risk involved a turn away from matters of proactive political concern toward a reflexive tarrying with the ironic double-binds, entrepreneurial games, and insouciant subcultures of the art system itself (of the kind described in Lane Relyea's *Your Everyday Artworld*).[55] These included Art Club 2000's performative mimicking of "subversive" corporate branding culture, Christian-Phillip Muller's embedding with the Ringier advertising company in order to supposedly *"détourn"* the design of its annual shareholders report, Carey Young's training herself in market-populist self-presentation techniques, Laura Cottingham's *Anita Pallenberg Story* (a send-up of the "rock star" aura surrounding certain bad-boy artists in the era of the dot-com bubble), and Andrea Fraser's *Untitled* (wherein her dealer facilitated a twenty-thousand-dollar exchange of sex for money between the artist and an anonymous collector under the post-Conceptual rubrics art-as-contract and performance-for-the-camera). This strand of work was not uncritical, but it was akin to the "cynical reason" that compounds, rather than dialectically redeems, defeated models of critique and resistance.[56] However insightful such work has been about the logics of affective labor and neoliberal entrepreneurialism, collective political struggle in the sense once associated with AWC or ACT-UP was off the agenda.

In a kind of coda to the hyper-reflexivity of 2003's *Untitled*, Fraser wrote a major essay titled "From the Critique of Institutions to the Institution of Critique" in 2005. "With each attempt to evade the limits of institutional determination, to embrace an outside, to redefine art or reintegrate it into everyday life, to reach 'everyday' people and work in the 'real' world," she writes, "we expand our frame and bring more of the world into it. But we never escape it."[57] Fraser seemed to justify a practice that was concerned only with the art system itself: "But just as art cannot exist outside the field of art, we cannot exist outside the field of art, at least not as artists, critics, curators, etc. And what we do outside the field, to the extent that it remains outside, can have no effect within it. So if there is no outside for us... it is because the institution is inside of us, and we can't get outside of ourselves." Yet her argument actually pointed in two directions. Although it could be read as a cynical apologia for the insular concern with art-world dynamics that her own work seemed to exemplify at the time, it also suggested, however obliquely, that any political engagement in the name of art or on the part of artists would need to grapple with the historical and institutional entanglements of the art system. The latter insinuation would prove to be prescient for the evolution of arts activism in the coming decade.

However, it was the first of these readings - that institutional critique had degenerated into a form of "discursive self-limitation" - that provided the foil for the theorization of a "fourth wave" of institutional critique by critics Gerald Raunig and Gene Ray in the late 2000s.[58] Fueled in part by the energies of the alter-globalization protests of the early 2000s, this era of critique involved a politically motivated exodus from the mainstream institutions of art to the field of social movements. Raunig and Ray argued that such a movement constituted a "transversal" engagement between artistic and activist fields, as opposed to a simplistic anti-art gesture. This involved what Raunig called "instituent practices," by which he intended a rethinking of institutional critique in its entirety through the lens of Foucault's late theses on governmentality.[59] For Foucault, the critical questioning of the "arts of government" developed by the modern capitalist state began with asserting a will "not to be governed, in that way, for that, by them."[60] This attitude did not entail merely a reformist adjustment to the existing order or a complete exit from power into some kind of unmediated freedom. For Foucault, critique is an activity that is bound up with new forms of conduct and exercises of power on the part of the governed. These activities can involve the rearranging of power relations within an institution in such a way as to radically alter its mode of governing, but they can also include the founding of new institutional forms altogether. Raunig is interested in the tension between the institution as the dynamic event of positing new arrangements of forces and as an established entity that consolidates and reproduces those arrangements over time. For Raunig, the "fourth wave" of institutional critique works within this tension between dynamic action and the setting up of enduring structures. Raunig suggests that "instituent power" can keep in check the tendency of congealed structures to ossify or become oppressive, while at the same time helping to accumulate and bind temporary energies that would otherwise burn out.

Raunig's analysis is more theoretical than empirical, but his primary example is that of artists embedding themselves in the work of self-governed "social centers" in cities like Amsterdam, Barcelona, and Athens during the 2000s. Often these were squatted or expropriated buildings repurposed as communal kitchens, media labs, fabrication workshops, and organizing hubs. Some spaces were under continual siege by police, while others received legal recognition and even public funding through progressive policies.[61] Some linked into broader artistic ecosystems, while others separated from them. All in all, however, these spaces were instituent in the sense that they were founded and governed by their own participants over time with the explicit aim of building and sustaining radical social movements. Art has often been central to them, but the form of institutionality they enact - their governance, divisions of labor, programming, audience, and overall raison d'être - is utterly different from that of a museum, a gallery, a university, or even an alternative space of the kind developed in the US in the 1970s.

Examples of such spaces have been less common in the United States than in Europe. An exception is 16 Beaver, situated in one of the few surviving light-industrial buildings in the Wall Street district of lower Manhattan. Though not a squat - it was sustained through a rent-sharing agreement with several other organizations - it was run as a movement commons, hosting a stream of artists, intellectuals, and activists from around the city and indeed the world over the course of its life span from 2000 to 2015. Though many of its participants maintained connections to the institutional worlds of art and academia - often channeling these resource flows into the ever-precarious subsistence of the space itself - 16 Beaver was entirely autonomous from such worlds. In the summer of 2011, 16 Beaver became one incubator of the Occupy Wall Street movement that launched just outside its doorstep, forging a historic intersection between the energies of the 2011 uprisings around the world and the networks of artists, activists, and intellectuals that 16 Beaver had cultivated in New York for more than a decade.[62]

Occupy was the most extreme example of an exodus from the art system in recent memory, giving rise to a set of instituent practices entirely indifferent to the art world and motivated by the imperatives of anti-capitalist movement-building. And yet, within weeks of the initial occupation, certain strands within Occupy, such as Occupy Museums and Arts and Labor, had begun to turn their sights back on the art world, now understood as an exemplary site of both 1% oligarchy and precarious labor. Writing in response to Occupy in late 2011, Fraser underwent a subtle shift in orientation in tandem with the analysis put forth by Occupy Museums and other groups. She maintained her skepticism toward extra-artistic claims being made by artists, but rather than a static deadlock, the immanence of artists to the art system seemed to offer a political opportunity of the kind she had obliquely noted in her 2005 text. "Any claim that we represent a progressive social force while our activities are directly subsidized by the engines of inequality can only contribute to the justification of that inequality - the (not so) new legitimation function of art museums," Fraser now wrote. "The only 'alternative' today is to recognize our participation in that economy and confront it in a direct and immediate way in all of our institutions."[63] Fraser's call to recognize and confront set forth a challenge to artists, critics, and curators who had long used "the market" as a foil for critique.[64]

Informed by the Occupy lexicon of the "1%," Fraser's call to combine an immanent critique of the art system with confrontational action echoed the then-developing Gulf Labor coalition. The group was formed in 2010 in response to the Guggenheim Abu Dhabi being built on Saadiyat ("Happiness") Island off the coast of Abu Dhabi in the United Arab Emirates (UAE). The Saadiyat cultural district includes a branch of the Louvre (which opened in November 2017) as well as a Guggenheim Abu Dhabi by Frank Gehry, the Sheikh Zayed National Museum by Foster + Partners, and a performing-arts center by Zaha Hadid. South Asian workers building Saadiyat Island leave family, friends, and loved ones for the promise of the "Gulf dream" in Abu Dhabi. They incur substantial debt in order to leave their home country and obtain construction work that pays very little. While in the UAE, workers are generally housed in remote, segregated,

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and surveilled worker camps. They have no rights to worker representation or any form of collective bargaining, and when they organize strikes and slowdowns in response to poor living conditions or lack of payment, the punishment leveled by employers is often harsh, including indiscriminate imprisonment and/or deportation.[65]

The idea of the Gulf Labor Campaign (GLC) emerged during a 2010 conference (Home Works Forum 5) hosted by Ashkal Alwan, the Lebanese Association for Plastic Arts, when, after direct dialogue with the Guggenheim led nowhere, a boycott of Guggenheim Abu Dhabi was launched at the Sharjah Biennale that same year. At the time, GLC demanded that the Guggenheim ensure that migrant-worker rights be protected during the construction of museums on Saadiyat Island. What began as an artist-organized and - led boycott, in which artists pledged to withhold their artwork from acquisition by the museum, evolved over time in the face of the Guggenheim's re-

fusal to address these labor conditions. GLC tactics came to include periodic email updates, publications, educational public programs, exhibitions (such as participation in the 56th Venice Biennale), research trips to the UAE and countries where some of the workers originate, and the tactic of *52 Weeks*, which leveraged art and creativity in the service of the campaign. In this project, every week for fifty-two weeks, a different artist submitted work that spoke to labor issues in the building of the Guggenheim Abu Dhabi and more broadly to the relation of arts and labor; this was a way to exert pressure on the Guggenheim and to build solidarity beyond the boycott. The visibility and impact of GLC ebbed and flowed during its first four years, but in 2014 the campaign entered a new phase of global media coverage with a series of confrontational direct actions at the Guggenheim in New York by a new entity called Global Ultra-Luxury Faction (G.U.L.F.). These included aggressively disrupting the brand image and the day-to-day operation of

the museum in order to force officials into dialogue.

GLC and G.U.L.F. were transversal in a way unanticipated by Raunig in his account of the fourth wave of institutional critique. Raunig had conceived this version primarily in terms of experimental, small-scale cultural spaces largely indifferent to the official art system. Though emerging out of the ferment of 16 Beaver and Occupy, GLC and G.U.L.F. were now activating the resources of the art system (the cultural capital and media visibility of artists) to directly target a major institution within that system. While pressuring the institution with specific demands for accountability, GLC also proposed a model of what political organizing within the art system could look like. However, from the perspective of the direct-action group G.U.L.F., GLC risked falling into the logic of a narrowly single-issue campaign, given its lack of success in connecting with other boycotts and struggles in the art world and beyond. G.U.L.F.'s set of concerns extend far beyond conditions on Saadiyat Island. In a manifesto titled "On Direct Action: An Address to Cultural Workers," G.U.L.F. states that the struggle around art-world institutions such as the Guggenheim should be understood in terms of a broader complex of the "global ultra luxury economy, underpinned by empire and white supremacy." This expanded frame of analysis also means a shift in political horizons. Without overlooking the specifics of the labor campaign, G.U.L.F. argued that struggles like Black Lives Matter and that of Palestine required rethinking art and activism in newly radicalized terms: "We do not imagine the workers as victims to be saved, but rather as fellow human beings whose freedom is bound up with our own. We have connected with their struggle because our own dignity depends on it. Our liberation is either collective or it is nonexistent."[66] As a follow-up to this statement, G.U.L.F. used the platform of the Venice Biennale to connect the struggle of migrant workers in Abu Dhabi to that of Palestinians in occupied Palestine. In an unsanctioned action, G.U.L.F. altered the GLC banner hanging in the Arsenale by marking it

Global Ultra-Luxury Faction May Day action at the Guggenheim Museum, May 1, 2015. Photograph by G.U.L.F.

with the popular cartoon figure "Handala," a symbol of Palestinian resistance. It also occupied the Israeli pavilion and held a conversation about the Boycott, Divestment, Sanctions movement against Israel. It was a connection that GLC was incapable of making because it saw itself as a campaign specific to the working conditions in Abu Dhabi; the limited analytical framework of GLC did not permit it to stand in explicit solidarity with Palestine.

The tension surrounding G.U.L.F.'s insistence on BDS made clear that the work of pressuring elite institutions was not an end in itself for the group but a process of "collective liberation": "We target the Guggenheim in New York because it is a gateway into a larger struggle… From acting we are learning a new way of thinking. Let each action be an opportunity to test, to train in the practice of freedom. Let us reimagine what art can be as a force of liberation and solidarity across borders."[67] Learning from the shortcomings of GLC, members of G.U.L.F. met to evaluate the landscape of the art world shortly after Venice. In the fall of 2015, the group decided that decoloniality would be made an explicit framework for articulating a shared politics of liberation while maintaining the specificities of each struggle.

Decolonize This Place

Decolonize This Place became known in the art world during its three-month residency at Artists Space in the fall of 2016.[68] The group had its origins, however, in an action targeting the Brooklyn Museum in the spring of that year. Late in 2015, the museum was set to open an exhibition titled *Agitprop!* that featured artists from the Russian Constructivists to Gran Fury, the Yes Men, and Occupy Museums - an indication of the extent to which radical practices had come to be recognized by art institutions in the years following 2011.[69] Before it opened, it was discovered that the museum would also be hosting the annual Brooklyn Real Estate Summit, an event unabashedly devoted to highlighting "undercapitalized" neighborhoods as tar-

Global Ultra Luxury Faction applies a stencil of "Handala" to the Gulf Labor Coalition installation at the Venice Biennale, 2015. Photograph by Hrag Vartanian.

gets of gentrification - demonstrating a major divide between the museum's supposed commitment to serving the people of Brooklyn and its actual complicity with processes of racialized displacement. News of the summit was met with protests by local groups from the Brooklyn Anti-Gentrification Network (BAN) in coalition with several artists in the *Agitprop!* exhibition, who issued demands that the summit be canceled and that the museum commit itself instead to holding a People's Summit on Gentrification in Brooklyn. Ignoring the first demand, the museum proceeded with the Real Estate Summit; the second demand was channeled into closed-door negotiations with artists involved in *Agitprop!* that dragged on into 2016 and bore little fruit. In the meantime, a *People's Monument to Anti-Displacement Organizing* - produced by a collective of artists from within and beyond the show itself including Occupy Museums, Chinatown Art Brigade, and Artists of Color Bloc - was installed in *Agitprop!* in collaboration with Crown Heights anti-displacement activist Alicia Boyd of Movement to Protect the People, highlighting the ongoing summit controversy within the very space of the exhibition itself. As Betty Yu and Noah Fischer wrote, "It is important to note that this work is *not* the result of an invitation by the Brooklyn Museum but rather came out of a demand and negotiation between the artists and the museum after the fall-

out of the Real Estate Summit in 2015."[70]

In a seemingly unrelated development, a new exhibition titled *This Place* opened adjacent to *Agitprop!* It was devoted to the work of blue-chip art photographers such as Stephen Shore and Thomas Struth, who had been funded to photo- graph Israel and the occupied West Bank.[71] According to the curator, the aim of the exhibition was to "challenge viewers to go beyond polarizing narratives found in mainstream media" in favor of "a deeply humanistic and nuanced examination that reminds us of the place of art, not as an illustration of conflict, but as a platform for raising questions." Though not technically in violation of the Boycott, Divestment, Sanctions criteria, *This Place* was nevertheless part and parcel of the artwashing of the occupation, which is to say the promotion of "Brand Israel" through artistic and cultural institutions.

In May 2016, a newly formed coalition called Decolonial Cultural Front emerged to draw a link between the two exhibitions: "How can the museum in one gallery claim to be presenting the vanguard of political art," DCF wrote, "and in the very next gallery lend itself to a spectacle of artwashing a people out of existence?"[72] The group staged a two-pronged action targeting both *This Place* and the stalled negotiations surrounding *Agitprop!* More than a hundred people gathered in the *This Place* gallery,

and an assembly was inaugurated by a collective acknowledgment that the action was taking place on occupied Lenape land. Then a team of guides led an unauthorized counter-tour of the exhibition that culminated in the relabeling of Shore's landscape photographs with native Palestinian placenames in Arabic (the artist had originally used default Israeli Hebrew names for the occupied land featured in the images). *Détourning* the title of the exhibition itself with each relabeling, the tour guides mic-checked to the crowd the phrase "Decolonize *this* place... *this* place... *this* place." As police arrived and shut down the gallery, people flooded into the neighboring Agitprop! exhibition. There they repeated the incantation "Decolonize this place!" and issued two new demands in addition to the call for a "People's Summit": that the museum adhere to the BDS criteria and that all real-estate executives be removed from the board. The *Agitprop!* gallery was also shut down by police, and demonstrators were forced out of the building, leading to an assembly held in front of the museum.[73]

As a result of the action and ensuing media pressure, the museum announced that it would collaborate with local organizers to convene a People's Summit on Gentrification. It was a demonstration of how direct-action interventions can force the hand of otherwise negligent or unresponsive institutions by creating crises for their brand image and disrupting the normal functioning of their operations.[74] While the other demands were ignored by the museum, their significance lay less in their being immediately met by the institution than in the new intersection of struggles facilitated by the action itself.

The call to "decolonize this place" originally uttered inside *This Place* went far beyond a single exhibition about Israel. The deictic shifter "this place" functioned as a mobile, iterative structure across and between sites: Decolonize *this* place, and *this* place, and *this* place.[75] The phrase thus enabled a form of mapping, weaving together specific "sites of injustice" across the city.[76] In her canonical analysis of site-specific art, Miwon
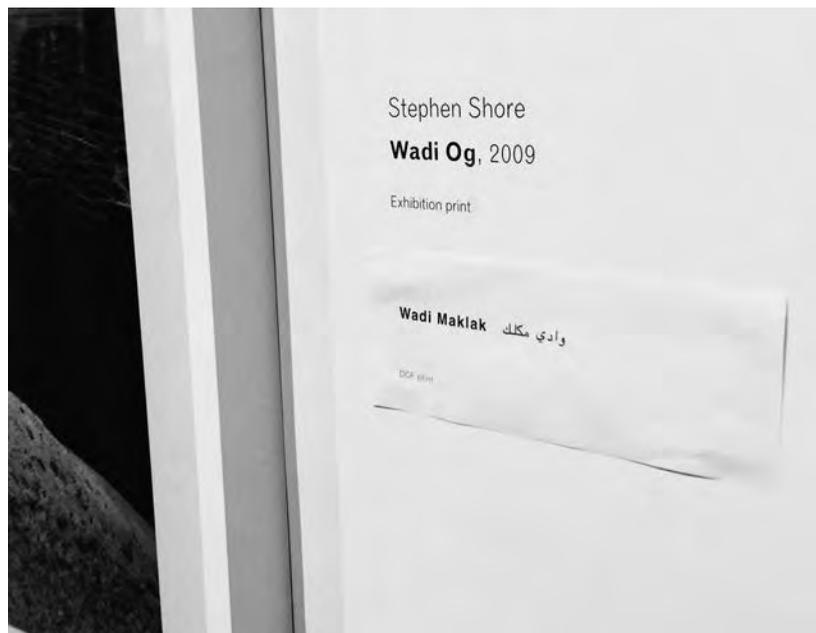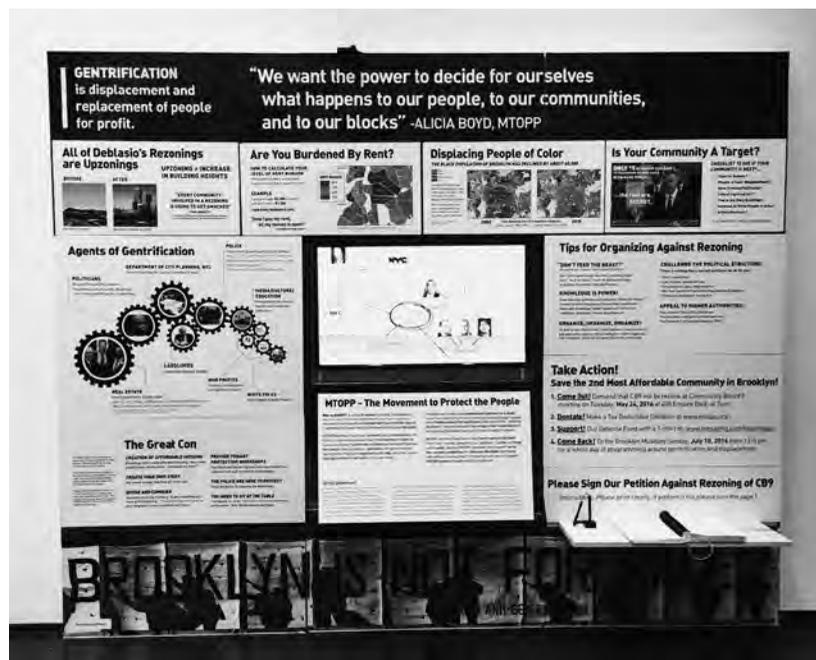
above: Alicia Boyd and collaborators. *A People's Monument to Anti-Displacement Organizing.* 2016.Installation view of the Brooklyn Museum's *Agitprop!* exhibi- tion, 2016. Photograph by Occupy Museums.
below: Decolonial Cultural Front. Relabeling of pho- tograph by Stephen Shore in the *This Place* exhibition at the Brooklyn Museum, 2016. Photograph by MTL+.

Kwon cautioned against the figure of an itinerant artist who indifferently moves from "place to place" executing interventions that ultimately have more to do with the brand of the artist than the places in question. Instead, drawing on Homi Bhabha, she challenged artists and critics to undertake the task of "demarcating the *relational specificity* that can hold in tension the distant poles of spatial experiences. Only those cultural practices that have this relational sensibility can turn local encounters into long-term commitments and transform passing intimacies into indelible, unretractable social marks so that the sequence of sites that we inhabit in our life's traversal does not become genericized into an undifferentiated serialization, one place after another."[77] Kwon's imperatives of both "relational specificity" and "long-term commitments" resonate deeply with the sensibility of Decolonize This Place.

What, then, did it mean to transpose "Decolonize this place" from the Brooklyn Museum to a very different institution such as Artists Space, which was less a target of forceful antagonism than a site of sympathetic collaboration? In early 2016, the group received an official invitation at the behest of Common Practice New York (CPNY).[78] The initial invitation from Artists Space was to curate an exhibition that would last for three months. But the group opted instead for what it called a "movement commons." The principles of the project were derived from months of discussion with various groups throughout the city to determine what kind of space could allow for decolonial solidarity to emerge, one that would actively work to facilitate the dismantling of patriarchy and the decentering of whiteness in its internal working culture as well as its outward-facing manifestations. The work began with addressing the fact that Artists Space itself was located on both occupied Lenape land and a rapidly gentrifying frontier on the edge of Chinatown. These foundational points in turn informed the five strands of artistic and organizing work that anchored the project in terms of its activities and collaborating groups: Indigenous struggle, black liberation, free Palestine, de-gentrification, and global wage workers. Core collaborators included NYC Stands with Standing Rock, Chinatown Arts Brigade, Insurgent Poets Society, NYC Students for Justice in Palestine, Take Back the Bronx, Mahina Movement, and Justice for Akai Gurley.

With the core principles, strands, and collaborators established, the movement space grew organically through further connections and relationships after opening on September 17, 2016, the fifth anniversary of Occupy Wall Street. The choice of this date was intended not as a celebration but as a retrospective reframing of that earlier movement in terms of both its promises and limitations, especially when seen against the horizon of decolonization (indeed, the first banner to be hung in the space read DE-OCCU-PY). Over the course of its three-month existence, the space mimicked that of Zuccotti Park, but now with political parameters, an architectural container, and institutional support. The project was approached not in terms of a critique of Artists Space per se, but rather as a creative testing-out of its potential as a temporary movement-building infrastructure. It was mutually agreed that Decolonize This Place had full autonomy and that the space would no longer visibly appear to be Artists Space, except when the institutional profile of Artists Space could amplify certain events and projects. Here Decolonize This Place functioned as a model of what Fred Moten and Stefano Harney call an "undercommons," a fugitive "liberation" of institutional resources and relationships otherwise locked away in official modes of institutional governance.[79]

Resources were provided to construct a kitchen and to offer stipends and hono- raria for those sustaining the space, and a standing budget was created for organizing actions launched from the space. With the close collaboration of the staff, Artists Space became a thoroughly different kind of place in terms of its day-to-day operations, public profile, mode of organization, and audience. Beyond its vital tradition of subterranean support for activist groups, Artists Space was now transformed into a highly visible round-the-clock movement hub. This work comprised an intensive layering of meetings, performances, trainings, dinners, and agitprop parties. It also featured discursive panels that mixed together high-profile academics such as Robin D.G. Kelley, Mabel Wilson, and David Joselit with an array of groups involved in the day-to-day work of the space such as El Salon, Mahina Movement, Insurgent Poets Society, Chinatown Arts Brigade, Take Back the Bronx, New York Stands with Standing Rock, and the United Melanin Society. Flyers, pamphlets, posters, and stickers were produced and disseminated by the thousands.[80] Rather than a discrete set of objects for display, Decolonize This Place involved an aesthetically dynamic reconfiguration of the gallery environment, transforming it into an endlessly mutating montage of large-scale banners pertaining to the movements using the space. The site of the gallery was thus both a constantly updated archive and a real-time armory,

Decolonize This Protest action at Artis, December 10, 2016. Photograph by Hrag Vartanian.

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with the banners often being pulled from the walls for use in actions throughout the city before being returned. Photographic and video documentation of such actions was recirculated not only through social-media platforms with the hashtag #decolonizethisplace but also into the space itself in the form of video loops and large-scale photographic murals alongside earlier actions by groups such as G.U.L.F. The centrality of banners to the visual environment of the gallery underscored the importance of this form as an underappreciated artistic medium with its own histories, one typically regarded as instrumental agitprop when considered at all.[81]

Several of the actions launched from Artists Space indicate how an "instituent" practice intersects with the four-part trajectory of institutional critique outlined above, and so offer one possible model for what "institutional liberation" could mean at present - including using the resources of one institution to mobilize against another. The first of these actions was the Anti-Columbus Day Tour of 2016, which was repeated one year later. As outlined elsewhere in this issue,[82] this ongoing campaign has presented the American Museum of Natural History with three demands: that the museum publicly support the renaming of Columbus Day as Indigenous Peoples' Day; that it agree to the removal of the monument to Theodore Roosevelt in front of the museum; and that it participate in the creation of a decolonization commission in order to radically overhaul its curatorial and governance structures as other museums have done.

A second action launched by Decolonize This Place targeted Artis, a non-profit organization devoted to bringing high-profile art-world figures on tours of the contemporary Israeli art world. First, a letter was hand-delivered to Artis calling for it to adhere to BDS, given that the organization has eschewed any direct government funding from Israel. When no response was forthcoming, hundreds of people marched from Artists Space to Artis with their faces covered in the iconic Palestinian keffiyeh, an unsettling sign of militancy coupled with the nonviolent

above: : Artists Space, August 2016.
below: Artists Space, October 2016.
Photograph by MTL+.

tactic of the boycott. Trailed by dozens of police officers, the marchers held an assembly in front of the Artis building, using the Occupy-era Illuminator van to project the slogan STOP ARTWASHING THE OCCUPATION onto the facade of the building. While the prospect of Artis adopting BDS was unlikely, the action served to highlight and legitimize the campaign in the art system, now with the brand name of Artists Space figuring into the narra-

tive. The action aimed to provoke a conflict within the art system between one avant-garde formation, launched with the support of Artists Space, and another organization, Artis, framed as standing on the wrong side of history.[83]

Decolonize This Place has been enmeshed with ongoing social movements, to which it is accountable, helping to facilitate their connections in an enduring manner. Indeed, following its residency

at Artists Space, Decolonize This Place has sustained itself as a movement formation, activating at particular political junctures. One such action occurred in the spring of 2018, when the Brooklyn Museum became the target of popular anger on account of its having hired a white woman as a consulting curator for the museum's extensive African-art collection.[84] Much commentary on the controversy focused on issues of diversity, hiring, and academic expertise, with prominent figures in the study of African art history coming to the defense of the curator and the museum (and pointedly questioning why the museum's hire of a white man as a photography curator had not generated the same outrage).[85]

From the vantage of Decolonize This Place, however, the stakes of the controversy went far deeper than any single hire, opening onto a set of long-standing grievances concerning the role of the museum in facilitating gentrification and the colonial history of the non-Western objects in the museum's collection. In an open letter to the museum, Decolonize This Place and a coalition of nineteen other groups and organizations (ranging from the Brooklyn Anti-Gentrification Network, Black Youth Project 100, and American Indian Community House to Occupy Museums and W.A.G.E.) argued that the popular anger had "brought to light a major disconnect between the governance of the museum and the communities of Brooklyn who the museum is obliged to serve," and called for the museum to participate in the formation of a decolonization commission to address deeply rooted structural injustices.[86] When the museum finally issued a statement regarding the controversy, it ignored the call for the decolonization commission, circumscribing the discussion to focus on the infallible credentials of the curator in question, though also acknowledging the need for "diversity in leadership."[87] The coalition in turn replied that "the crisis currently enveloping the museum cannot be resolved by a deliberation between arts experts, regardless of their background. The controversy around the hire has now given way to public scrutiny of the foundations,

the authority, and the governance of the art institution itself."[88]

The call for the museum to participate in a decolonization commission echoed that issued to the American Museum of Natural History. This move was significant. Politically, it called the bluff of those who, in responding to the hiring crisis, deferred to the idea that the art field itself needs to be structurally examined and transformed rather than focusing unfairly on individuals. Symbolically, it short-circuited the apparent distance between two very different kinds of institutions: an antiquated monument to a white-nationalist president, on the one

hand, and a cutting-edge, cosmopolitan hub for multicultural Brooklyn on the other. Indeed, as the coalition noted in its letter, the Brooklyn Museum seemed especially ripe for a deep transformation, given the evident presence of radical tendencies already within the institution as exemplified by the We Wanted a Revolution: Radical Black Women, 1965-1985 show held in summer 2017 and Radical Women: Latin American Art, 1960-1985 in spring 2018. Beyond diversity in terms of staff and programming, a decolonial perspective enables one to exacerbate the contradictions between such visionary exhibitions and the actual governance of

Lorena Ambrosio of Decolonize This Place displays a poster by Kyle Goen/MTL+ during the Anti–Columbus Day Tour at the American Museum of Natural History, October 10, 2016. Courtesy of MTL+.

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the institution. As Alicia Grullón - whose own work was part of the programming around *Radical Women* - put it during an unauthorized Decolonize This Place assembly inside the museum following a month of silence from the institution, "[The women in this show] saw the contradiction of museums as rational public spaces when the world outside was anything but. They understood we are all still colonized in our minds and imaginations... We are still undergoing the process of becoming human."[89]

Whatever the ultimate fate of calls for decolonization commissions at major museums, we are at a moment when the principles of institutional critique are being pushed to a breaking point and opening onto something radically new and radically old at the same time. As Decolonize This Place put it in a pamphlet distributed at the museum, "An innovative show here, a progressive event there... are not enough. The institution must be questioned in its very foundations, starting with the fact that it sits on occupied Lenape land and contains thousands of objects collected through imperial plunder. Why not make these starting points for a discussion, rather than the question of who curates what department? What would it mean to liberate this institution from the structures of oppression that are built into it from the beginning?"[90]□

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Decolonization Commission
1. Territorial acknowledgement of Indigenous land occupied by this building and giving material effect to such an acknowledgment in curatorial practices, programming, exhibitions, and day-to-day operations.
2. The deep diversification of curatorial staff and executive leadership whereby the lived experience of oppressions — including patriarchy, white supremacy, and poverty — are valued and factored in.
3. A decolonial inventory of colonial-era objects of both African and Indigenous people with a view to settling the long-pursued claims of reparations and repatriation.
4. An upgrade of working conditions and pay of ground staff — who are disproportionately employees of color — in security, food service, and janitorial divisions.
5. The replacement of board president David Berliner and other trustees who are real estate tycoons with a broad cross-section of artists and community organizers.
6. The undertaking of a de-gentrification initiative to examine and mitigate the museum's role in boosting land value and rents in the borough.
7. An institutional commitment to address the issues raised by the boycott, divestment, and sanctions (bds) movement in recognition of Brooklynites' role in the settler movement in Palestine.

Decolonize This Museum

above: Jackson Polys leads an assembly in the Northwestern Peoples Hall of the American Museum of Natural History during the second annual Anti-Columbus Day Tour, October 9, 2017. Photograph by Elena Goukassian.
below: Kyle Goen/MTL+. Front and back covers of Decolonize This Place pamphlet, distributed at the Brooklyn Museum, April 29, 2018.

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42. In an important article that appeared around the same time as that of Not an Alternative, Gregory Sholette argues that we are witnessing not the surpassing but rather the "return" of institutional critique: "Merciless Aesthetic: Activist Art

as the Return of Institutional Critique. A Reply to Boris Groys," *Field Journal* issue #4 (Spring 2016), http://field-journal.com/issue-4/merciless-aesthetic- activist-art-as-the-return-of-institutional-critique-a-response-to-boris-groys.

43. See Kate Khatib, ed., *We Are Many: Reflections on Movement Strategy from Occupation to Liberation* (Oakland: AK Press, 2012); and *Chris Crass, Towards Collective Liberation: Anti-Racist Organizing, Feminist Praxis, and Movement-Building Strategy* (Oakland: PM Press, 2013).

44. Keeanga-Yamahtta Taylor, *From #BlackLivesMatter to Black Liberation* (Chicago: Haymarket Books, 2016). Here Taylor echoes the Combahee River Collective Statement of 1977: "Here we might use our position at the bottom, however, to make a clear leap into revolutionary action. If Black women were free, it would mean that everyone else would have to be free since our freedom would necessitate the destruction of all the systems of oppression." Emphasizing the need to struggle against the "interlocking systems" of white supremacy, patriarchy, class power, heterosexism, and imperialism simultaneously, this text is foundational for later theories of intersectionality, and has been an essential touch- tone for the Black Lives Matter movement. See Keeanga-Yamahtta Taylor, ed., *How We Get Free: Black Feminism and the Combahee River Collective* (Chicago: Haymarket Books, 2017). The text is also reproduced in Hockley and Morris, *We Wanted a Revolution*.

45. Helen Molesworth, "Art Is Medicine," *Artforum* (March 2018), pp. 171-72.

46. On the historiography of institutional critique, see the introductions by Alexander Alberro and Blake Stimson to their edited volume *Institutional Critique: An Anthology of Artists Writings* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2009); and Benjamin Buchloh's foundational critical text "Conceptual Art, 1962-1969: From the Aesthetic of Administration to the Critique of Institutions," *October* 55 (Winter 1990), pp. 105-43. Our account here is also informed by Sholette, "Merciless Aesthetic: Activist Art as the Return of Institutional Critique."

47. See Julia Bryan-Wilson, *Art Workers: Radical Practice in the Vietnam Era* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2011); Hockley and Morris, *We Wanted a Revolution*; and D'Souza, *Whitewalling*.

48. See Julie Ault, "A Chronology of Selected Alternative Structures, Spaces, Artists Groups, and Organizations in New York City, 1965-1985," in Ault, *Alternative*

Art New York; and Lauren Rosati and Mary Anne Staniszewski, eds., *Alternative Histories: New York Art Spaces, 1960-2010* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2012). Interestingly, both of these volumes were produced to accompany historical exhibitions held at historical alternative spaces in their own right: Drawing Center and Exit Art.

49. It is important of course not to idealize these (largely white-dominated) institutions as unproblematically radical, or to gloss over the very different histories of a space like that of El Museo del Barrio versus that of Artists Space, the latter of which was famously targeted by the Black Emergency Cultural Coalition for the "Nigger Drawings" exhibition. See D'Souza, *Whitewalling*.

50. See Alan W. Moore, *Art Gangs: Protest and Counterculture in New York City* (Brooklyn: Autonomia, 2011).

51. See González, "Fred Wilson: Material Museology," in *Subject to Display*, pp. 64-119.

52. See Guerrilla Girls, *Confessions of the Guerrilla Girls* (New York: Penguin, 1995); and *The Guerrilla Girls' Bedside Companion to the History of Western Art* (New York: Penguin, 1998).

53. See Douglas Crimp, ed., *AIDS: Cultural Analysis / Cultural Activism* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1988).

54. Miwon Kwon, "One Place After Another: Notes on Site-Specificity," *October* 80 (Spring 1997), pp. 85-110. Kwon's argument builds on Hal Foster's critique of what he calls "the artist as ethnographer" in *Return of the Real* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1996).

55. For a textured look at the social milieu of second-wave institutional critique surrounding institutions including American Fine Arts and the Whitney ISP, see Lane Relya, *Your Everyday Artworld* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2013).

56. Indeed, it is perhaps in part for this reason that an artist like Thomas Hirschhorn, with his joyfully unironic declarations of love for radical figures like Heartfield and Bataille, would prove to be so appealing to critics like Foster. Compare Hal Foster's "The Art of Cynical Reason" in *Return of the Real* with his "Towards a Grammar of Emergency," *New Left Review* 68 (March-April 2011), pp. 105-18.

57. Andrea Fraser, "From the Critique of Institutions to the Institution of Critique," *Artforum* (September 2005), p. 104.

58. Gerald Raunig and Gene Ray, eds., *Art and Contemporary Critical Practice: Reinventing Institutional Critique* (London: Mayfly Books, 2009).

59. Gerald Raunig, "Instituent Practices: Fleeing, Transforming, Instituting," in *Art and Critical Practice*, pp. 3-11.

60. See Michel Foucault, "What Is Critique?," in *The Politics of Truth* (Cambridge, MA: Semiotexte, 1992), pp. 23-82. On governmentality and the modern museum, see Tony Bennet, *The Birth of the Museum: History, Theory, Politics* (New York: Routledge, 1995). Rosalyn Deutsche has also drawn upon Foucault's idea of the "politics of the governed" in "The Art of Not Being Governed Quite So Much," in *Hans Haacke*, ed. Rachel Churner (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2015).

61. On this trans-European history, see Bart van der Steen, Ask Katzeff, and Leendert Van Hoogenhuijze, eds., *The City Is Ours: Squatting and Autonomous Movements from the 1970s to the Present* (Oakland: PM Press, 2014); and Alan W. Moore and Alan Smart, eds., *Making Room: Cultural Production in Occupied Spaces* (Berlin: Other Forms Press, 2016).

62. See McKee, *Strike Art*, pp. 89-93.

63. Andrea Fraser, "L'1%, C'est Moi," *Texte Zur Kunst* 83 (September 2011), p. 126.

64. See *Artforum*'s special issue on "The Market" (April 2008).

65. See Chakravartty and Dhillon, "Gulf Dreams for Justice; Migrant Workers and New Political Futures," pp. 36-64.

66. G.U.L.F, "On Direct Action: An Address to Cultural Workers," in *Ross, The Gulf: High Culture / Hard Labor*, p. 135.

67. G.U.L.F, "On Direct Action," p. 135.

68. For overviews of the project, see Angela Brown, "'Decolonization Is Not a Metaphor': Artists Space Steps Out of Analysis and Into Action," *Artnews*, November 15, 2016, http://www.artnews.com/ 2016/11/15/decolonization-is-not-a-metaphor-artists-space-steps-out-of-analysis-and-into-action/; Ilana Novick, "Learning from Decolonize This Place," *Hyperallergic*, January 9, 2017, https://hyperallergic.com/350186/learning-from-decolonize-this-place/; and Terence Trouillout, "Decolonize This Place," *Brooklyn Rail* (December 6, 2016), https://brooklynrail.org/ 2016/12/art- seen/decolonize-this-place/.

69. Holland Cotter, "The Art of Politics, in 'Agitprop!' at the Brooklyn Museum," *New York Times*, December 17, 2015.

70. Noah Fischer and Betty Yu, "A People's Monument to Anti-Displacement Organizing," April 18, 2016, http://artfcity.com/2016/04/18/a-peoples-monument-to-anti-displacement-organizing/.

71. For a detailed review of the show itself, see Nina Felshin, "A Photo Exhibition About Israel and the West Bank That

Chooses Sides," *Hyperallergic*, May 13, 2016, https://hyperallergic.com/298529/a-photo-exhibition-about-israel-and-the-west-bank-that-chooses-sides/.

72. Decolonial Cultural Front pamphlet distributed at Brooklyn Museum, May 7, 2016.

73. Michelle Chen, "Gentrification and Occupation at the Brooklyn Museum," *The Nation*, May 9, 2016; Rebecca McCarthy, "Faced with Brooklyn Museum's Inaction, Protesters Target Two Exhibitions," *Hyperallergic*, May 9, 2016, https://hyperallergic.com/297401/faced-with-brooklyn-muse- um-inaction-protesters-target-two-exhibitions/.

74. Ben Davis, "Activism Pays Off, as Brooklyn Museum Embraces Anti-Gentrification Forum," *Artnet*, July 7, 2016, https://news.artnet.com/art-world/brooklyn-museum-gentrification-forum-543926.

75. On the deictic shifter, see Rosalind Krauss, "Notes on the Index," in *The Originality of the Avant-Garde and Other Modernist Myths* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1985), pp. 196-209.

76. On "mapping sites of injustice with our bodies," see Judith Butler, "So What Are the Demands?," in *Tidal: Occupy Theory, Occupy Strategy* 2 (March 2012), pp. 8-11.

77. Kwon, "One Place After Another," p. 110.

78. CPNY is a coalition of old and new alternative spaces grappling with their public purpose and economic viability in the face of both accelerating gentrification and the official neglect of such putatively "elite" institutions by the New York Department of Cultural Affairs in its devising of an NYC Cultural Plan. For a theorization of the questions facing these small, flexible, "proposition-based" institutions, see David Joselit, "In Praise of Small" (2015), commonpracticenyc.org.

79. Stefano Harney and Fred Moten, *The Undercommons: Fugitive Planning and Black Study* (New York: Minor Compositions, 2013).

80. *Decolonize This Place* stickers, with their site-specific indexicality, were an especially popular item, showing up on surfaces throughout the city from cop cars to courthouses to luxury condos, as well as art sites like Maurizio Cattelan's smug golden toilet at the Guggenheim.

81. As we read in a Decolonize This Place pamphlet distributed at the space, "Banners do much more than communicate a message. They are a choreography of direct action and media circulation. They can be used to create and hold space: physically, visually, and in the public imagination. Whether heading up a

march, blockading an intersection, framing the entrance to a park, or affixed to an offi- cial structure of power, banners can mark sites of injustice and resistance, and map linkages between such sites. But it is not really about banners. Banners are nothing without the bodies that activate them, and the breath that animates those bodies in turn."

82. See MTL+, "Response to Questionnaire on Monuments," pp. 119-33.

83. Hrag Vartanian, "Over 120 Protestors Ask Artis Nonprofit to Clarify 'Organization's Position by Signing onto BDS,'" *Hyperallergic*, December 11, 2016, https://hyperallergic.com/344358/over-120-protesters-ask-artis-nonprofit-to-clarify-organizations-position-by-signing-onto-bds/.

84. Teju Adisa-Farrar, "Why Are White Curators Still Running Collections of African Art?," *The Guardian*, April 3, 2018, https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2018/apr/03/brooklyn-museum-white-curators-african-art-open-letter.

85. See especially the remarks by Steven Nelson in Ryan Sit, "Museum Appoints White Woman As African Art Curator, Sparks Outrage," *Newsweek* (March 29, 2018), which would be cited repeatedly by other articles in subsequent weeks.

86. Quoted in Hrag Vartanian, "Coalition of Anti-Gentrification Groups Pressures Brooklyn Museum to 'Decolonize,'" *Hyperallergic*, April 5, 2018, https://hyperallergic.com/436293/coalition-of-anti-gentrification-groups-pressures-brooklyn-museum-to-decolonize/.

87. Maya Salam, "Brooklyn Museum Defends Its Hiring of a White Curator of African Art," *New York Times*, April 6, 2018.

88. Quoted in Hrag Vartanian, "Growing Coalition Calls Brooklyn Museum 'Out of Touch,' and Demands Decolonization Commission," *Hyperallergic*, April 12, 2018, https://hyperallergic.com/437542/growing-coalition-calls-brooklyn-museum-out-of-touch-and-demands-decolonization-commission/.

89. Quoted in Hrag Vartanian, "Protestors Occupy Brooklyn Museum Atrium, Demanding Decolonization Commission," *Hyperallergic*, April 30, 2018, https://hyperallergic.com/440426/protesters-occupy-brooklyn-museum-atrium-demanding-decolonization-commission/.

90. Decolonize This Museum pamphlet distributed at the Brooklyn Museum, April 29, 2018.

THE LARGE GLASS   No. 25 / 26, 2018

76   MTL COLLECTIVE: From Institutional Critique to Institutional Liberation? A Decolonial Perspective on the Crises of Contemporary Art   77

Steve Lambert

made international news after the 2008 US election with The New York Times "Special Edition,"a replica of the "paper of record" announcing the end of the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan and other good news. In the Summer of 2011 he began a tour of Capitalism Works For Me! True/False - a 9 x 20ft sign allowing people to vote on whether capitalism worked for them. He has collaborated with groups from the Yes Men to the Graffiti Research Lab and Greenpeace. He is also the founder of the Center for Artistic Activism, the Anti-Advertising Agency, Add-Art (a Firefox add-on that replaces online advertising with art) and SelfControl (which blocks grownups from distracting websites so they can get work done).

Steve's projects and art works have won awards from Prix Ars Electronica, Rhizome/The New Museum, the Creative Work Fund, Adbusters Media Foundation, the California Arts Council, and others. Lambert's work has been shown everywhere from museums to protest marches nationally and internationally, featured in over fourteen books, four documentary films, and is in the collections of The Sheldon Museum, the Progressive Insurance Company, and The Library of Congress. Lambert has discussed his work live on NPR, the BBC, and CNN, and been reported on internationally in outlets including Associated Press, the New York Times, the Guardian, Harper's Magazine, The Believer, Good, Dwell, ARTnews, Punk Planet, and Newsweek.

He was a Senior Fellow at New York's Eyebeam Center for Art and Technology from 2006-2010, developed and led workshops for Creative Capital Foundation, co-directs the Center for Artistic Activism, and is an Assistant Professor at SUNY Purchase. In 2013 he was invited to speak at the United Nations about his research on advertising's impact on culture. Steve is a perpetual autodidact with (if it matters) advanced degrees from an reputable art school and respected state university. He dropped out of high school in 1993.

ABOUT THE PROJECT

If you ever want to clear a public space in the United States, approach everyone and try to talk to them about capitalism.

In the United States, Capitalism is woven into nearly every aspect of our lives, yet it's rarely subject to substantive conversation. The reporting about capitalism is shrouded in euphamisms - the job market, the real estate section, the economic outlook, the business climate, the economy - but capitalism is the economic system that dare not speak its name. If we're to move forward as a society, capitalism needs to be up for serious discussion, honest evaluation and, ultimately, systemic change.

However, having a conversation about Capitalism with strangers in public is not easy, as I've discovered. Capitalism is often discussed - even dismantled - in academia, but not in terms that make sense to non-specialists. Meanwhile it is rarely examined in popular culture with the depth and complexity it requires, so any prompt to consider capitalism doesn't lead to a profound intellectual conversation. Capitalism isn't considered thoughtfully, it's reacted to thoughtlessly.

The purpose of Capitalism Works for Me! is to create a situation where strangers will be guided through a cognitive struggle around how encomics impacts their life. However, the method is down-to-earth, familiar, and humorous so they choose to engage and even welcome the experience.

The sign itself works as bait - a flashing, red, white, and blue backdrop that provides comforting and nostagic form for an unfamiliar subject. Participants start by staring at the scene and trying to make sense of it. Someone from our team approaches, volunteering the most basic information on *how it works*; you press a button on the podium and the numbers change. This leaves space for the participants questions which have included:

What is capitalism?

What do you mean by "works"?

What do you mean by "for me"?

Answers to these questions are the entry point for more questions for the visitor in return.

"What is Capitalism? It's a system of private property and profit, so do you work for someone else or are you self employed? Do you feel like you are paid fairly?"

It goes deep and personal quickly.

However, people often fall back on the comfort of abstractions and repeating popular myths. For example, the true/false dilemma is much easier to resolve when the only alternatives to capitalism are presumed to be failed communist dictatorships. It's also much easier to pretend that the only "true" definition of capitalism is the kind of free-market extreme idolized by thinkers like Ayn Rand and Friedrich Hayek but never seen in the real world.

Our teams are trained to steer people away from these abstractions and toward an intense, personal reflection. It can require improvisational skills, a gentle touch, jokes, or relaying stories from past participants.

The intention isn't to get someone to vote or believe any one way. The first objective is to get people to understand the complex nature of the problem and realize, while capitalism may work for you, it doesn't work for most people. The reasons why so many say it doesn't work can't easily be dismissed. The remarkable thing is how often this happens.

Once people understand that capitalism has shortcomings, the second objective is to get them to imagine other ways. What changes could we make? Can we imagine a world beyond capitalism? Admittedly, no one has an answer to that, despite a majority acknowledging the current system is flawed. Some are more comfortable moving into the uncharted territory than others but uncharted territory is certainly where we're headed.

Capitalism Works For Me! True/False debuted the summer before Occupy Wall Street and has continued to be relevant in locations across and outside the United States. It has been shown at 15 venues in the United States including Times Square, as well as at festivals multiple festivals in Europe, the UK, and Australia. In it's debut as SPACES in Cleveland, Ohio, over the course of eight weeks, the project was able to directly interact with over 17,000 people - a record for SPACES. As their director, Christopher Lynn, clarified "these [17,000] are people who voted and/or spoke to a SPACES representative about the project, not casual passers-by." The recordings of participants in Times Square were used as the subject matter for a book by Professor Christian Chun called, _The Discourses of Capitalism: Everyday Economists and the Production of Common Sense_.

Dimitry Vielnsky

We Have a Situation Here…

Living under suspicion

No text is possible today without acknowledgement of the writer's identity.

I am writing this text as a Soviet Jew, born in Leningrad, having experienced both everyday and official anti-Semitism, and whose country, the Soviet Union, ceased to exist as a result of being colonized by capitalism, while my city changed its name to become Saint Petersburg. At the same time, I write as an artist who has lived for 54 years in this city and has no desire to go anywhere else, because it is my territory and is still worth fighting for. Other information about me as an artist and my work and writings is available on-line.

Triggers: universalism, dialectics, hegemony, class

The text is based on broad generalizations and does not undertake an analysis of the many different cases which may fall outside the parameters of its general schematization.

In recent times we have observed a general condition of heightened "sensitivity." Sensitivity about language that may be considered insulting or a deviation from certain ethical norms. Jews and people of color are sensitive, trans people are sensitive, fascists and Russian Orthodox believers are sensitive, Christians are sensitive, and Muslims are very sensitive too; white racists and other nationalists are also sensitive, as are feminists in relation to other feminists and trans women; identitarians, vegans and meat-eaters are sensitive as well.

The list could be prolonged endlessly; identities are multiplying, and they all claim to be backed by the "iron logic of history" - the logic of struggle against "the one / the universal" and for multiplicity, diversity, identity.

This struggle is conditioned by centuries of oppression, non-recognition, colonization, exclusion, and genocide; it is, obviously, legitimate, just, necessary, and an emancipatory practice, very important for society's development and self-awareness. Yet recently certain tendencies in these processes have raised warning flags and an effort should be made to grasp why this crucial ethical turn is happening in the midst of increasing rifts among and defeats of emancipatory movements in politics and art.

The position of victimhood

An increasing number of activist groups and artistic and cultural manifestations speak from a position of victimhood. This position is not a figment of someone's imagination but a material fact of the history of oppression and the currently existing reality. Without devaluating the historical and material preconditions of such a positioning, we should analyze its genealogy. The stance of victimhood must be compared with the historical position occupied by the working class in society. The efforts of Marxist theoretical work were largely directed toward transforming the worker subject from being a passive victim to taking a position as the active subject of history, the proletariat, capable of abolishing all class distinctions. In other words, Marxism stood for the possibility of a passage from the private experience of class oppression to a universal project of emancipation. This idea, we used to say, was capable of seizing the consciousness of the masses. We thus see how the passive condition of victimhood can acquire a new quality.

Today's position of victimhood is instead constructed on the model of the Jew - oppressed for centuries, survivor of catastrophe, and asserting others' "irredeemable" guilt. This irreedemability is the radical political innovation of the Holocaust; the victim always possesses unblemished righteousness, and the only possible stance from which it can be questioned is that of the fascist / rapist / colonizer. Furthermore, no comparison is conceivable; the position of victimhood is unique, and comparison amounts to sacrilege. Any universalizing approach is paralyzed.

Guilt and the society of suspicion

The culture of suspicion was always a repressive culture of oppressors. The oppressive society teaches you to blame yourself for any misfortune - a woman, a Tajik migrant can be accused of being insufficiently suspicious, insufficiently careful, insufficiently collaborative and thus responsible for their treatment at the hands of men/the police/the state. But asserting your victimhood helps you turn the suspicion outward and analyze society.[1]

And out of these situations of victimhood arises a radical politics of accusation. Germans are guilty of the Holocaust, Western Christian civilization is guilty of colonialism, men are guilty of patriarchy, the bourgeoisie of capitalism, and so on. They are guilty. We are guilty. Repentance is possible; people can accept responsibility and become accountable; yet a psychological trap takes shape in which the more you accept accountability, the greater your guilt becomes, and it remains irredeemable.

Everyone is revealed to be a potential suspect, and all bear responsibility not only for themselves but for a set of circumstances in whose creation they personally cannot have taken part. A concept of collective historical guilt emerges whose key features developed in the interpretation of the Holocaust. Calls to repent do not bring genuine reconciliation, since it is impossible to establish degrees of sincerity and measures to legally formalize and monetize repentance have failed to ease tension and suffering. Suspicions remain, and even intensify - repentance can be a cover for new, darker crimes, intentions and thoughts.

It seems to me that we are now faced for the first time with the thoroughgoing impossibility of redemption. In Christianity, Original Sin was beyond redemption until the redemption by Jesus Christ, through which act all are within reach of salvation. In Marxism, the sin or guilt of the bourgeoisie is redeemed through renunciation of property and a conscious change of allegiance to the side of the proletariat. To be a proletarian is not an essentialist position based on birth or on a fixed position in relations of the production; it is a conscious choice, the possibility of forming your own consciousness as a proletarian consciousness. From being a passive category, guilt becomes an active one; each person can choose their side, and that person's past will not hinder their radical transformation, their metanoia. Today the possibility of such a transformation is in question and we thus find ourselves in a toxic environment with no salvation in sight.

Decolonizing Cultural Heritage

The whole history of culture can be regarded as a series of catastrophes. Benjamin told us as much, but that insight was long inscribed in the tradition of European melancholy. There is no cultural achievement that is not simultaneously a document of barbarism. No culture is innocent - all culture is permeated by the poisons of colonialism, patriarchy, racism, anti-Semitism, and oppression. What today seems politically correct to us will have ceased to be so by tomorrow.

How can we live with this legacy? To pose the question in this form brings us back to the heated debates after the October Revolution, when none harbored any illusions regarding the substance of bourgeois, feudal, slave-holding culture, or idealized the cultures of what were then called primitive societies. Those debates involved a clash between, on the one hand, the claim that proletarian culture demanded the total destruction of the past - the position articulated by Proletkult (nothing was worth saving, nor was there any need to save anything), and, on the other, the consistent vindication of universalism in its Marxist form - the position of reappropriation, the actualization of emancipatory potential, capable of being crystallized, in many works of the human spirit from past ages, however constrained by the ideological fetters of their period.

The contemporary decolonizing approach is based on the uncovering and showcasing of perspectives from the past which developed outside the European colonial worldview - mainly the voices of women, slaves, and indigenous peoples. They are presented, quite justifiably, as the source of a different knowledge, and this is a coherent expansion of previous acts of addressing the repressed past, primarily of class consciousness. The inclusion of these parallel histories is extremely important for fully understanding the world and its history. Decolonization inevitably stumbles into internal limitations, and the very same problem confronted the Bolsheviks after 1917. The creation of new languages and historical narratives is acutely necessary, but the process can lead into a dead end if it neglects the opportunity to find a line of solidarity in the "dirty" past, when the revolutionary might turn out to have been a male chauvinist and anti-Semite, when a woman may have retransmitted patriarchal ideology, when a reactionary slaveholder author may have manifested unique insight into human nature, and an abolitionist may have been a homophobe.

The destruction of monuments is an important moment in the formation of revolutionary consciousness, yet their destruction at a moment of polarization of hegemonic relations is more likely to activate «old demons» which can be difficult to neutralize in a developing political situation, as we see in the process of Ukraine's "de-communization."[2]

The Bolsheviks understood this danger in time and began their unique operation of reinterpreting and carefully "saving" the past, thereby creating a new language of description of the world, an experience we would do well to analyze carefully.

Paradoxes of hegemony

Few things are as deeply compromised in the world of progressive ideas and activism today as the idea of hegemony. Hegemony is understood as an historical construct belonging to the old school, associated with violence, power, the suppression of diversity and all the nightmares of a consciousness freed from the methodology of antagonism and the ideological framework of class struggle.

The confrontational "us against them" model of politics is held no longer to describe the actual struggle, since it is impossible to define "us" and "them"; all are found to be cunningly interconnected in complicated actor-network processes. In fact there is no struggle left, and the world has entered a new phase of post-politics, in which all sides in a conflict can (and must) jointly develop solutions in a social sphere based on dialogue and consensus.

This progressive reconceptualization of politics, until recently triumphant (definitely hegemonic), is rapidly receding into the past under pressure from the ideas of the alt-right. The growing contemporary split in the public sphere may be described as a process in which many marginal voices, including some that are unfamiliar and others that were formerly prominent, are expelled from that sphere. The aggressively dominant "right consensus," united with the manipulative technologies of "big data," attacks on all fronts, and the ideology of protecting the rights of minorities, now placed in a defensive position, is attached, with increasing straightforwardness, to pursuing the interests of neoliberal capital, and is losing battle after battle in Russia and around the world.

Within these processes, in a strange joke at history's expense, the main ideas and hegemonic relations are operationalized, whether consciously or unconsciously, from the right rather than the left. It seems that nominal leftists have

fallen into the trap and fail to see the obvious alignment of forces; to paraphrase a well-known saying, if you don't take care of hegemony, then hegemony will take care of you. While we have been imagining a world without violence or any forms of domination, the "tough guys" have sharpened their ability to dominate, oppress, establish new canons of historical interpretations to be taught in our schools, and formulate a language of violence and enmity, and do so with increasing confidence. They have reappropriated what Gramsci called the "political initiative." It took different forms in different countries, but in general the process has been synchronized in Russia and the West: a broad coalition of rightists was able partly to invent, partly to demonize, partly to correctly analyze the current global hegemony of left-liberal ideas (human rights, minority rights, decolonization, gender equality, "cultural Marxism," the interests of transnational capital, and so on), and then consistently proclaim its task to be abolishing that hegemonic order and advancing its own ideas in the interests of the forgotten and duped citizen, the hardworking adherent of traditional values.

In other words, the right today is recapturing lost ground by means of a trenchant and considered policy of developing a new historical bloc and conscious political work on hegemonic relations.

All of these considerations speak to the fact that the ideas of hegemony still accurately describe lines of struggle in contemporary society and in cultural production, which are differently but no less ideologized than in the 1930s. And it is important to insist that hegemony is not an archaic concept but a concrete materialist theory which allows us to grasp a true image of the world in its emerging contradictions. Most importantly, unlike other fashionable social theories, this is a militant one, one that creates preconditions for transforming the situation.

The universal and the particular

All of these situations and many other symptoms of the changing state of the world can be distilled into the eternal opposition between the universal and the particular and the political practices for resolving that opposition.

The new left's post-1968 rejection of the position of universality occurs at the moment when the domination of the global market and the colonization of life by capital, with the aid of new technologies for the control and manipulation of consciousness, has become utter and total. Market relations have succeeded in quashing and extirpating, in the most brutal manner possible, any practical attempt to execute a universal project of emancipation in the form of class struggle under the leadership of a revolutionary party and an exceptionally true theory.

Many have already argued the point that the politics of the particular, of identity, can easily be integrated in the market's total domination. The market is the one remaining uncontested, universal idea and practice in which the particular and the universal continually merge (goods are particular but the situation of exchange is universal), and is prepared to assertively forestall any competing projects. Decolonization seriously and legitimately disrupts the Western model of universalism, but has not really been able to challenge the narrative of economic globalization, and at the same time has shown an incapacity to construct alternative projects that would be capable of uniting the contradictory narratives of the decolonized territories and their histories.

But universality can arise once again where there is the solidarity of a shared concern, when scattered particular struggles become united in a collective understanding that no micro-victory of recognition can radically change the collective situation and only the union of various forms of struggle can form a horizon of emancipation. Real politics is possible as "the result of a specific dialectic between what we call the logic of difference and the logic of equivalence."[3] This can be denied or overlooked, but then we ought not be surprised when our political space is revealed to be fully captured by conservative ideas and the market, while what remains for left-liberals is the space containing the ruins of culture and the activities of nonprofit organizations who provide first aid to various victims. And these activities may at any moment be discontinued by the political decisions of others.

What is happening with Art.

In some ways art represents the most consistent practical implementation of egalitarian politics. For art, this means recognizing the equality of all marginalized and repressed forms of expression and aesthetics.[4]

The universality of art inheres in such recognition, in its ability to overcome all possible differences. Any "event of art"[5] always represents a unique, particular experience or utterance. But this particularity of the particular event is capable of becoming transformed into representative universality, overcoming the limits of its particularity while, at the same time, not losing its unique exceptionality. This relationship, by means of which a given particularity gains the representation of universality, is what we call "hegemonic relations" and is precisely the compositional principle of the common system of art practices.

Yet the very universality of the system of art can be described as an unstable system - it exists in this constant tension between universality and particularity and composition of hegemony is not secured once and for all but, on the contrary, is constantly being reevaluated.

Until recently, the history of art could be accurately described using this composition of hegemonic relations. But is that still true today?

It seems that now, after the destruction of modernist conventions, these relations are suspended; full equality of everything with everything else has been proclaimed, but as a result only what conforms with the hegemony of the market can survive. The representation of universality is fully defined by the price of work and the dictatorship of the small circle of top private investors. All the rest persists as a screen of "archaism," a cover story; that is why so many politically and socially-oriented works often feel hypocritical. Diversity in art is completely possible and welcomed without socialist hegemony, and we must admit that in terms of diversity, the situation doesn't look so bad; but we need to understand why the situation of socialist art looks so bad.

Essentialism and the constructed.

Today we see an intriguing, paradoxical alignment of postmodernist concepts that affirm the socially and historically constructed nature of all forms of identity with the vindication of certain authentic rights, such as the right to be a woman (and not a trans woman)[5], to be Indigenous (rather than choosing to become with Indigenous)[6], to be black (as a prerequisite for understanding or representing blacks)[7], to be a true Orthodox Christian to represent the Christian values in a proper way[8], and so on.

These emerging forms of "authentic" belonging have begun to defend their exceptionality in the face of attempts to undermine their exclusive claim on the right to belong to that identity. Any attempts at a dialogue are blocked by the argument that they show disrespect and incur emotional damage, while any disagreement shows the impossibility of dialogue and the aggressive rejection of contrary opinions. The fashionable, widely popular metaphor of the trigger whose deployment elicits a painful psychic reaction, explains, to a great extent, how this mechanism for avoiding confrontation with the other works. Triggers are pervasive throughout society, as it splits into continually multiplying identities and subcultures.

In lieu of a conclusion

I unexpectedly came across Mark Fisher's "Exiting the Vampire Castle"[9] when I had more or less finished the first draft of this article. Obviously, this was no accident, and it became one more proof that those who share certain ideas should not surrender and must continue to insist on dialogue.

In fact it would be difficult to add anything to Fisher's text, since our diagnoses largely coincide and the intervening years have seen many similar situations develop. Mark wrote very straightforwardly:

We need to learn, or re-learn, how to build comradeship and solidarity instead of doing capital's work for it by condemning and abusing each other. This doesn't mean, of course, that we must always agree - on the contrary, we must create conditions where disagreement can take place without fear of exclusion and excommunication.

Strange as it may seem, such assertions are now read as aggressive perorations, written from a position of privilege, oppression and ignorance of the multiplicity of differences. We often hear, as an argument intended to close any discussion, that the right to universalism is the privilege of the master, the right of the colonizer, i.e., the right to speak from the position of historical power. Whereas politics arises from the oppressed shunning relations of hierarchy and authority while continuing to analyze and unmask new power structures.

We may accept the hard-hitting righteousness of that position, but it does not change the simple empirical observation that such a criticism, according to its own inner logic, is fated to recreate multiplying lines of schism, given that making sense of the cartography of oppression grows more complex, while time is running out and vulnerabilities are increasing. Moreover, in the final analysis we may as well proceed to the final logical step that each of us is oppressor to herself, and work purely on what is to be done with this knowledge.

Is there another way out of this opposition? It seems to me that there is a still more subtle dialectic when we declare the right to universalism a right shared by all - the only right capable of dismantling the oppositions of oppression. To become more than oneself. To celebrate the external agency inside and outside ourselves.

I had the good fortune (or misfortune) to grow up and live half my life in the Soviet Union; this means a great deal, and may now have no meaning. As time has gone on, it seems increasingly clear that if anything can work miracles, the absence of private property can. It can create a completely different mindset.

It was a generous world, in the sense that we completely believed we were living among comrades with whom we shared simple, all-encompassing humanist ideals. That, of course, presents a naive, simplistic picture of how it was, and you could easily show the extent to which it contrasted with the reality. The ideal of comradeship represents the overcoming of class, gender, race and national allegiances - it is even possible to be a comrade to things, animals and nature as a whole. To be a comrade means to form a shared living space beyond the reach of suspicion.

I now see many people around, in various parts of this big and varied world[10], from various generations, who, like me, are drawn more to the search for what we have in common than to the search for divisions. To whom the question "what do we have in common?" is more exciting than asking where our differences lie. I would like to believe that the exhausting but very important and necessary work of fragmentation will lead to a new balance in one world containing many worlds of resistance, as the Zapatistas have suggested. It looks like we now have a unique chance to reach a different synthesis of the universal and a new deep understanding of the particular. And we see this search in the intonations of many discussions and works of art, as well as in new struggles based on empathy and solidarity.

If we fail to make this happen in the near term, the consequences will render all of our vital searches for a new world, embracing all emancipated identities, meaningless.□

References

1. Thanks to Kate Lyn Seidel for careful and insightful comments on this text in general, and in particular for this important observation.

2. The war in Ukraine and annexation of Crimea by Russia had started shortly after the series of attack on Soviet monuments in 2013.

3. Here my speculations are based on the ideas of Hegemony and Socialist Strategy, written by Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe https://libcom.org/files/ernesto-laclau-hegemony-and-socialist-strategy-towards-a-radical-democratic-poli-

tics.compressed.pdf

4. See Boris Groys "Art Power" The MIT Press Cambridge, Massachusetts London, England, 2008

5. I consider here the "event of art" as any expanded presence in the society the works of artists, art exhibitions, museums and archives, any art institutions with their programs, self-organized artistic communities etc.

6. See the discussions around TERFs" (short for trans-exclusionary radical feminist).

7. See the Jimmie Durham case: https://news.artnet.com/art-world/cherokee-curators-artists-jimmie-durham-cherokee-1007336

8. See Hannah Black's open letter: http://www.artnews.com/2017/03/21/the-painting-must-go-hannah-black-pens-open-letter-to-the-whitney-about-controversial-biennial-work/

9. See the action of God's Will led by Christian activist Enteo (Dmitry Tsorionov) and the distruction of the work by Vadim Sidur: https://www.interfax.ru/culture/460456

10. See the article and follow-up discussions here: https://www.opendemocracy.net/ourkingdom/mark-fisher/exiting-vampire-castle

11. It is very important to see how similar issues are discussed in the politics and theory of black anti-racist activists such as Asad Haider - as Judith Butler writes, "… Haider writes in an open and persuasive prose to show how identity is always partial and ambivalent, deflecting from the larger racial ideologies while reproducing its terms". https://www.versobooks.com/books/2716-mistaken-identity

Elena Veljanovska

"Mastering the Art of Conviviality"

The work methodology of the art collective *Chto delat?* ('What is to be done?')[1]

"We entered politics, the struggle, resistance, not through the news or activism, but through literature, essays, films, in general through art. And as we know, it is this combination of indigenous people, science and art, that gave us the phenomenon of Chiapas… Ah fuck! The mosquitos are biting!"

Summer School of slow introduction to Zapatism, (Excerpt from a video conversation) "The point where the mosquitos start biting", (3 channel video installation, from 2:00 min.)

The work of the *Chto Delat* collective has an atmosphere of light-heartedness chattiness and playfulness - the result of bringing together different generations and pursuing a range of conversations, practices and movements. And yet within this atmosphere there is also taking place the heavy work of unravelling oppressive power structures and experimenting with various forms of learning. Multiple practices and pedagogies come together in this work, but the overarching element is always that of critically examining and challenging power structures, including those structures that currently dominate the art world.

Chto Delat first came together as a group in St. Petersburg in May 2003 when they organized an action called 'The Refoundation of St. Petersburg'. The core membership of the collective includes artists, critics, philosophers, choreographers and writers from the cities of St. Petersburg, Moscow and Nizhny Novgorod. Their first project together was when they published an international newspaper with the title *Chto Delat*? - meaning 'What is to be Done?', which became the name of the collective, alluding to the title of a 19th century novel by Nikolay Chernyshevsky about the first socialist workers' self-organization movement in Russia - a question also used by Lenin as the title for his famous pamphlet of 1902.

From the outset, *Chto Delat* has been focused on translating issues from local cultural politics into a global context: "*Chto Delat* sees itself as an artistic cell and also as a community organizer for a variety of cultural activities intent on politicizing 'knowledge production'."[2] With this approach the collective has placed its work on a firm ideological path in which the role of intellectuals in society is to serve as educators promoting social justice and equality. The group's artistic language has been consistently developed to reinforce this idea.

The collective's artistic activities are realized in various formats and in various media, including plays, performances, videos, murals, art projects and summer schools. Their ideological work is in tune with the theoretical tenets of radical thinkers such as Jacques Rancière and Ivan Illich, while their practices are strongly influenced by Bertolt Brecht's concept of 'learning-play' and the movies of Godard and Fassbinder. Among the most notable aspects of *Chto Delat's* work is their use of flexible methodologies based on horizontal learning and knowledge exchange, creating conditions for radical education and constant exploration of emancipatory practices. As such their work combines theoretical background with sensorial, bodily expression and the development of collective convivial tools for education and learning. Additionally, their work is characterized by a cross-generational approach and active engagement with political and social issues.

Over the years since its formation the group have expanded their educational projects so that today this work is one of their main activities. In 2013 they initiated an educational platform in St. Petersburg called 'The School of Engaged Art'. This school was an educational platform for addressing gaps in current teaching about engaged art practices and critical artistic approaches. In this way *Chto Delat* have positioned themselves as a prolific political actor in the art world and in society at large. In the past few years the collective has produced a great amount of valuable work through this educational model, which also shapes their methodology of work. Below I have sought to provide an accessible overview of their work by reviewing three of their recent projects.

Performance: Becoming with the Museum

This performance in the Museum of Contemporary Art in Skopje was the result of five days of preparation as part of the 2017 Festival for Critical Culture (CRIC) held annually (since 2016) by the Kontrapunkt Association of Citizens from Skopje. The theme of the 2017 Festival was 'Constant transition - trapped in broken mirrors' and dealt with the never-ending process of transition and transformation to democracy in Eastern Europe.

The Museum of Contemporary Art in Skopje was built after the massive earthquake in Skopje 1963 as a donation of the Polish government. Its collection of mainly 20th century modern art was donated by renowned contemporary artists,

including Calder, Picasso and Vasarely. The story of the Museum's origins is itself a great story of art and solidarity, deeply appreciated and embedded in the memory of local citizens and especially among artists and art professionals. This is why the performance took the Museum of Contemporary Art as its subject matter. It was based on the narrative of Solidarity through art and of valuing each encounter with artworks as an active process that transforms the viewer. The performance focused on the quiet reflection of experiencing an artwork by each participant, and through their stories tried to create a symbiosis between the participant's memory, the artwork and the space, thus creating a situation of a symbolic becoming 'with' the museum. In this way, the group used the potential of transforming a story into a bodily action, connecting the space and the collective body that walks and talks as one without suppressing individuality.

The Summer School of Orientation in Zapatism (2017)

Chto Delat's 'Summer School of Orientation in Zapatism' aimed at introducing and embodying the ideas of Zapatism in Russia. The project was based on the idea of opening a Zapatista embassy to spread the collective's ideas and methodology across the world. One of the leading principles of Zapatism is *encuentro* (encounter), which opens up possibilities for developing horizontal relationships and space for discussion and for listening and learning with and from each member of the community. Other notable principles related to education employed by the movement include *educar produciendo*, meaning to educate by producing, and *educar apreniendo* - to educate by learning. The general approach is one of learning how to learn anew, learning how to re-establish relationships with local and indigenous peoples and communities in order to use indigenous knowledge to empower the global struggle against neoliberalism.

The Summer School took place in Russia in 2017, where a group of 17 young people shared a country house and cre-

Go and Stop Progress_07-17.08.2018_Vierte Welt Berlin

ated a temporary living commune for two weeks. This long and slow process was based on another important principle of Zapatism: the principle of adopting a different type of temporality in education, i.e. "slow learning". The school included a reading group, communal practices and bodily movements and exercises. The final result was a three-channel video installation in which the students reflected on learned ideas to gain deeper insights into Zapatism. The film is at the same time an open lesson in Zapatism and an attempt to go deeper into the European pastoral tradition, as well as an anticipation of the future embassy in Russia and a reflection of the process of being together.

The goal of the school was to specifically connect the younger participants with reflection, and how to relate and integrate the learned theory and practical aspects of the Zapatistas methodology in order to challenge Russian/ European ways of living. Another aspect was the attempt to integrate lessons from local indigenous experiences of living in harmony with surrounding nature into everyday socio-political and cultural life.

Mastering the Art of Conviviality

The Summer School organised by the *Chto Delat* collective in Berlin in 2018 took

the legendary words of Kazimir Malevich - "Go and stop progress!" - as its theme and aimed at exploring different ideas and practices questioning the notion of 'progress'. Topics included performance theory, the limits of cultural theory, the burning issue of anthropogenic influences on the climate, and the links between the natural sciences and art. The project further critically examined the so-called 'Capitalocene era' by discussing crypto-currencies and economic progress in relation to the use of natural resources.

This rich content was framed by "two different approaches to the potentiality of liberation". The first of these was the Marxist link between emancipation and linear technical progress, or rather the 'left accelerationists' position which believes capital will '*dig its own grave*'. The second approach is based on the idea of knowledge produced by the indigenous/vernacular cosmogony, in which "progress is considered as barbaric exploitation and destruction of resources and human lives, and it is based on genocide and ecocide". These ideas were confronted and discussed over ten days in order to assess the current state of increasing economically progressivist and politically conservative forces that are endangering emancipatory ideas. In this spirit the school additionally discussed
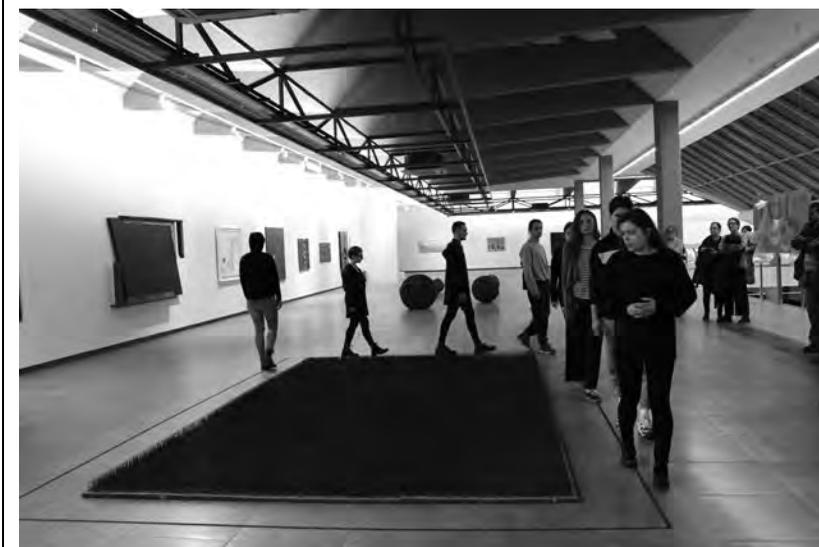
the ideas of the International Zapatista movement and their working methods and principles as "new possibilities for 'rootedness' that could be used to overcome the conservative logic".

The overarching methodological principle of the school was to explore ways of living and breathing conviviality. It was an attempt to embody theory into an art practice in which the students were equally engaged by theory and practice. The range of bodily practices focussed on three pillars: creating a collective body, creating collective memory, and creating a collective experience. These three pillars together managed to establish the connecting notion of conviviality, by self-arranging methods of convivial living that appeared within the group over the course of ten days sharing the space and thoughts. One of the most interesting aspects was reflective memory reading, where each participant had to connect an event from the present that was influenced by one from the past. This exercise generated shared memories that were then used in shaping the content of the final event - the open lesson. Furthermore, they served as a collective fund from which each group could 'borrow' a story when necessary, resulting in a pool of mixed biographies, places and memories. Another aspect of the project was the use of the Brechtian 'Learning Play' of formulating and taking up positions in front of engaged audiences.

What unites all the projects and connects the work of the *Chto Delat* collective in general is a true feeling for the importance of the collective, for solidarity against power, and for empathy and determined hope in building a better society through resistance.□

Becoming with the Museum_17.12.2018_MoCA Skopje

References
1. The core group includes: Tsaplya Olga Egorova (artist), Artiom Magun (philosopher), Nikolay Oleynikov (artist), Natalia Pershina / Glucklya (artist), Alexey Penzin (philosopher), Alexander Skidan (poet and critic), Oxana Timofeeva (philosopher), Dmitry Vilensky (artist) and Nina Gasteva (choreographer).
2. The statement by Chto delat, assessed on 1 November 2018 on the following link: https://chtodelat.org/

Engaged Visual Methodologies, Unearthing Data and Memories

Forensic Aesthetics

Eyal Weizman

from Forensic Architecture: Violence at the Threshold of Detectability (New York: Zone Books, 2017) pp. 94-96

References
1. See, for one example, Alain Badiou, *Ethics: An Essay on the Understanding of Evil*, trans. Peter Hallward (London: Verso, 2001).
2. Michael Sfrad, a human rights lawyer and a frequent collaborator, explained that "architects were now those able to show lawyers things that lawyers can't see." Michael Sfrad, in conversation at his office, January 2013. He repeated a similar point in a conversation with Susan Schuppli at The Architecture of Public Truth conference at the Haus der Kulturen der Welt, Berlin, organized alongside the opening of the Forensis exhibition, March 2014, http://www.hkw.de/en/programm/projekte/veranstaltung/p_100468.php.
3. Keenan and Weizman, *Mengele's Skull*, p. 24.

Collaboration between artists and the human rights movement is not a new phenomenon. Photographers, filmmakers, and artists have worked with human rights organizations since the birth of the human rights move ment in the mid-1970s. Human rights groups made good use of the affective power of the arts in helping stir public compassion. And the emergence and development of a human rights sensibility and its attention to victims opened a new pathway for artists to engage with political issues. The compassionate sensibility that developed was different from the revolutionary aesthetics of the modern political art of the early twentieth century. It sometimes bypassed the desire for overarching historical and political narratives in favor of accounts of personal tragedies.[1] Registering this entangled development and the emergent sensibility that ensued, the reception rooms of human rights organizations were often dedicated to art and photography exhibitions of this kind. However, with several important exceptions, artists' work was kept external to, and merely illustrative of, the actual investigative work.

Forensic architecture seeks to shift away from this use of the arts and to employ aesthetic sensibilities as investigation resources. Forensics is, anyway, itself an aesthetic practice because it depends on both the modes and the means by which incidents are sensed, recorded, and presented. Investigative aesthetics seeks to slow down time and intensifies sensibility to space, matter, and image. It also seeks to devise new modes of narration in the articulation of truth claims.[2]

"Forensic aesthetics" is a term that Thomas Keenan and I proposed in our book Mengele's Skull.[3] We used it to describe the way in which forensic presentations involve aesthetic techniques that are often in excess of the strict requirement of science. Aesthetics is differently employed in each of the three sites of forensic operation: the field, the lab/studio, and the forum. The first and basic level of forensic aesthetics is that of "material aesthetics": the modes and means by which material objects - bones, ruins, or landscapes - function as sensors and register changes in their environment. Matter can be regarded as an aesthetic sensorium inasmuch as its formal transformations register the

Images produced using photographs of Mengele and images of his skull in Richard Helmer's face-skull super imposition demonstration, Medico-Legal Institute labs, Sro Paulo, Brazil, June 1985. courtesy of Maja Helmer

different forces around it. Material aesthetics is both prior and primary to human perception, apprehension, and judgment. The meaning of aesthetics in this context is close to the one it had in ancient Greece, in which to sense is to be aestheticized, just as, inversely, to be unaestheticized is to make oneself numb to perception. For Bruno Latour, aesthetics designates the ability to perceive and to be concerned, "to render oneself sensitive, a capacity that precedes any distinction between the instruments of science, of art and of politics."[4] While aesthetics is generally understood as what pertains to human senses and perception, "material aesthetics" instead captures the way in which matter absorbs or prehends (rather than apprehends or comprehends) its environment. Such "non-sensuous perception," proposed by the early twentieth-century English mathematician and philosopher Alfred North Whitehead, can help form the link between human sensing and material sensors. Matter prehends by absorbing environmental themes into its material organization. Aesthetics, conceived in this way, is the mode and means by which material things relate to each other.[5]

Such an aesthetics of sentient materiality is familiar to the forensic anthropologist, who sees in the texture of bones a medium in which extended processes of life - habits, labor, nutrition patterns, as well as abrupt incidents - become texture and form. It is also a familiar concept to the building surveyor, who seeks to identify the processes that lead to a building failure, such as a structural crack. Bones and buildings could be said to be "aestheticized" to their environment because their deformations register variations and differences within their surroundings. Inversely, these formal mutations image (a verb) the environment. Not everything gets registered in a similar fashion - some things get recorded, and some things fade with time.

While in the nineteenth century, celluloid soaked in gelatin and silver salt particles was the means - through photography - to record its relation to the environment around it, today, some digital instruments are sensitive enough to help us read the way different surfaces that have not been designated as sensors may function as such. A table top, for example, senses the room in which it is located, objects, hot or cold placed on it, as well as the heat and radiation of living matter in various degrees of proximity to it. Material aesthetics is the quality of relations between things - the being of matter in the world, its ability to absorb and the degree to which it might. This understanding of material relations extends the principles of photography to the rest of the material world, breaking film's and digital photography's monopoly over registration and visual representation. The inverse must also be true: as objects become images, images should be studied as things, parts of the material world.[6] Still, to be read as sensors, the transformations of material objects must be captured by other sensors, such as photographs, analog or digital, remote or proximate, single or hyperspectral, that translate the sensorial capacity of matter into data and help make sense of them.

On the next level, in the forum, the term "forensic aesthetics" refers to the mode by which things are presented. It involves different techniques and technologies of demonstration, rhetoric, and performance - gestures, narrative and dramatization, image enhancement and projection. All this takes place in the media environment. International criminal courts and tribunals depend on video cameras to conduct their proceedings. Each participant in the trials of the ICC or ICTY sits in front of a screen. The legal teams watch these screens for the images, documents, or videos presented to all sides simultaneously in evidence. Face-to-face interaction has been superseded by face-to-screen or screen-to-screen communication, as Susan Schuppli and others have demonstrated.[7] This is very different from traditional courts, which are still largely allergic to the presence of media. But it has a precedent: in the Nuremberg trials, a screen was set at the apex of the courtroom's perspective, otherwise reserved for the judges. Now the spaceof international tribunals resembles more a film set or a live-broadcast studio, recording and archiving the processes that unfold in front of multiple cameras and screens. It is for this reason, perhaps, that the ICTY could be established in the anonymity of the rented floors of a former insurance building and the ICC could fit comfortably within the former headquarters of a mobile phone company.[8]□

4. Bruno Latour, "The Anthropocene and the Destruction of the Image of the Globe," Latour's fourth Gifford Lecture, delivered February 25, 2013, http://www.ed.ac.uk/humanities-soc-sci/news-events/lectures/gifford-lectures/archive/series-2012-2013/bruno-latour/lecture-four.

5. Whitehead, *Process and Reality*, pp. 3-4 and 249. "Non-sensuous perception" for Whitehead is limited to living entities, but it is suggestive of the possibility of its extension because perception, for him, is not limited to the human or even to the living, but is a property of all material forms. See also Melanie Sehgal, "A Situated Metaphysics: Things, History, and Pragmatic Speculation in A. N. Whitehead," in *The Allure of Things*, eds. Roland Faber and Andrew Goffey (London: Bloomsbury, 2014). See also John Durham Peters, *The Marvelous Clouds: Toward a Philosophy of Elemental Media* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2015), p. 4.

6. In the opening pages of *Matter and Memory*, Henri Bergson writes: "Matter is an aggregate of 'images.' And by 'image' we mean a certain existence which is more than that which the idealist calls a representation, but less than that which the realist calls a thing - an existence placed halfway between the 'thing' and the 'representation.'" Henri Bergson, *Matter and Memory*, trans. Nancy M. Paula and W. Scott Palmer (New York: Zone Books, 1988), p. 9.

7. Susan Schuppli examines the procedures by which media artifacts in the archive of the ICTY were turned into evidence. As she follows the movement of videotapes, satellite images, maps, and recording devices through a juridical matrix that sorts, archives, catalogs, and presents them, these objects become what she calls "material witnesses": that is, they bear witness not only to the alleged criminal events, but to the very sorting process they underwent in order to qualify as evidence. Susan Schuppli, "Entering Evidence: Cross-Examining the Court Records of the ICTY," in Forensis, pp. 263-300. See also Susan Schuppli, *A Material Witness: Forensic Media and the Making of Evidence* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, forthcoming).

8. The Model Court collective describes the ways in which new audio-visual and telecommunication technologies, their material presence, digital properties, interruptions, and breakdowns outline the contemporary sphere of universal jurisdiction. Their film and installation *Resolution 978HD* (2013) follows the genocide

trial of Fran3ois Bazaramba, a Rwandan national, in a district court of Porvoo, Finland. The court was set up in a local basketball court. Because the trial necessitated the remote interrogation of the accused via teleconference, the legal principle of habeas corpus, which usually demands the physical presence of the accused, was reinterpreted as the threshold condition of various technologies - bandwidth, resolution, and automatic light detectors - that would allow the remotely assembled court to see a person blush or sweat. Lawrence Abu Hamdan, Sidsel Meineche Hansen, Lorenzo Pezzani, and Oliver Rees (Model Court), "Resolution 978 HD: A Visual Essay," in Forensis, pp. 310-17, http://www.forensic-architecture.org/file/resolution-978hd. In the 1945 Nuremberg trials, in which twenty-one major Nazi war criminals faced judgment, films were screened as part of the process, and the proceedings were themselves filmed. American architect Dan Kiley supervised the refurbishment of the old Nuremberg court. The innovation was that the judges were placed to one side, facing the accused, while the central perspective was occupied by the screen, allowing the public a direct view of it. The screen served as a link between the accused, the judges, and the public. During his opening address Judge Jackson said, "We will show you these concentration camps in motion pictures, just as the Allied armies found them when they arrived." A film, shot at Dachau on May 5, 6, and 7, 1945, by the Special Coverage Unit (SPECOU) was screened on November 29, 1945. Christian Delage, "The Nuremberg Trials: Confronting the Nazis with the Images of Their Crimes," in *Images of Conviction*, pp. 131-49. For more on the use of media in the Nuremberg trials, see Cornelia Vismann, "Tele-Tribunals: Anatomy of a Medium," *Grey Room* 10 (Winter 2003). The 1961 Eichmann trial in Jerusalem saw the first use of video cameras in this process. See Rony Brauman and Eyal Sivan, *Adolf Eichmann: The Nazi Criminal Who Organized the Destruction of the Jewish People* (Turin: Einaudi, 2003). And see their film *The Specialist: Portrait of a Modern Criminal* (1999). In the context of the more recent process of the tribunals of the ICTR and the ICTY, videos are used extensively. On the media architecture of the ICTY, see Laura Kurgan, "Residues: ICTY Courtroom No. 1 and the Architecture of Justice," in *Alphabet City 7: Social Insecurity*, eds. Cornelius Heesters and Len Guenther (Toronto: House of Anansi, 2000), pp. 112-29; Susan Schuppli, "Entering Evidence," in

Forensis. For more recent changes to the British court system, see BBC, "TV Cameras Allowed into Court of Appeal," October 31, 2013, http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-24744684. The new building of the ICC, which opened in early 2016, was designed to closely integrate physical and media architecture.

A detainee works with Forensic Architecture researchers to recreate elements of the prison in April 2016. Image: Forensic Architecture, 2016

This corridor in the prison, known to be linear, was experienced by a survivor while he was tortured and the space was distorted by the traumatic conditions at the moment the memory was encoded. Image: Forensic Architecture, 2016

Unearthing State Violence

Forensic Architecture (FA) is a research agency based at Goldsmiths, University of London, consisting of architects, artists, filmmakers, journalist, software developers, scientists, lawyers, and an extended network of collaborators from a wide variety of fields and disciplines. Founded in 2010 by Prof. Eyal Weizman, FA is committed to the development and dissemination of new evidentiary techniques and undertakes advanced architectural and media investigations on behalf of international prosecutors, human rights and civil society groups, as well as political and environmental justice organisations, including Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch, B'tselem, Bureau of Investigative Journalism, and the UN, among others.

'Forensic architecture' is also an emergent academic field that refers to the production and presentation of architectural evidence in legal forums, including courts, and for advocacy purposes. Both 'forensics' and 'architecture' refer to well-established disciplinary frames; brought together, they shift each other's meaning, giving rise to a different mode of practice. While architecture turns the attention of forensics to buildings, details, cities, and landscapes, and adds an essential method of investigation, forensics turns architecture into an investigative practice, and demands that architects pay close attention to the materiality of the built environment and its representation through data and media.

The necessity for Forensic Architecture as a practice emerges from the fact that contemporary conflicts increasingly take place within urban areas where homes and neighbourhoods become targets and most civilian casualties occur within cities and buildings. Crucial evidence is now generated on an unprecedented scale by both civilians and participants in conflict and shared widely across social and mainstream platforms.

While such developments have contributed to the complexity of forms of conflict and control, they have also enabled new means of monitoring. As urban battlefields become ever more complex data and media environments, FA believes that human rights analysis must fully engage with the challenges of new media and the participatory, citizen-generated, and open-source evidence generated therein.

Grounded in the use of architecture as a methodological and analytic device, with which to investigate armed conflicts, environmental destruction and other political struggles, Forensic Architecture's new forms of investigations cross-reference multiple evidence sources by employing spatial and material analysis, remote sensing, mapping and reconstruction, and extend outwards to overlay elements of witness testimony and the cumulative forms of visual documentation enabled by contemporary media.

Tools and techniques developed by FA for analysing and presenting state and corporate violations of human rights across the globe involve modelling dynamic events as they unfold in space and time by creating navigable 3D models, filmic animations of environments undergoing conflict, and conceiving of interactive cartographies on the urban or architectural scale. The agency also develops open source software that facilitates collective research together with victim groups and stake holders.

The beneficiaries of FA's research are the victims of human rights violations, communities at risk in conflict zones, their representatives or organizations advocating or prosecuting on their behalf. FA presents their evidence in written, video, and/or interactive form to convey complex human rights violations in a convincing, precise, and accessible manner, crucial for the pursuit of accountability.

In recent years, Forensic Architecture has undertaken, together with and on behalf of the victims, a series of investigations internationally into state crimes and human rights violations, spanning events from war crimes to instances of politically and racially motivated violence to the lethal effects of the EU's policies of non-assistance for migrants in the Mediterranean. These investigations have led to the contestation of accounts of events given by state authorities, affecting legal and human rights processes, giving rise to citizen tribunals and truth commissions, military, parliamentary and UN inquiries. Through these forums, this analysis has provided unique and decisive evidence about incidents with which other methods could not have engaged.

Through their detailed and critical investigations, Forensic Architecture presents how public truth is produced - technologically, architecturally, and aesthetically - and how it can be used to confront authority and to expose new forms of state-led violence.

1.Torture in Saydnaya Prison

Saydnaya prison, as reconstructed by Forensic Architecture using architectural and acoustic modelling. Image: Forensic Architecture, 2016

Working with Amnesty International, Forensic Architecture reconstructed an architectural model of Saydnaya, a secret Syrian detention center, from the memories of several of its survivors, then living as refugees in Turkey. In recent years, no visits from independent journalists or monitoring groups have been permitted into the prison. It is estimated that since 2011, thousands of prisoners (both civilian detainees and anti-government rebels) have been killed. Survivors' memories are the only resource with which to recreate the spaces, conditions of incarceration, and incidents that took place inside Saydnaya. But the process of recollection is not straightforward: prisoners were kept in a state of constant disorienting sensory deprivation. Held in darkness and enforced silence, never allowed to see outside their own cell, the survivors' experiences were at the threshold of both vision and hearing.

The model-building process interrogated these sensory thresholds. Architectural and acoustic modelling helped the former detainees locate windows, doors and objects such as blankets and torture devices. The witnesses' memories of sounds were heightened because of their visual deprivation and they were able to depict in detail the sound signatures of cells and other areas of the prison, as well as guard's footsteps and torture techniques.

Working with audio investigator Lawrence Abu Hamdan, Forensic Architecture reconstructed the acoustic dimension of the building using techniques such as 'echo-profiling'. The technical process of interviewing through modelling helped survivors recall events otherwise obscured by trauma and violence. Modelling thus bridged the otherwise separate and distinct functions of testimony and evidence.

Using the resulting digital 3D model and accompanying witness testimonies Forensic Architecture generated an interactive online platform that enables users to navigate through the prison, and hear testimonies of the severe levels of torture and ritual violence located within Saydnaya.

The publication of this report attracted the online fire of supporters of Syrian president

Credits
Commissioned by: Amnesty International
Witnesses: Samer, Diab, Jamal, Salam, Anas
Project team: Eyal Weizman (Principal Investigator), Christina Varvia (Project Coordinator), Hania Jamal, Ana Naomi de Sousa, Simone Rowat, Néstor Rubio, Stefan Laxness, Pierre-François Gerard, Yamen Albadin, George Clipp, Hala Makhlouf, Ghias Aljundi, Samaneh Moafi, Hana Rizvanolli, Franc Camps Febrer
Audio investigation: Lawrence Abu Hamdan
Collaborators: Gochan Yildirim / 1635film-istanbul, Nadim Mishlawi / DB Studios, Mihai Meirosu / Nvision Audio
Thanks to: Vasif Kortun / SALT Galata, Fiona Gabbert / Goldsmiths' University Forensic Psychology Unit

Bashar al-Assad, who described Forensic Architecture's methods as 'fake news' and 'special effects', and finally of al-Assad himself, who called it a fabrication meant to 'vilify and smear the Syrian government'. In March 2017, the platform was submitted to the Federal German Prosecution as a part of a universal jurisdiction case against the Syrian leadership. In May 2017, the US State Department released aerial images that purportedly identified the chimneys of a crematorium built at Saydnaya to dispose of the bodies of those executed there.

2. Airstrikes in Atimah

Using clips found on social media websites, Forensic Architecture investigated and located three airstrikes on 8 March 2015, near the town of Atimah in Syria and the displaced persons camp of the same name. No nation has so far claimed responsibility for the attack. Image: Forensic Architecture, 2015

Credits
Project team: Eyal Weizman (Principal Investigator); Christina Varvia (Video Editing, Spatial Analysis); and Chris Woods (Voiceover)
Collaborator: Airwars

On 8 March 2015, three bombs landed near the Turkey-Syria border, between the town of Atimah in Syria and an internally displaced persons (IDP) camp where more than thirty thousand civilians were sheltered.

No military force has claimed responsibility for this attack, but Forensic Architecture (FA) determined it was likely to be a US strike on al-Qaeda militants who operated in the area.

The analysis sought to confirm the exact location of each strike. People in the camp and in Atimah photographed the bomb clouds shortly after the strike, and uploaded their images and videos to the internet. FA verified two sources to be of the same strike, from different perspectives - one from the town and the other from the IDP camp.

Forensic Architecture reconstructed the cameras' locations and their cone of vision, and intersected these perspectives to locate the strike. Comparing the size of the smoke plumes with those of other known bombs in our archive, FA estimated that these were one-ton bombs.

3. The Iuventa

Counter-investigation of the events leading to the seizure of an NGO rescue vessel
18 June 2017
An investigation by Forensic Oceanography and Forensic Architecture
Realised with the support of Borderline Europe, the WatchTheMed platform and Transmediale

As demonstrated in our report Blaming the Rescuers, since the end of 2016, a growing campaign of de-legitimisation and criminalisation has systematically targeted non-governmental organisations (NGOs) engaged in search and rescue in the Mediterranean. These organisations had courageously deployed their own rescue missions in a desperate attempt to fill the gap left by the EU and its member states' decision to pull back from rescue at sea at the end of 2014.

In our report we analysed and countered the arguments used to fuel a "toxic narrative" against rescue NGOs, which emanated from EU agencies such as Frontex and different

By mapping the sky to the inside of a sphere, we track the motion of a mounted camera and match the drifting movements of the vessels in the scene. Image: Forensic Oceanography and Forensic Architecture, 2018

Project Team Forensic Oceanography: Charles Heller, Lorenzo Pezzani
Project Team Forensic Architecture: Nathan Su, Christina Varvia, Eyal Weizman, Grace Quah
Technical consultants: Rossana Padaletti (GIS) and Richard Limeburner (Oceanography)
Footage and stills by Jugend Rettet e.V. and Reuters
Realised with the support of Borderline Europe, the WatchTheMed platform and Transmediale

institutional bodies in Italy. While this campaign had remained largely on a discursive level, over the summer of 2017 it quickly escalated with the Italian government's attempt to impose a "code of conduct" on rescue NGOs. An intense standoff ensued as several NGOs, from larger organisations such as Doctors without Borders to smaller ones such as the German Jugend Rettet ('Youth Rescue'), refused to sign it before the announced deadline of 31 July 2017, claiming that the code would have threatened their activities at sea with requests that a leading legal scholar had described as "nonsensical", "dishonest" and "illegal".

On 2 August 2017, only days after this deadline had passed, Jugend Rettet's ship, the Iuventa, was seized by the Italian judiciary. Its crew was accused of having colluded with smugglers during three different rescue operations: the first on the 10 September 2016, the second and third on 18 June 2017. The order of seizure contended that on those occasions the Iuventa was being used to "aiding and abetting illegal immigration" by arranging the direct handover of migrants by smugglers and returning empty boats for re-use.
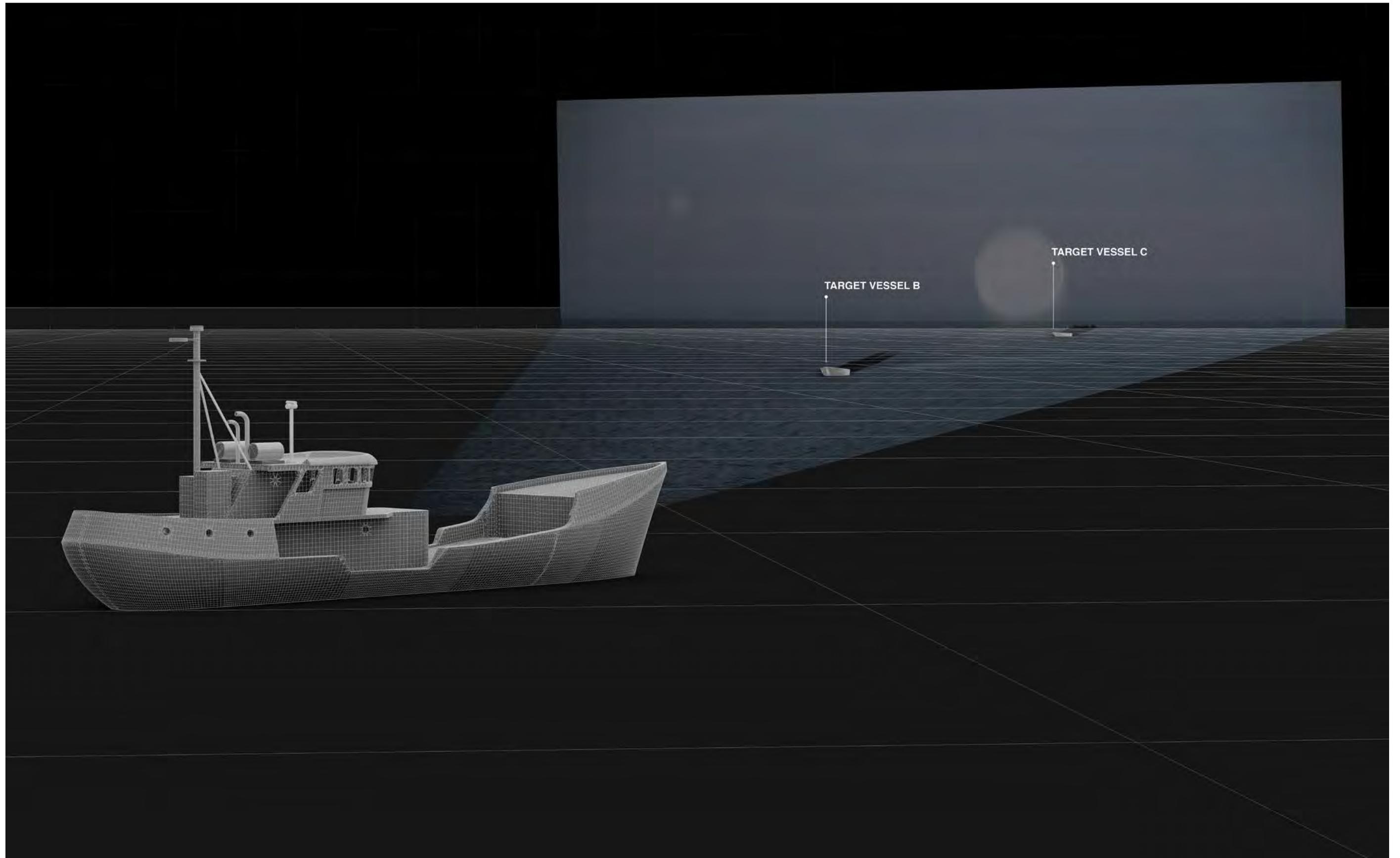
The video presented here offers a counter-investigation of the authorities' version, and a refutation of their accusations. While the latter operate by decontextualizing factual elements and recombining them into a spurious chain of events, our analysis attempts instead to cross-reference all elements of evidence into a coherent spatio-temporal model. This is made possible by the exponential increase in video documentation recorded by NGOs and other actors at sea. From our reconstruction, it appears that the Iuventa crew did not return empty boats for re-use, nor communicate with anyone potentially connected with smuggling networks. The materials we have reviewed further show the Iuventa crew's professionalism and commitment to saving lives at sea.

While no charges have been so far brought against the crew of the Iuventa nor against Jugend Rettet as an organisation, thus making it extremely difficult for them to respond to these accusations, the boat has remained under custody of the Italian police in the port of Trapani, Sicily.

The attempt to criminalise and limit the rescue activities of the NGOs, most of whom have been forced to suspend their activities since summer 2017, should be understood as part of a two-pronged strategy by Italian and EU authorities to close off the central Mediterranean at all cost. This undeclared operation, which we have dubbed "Mare Clausum", also includes the provision of technical, political and material support to the Libyan coast guard. The latter has not only increasingly threatened rescue NGOs at sea, but also intercepted and returned more and more migrants back to Libya. In this way, European authorities have been physically containing migrants in a country where their lives are endangered, and their human rights are systematically violated. Meanwhile, migrant solidarity groups have been attacked and criminalised all over Europe and beyond, from Lesvos to Calais, from Tangier to Bardonecchia, from the Roja valley in France to Denmark.

At the moment where NGO vessel Iuventa first photographed two migrant boats in distress, we capture the relative positions of the vessels by mapping the surface of the image onto the surface of the sea. Image: Forensic Oceanography and Forensic Architecture, 2018

4.The Ayotzinapa Case: A Cartography Of Violence

Forensic Architecture used available photographic evidence from the scene to inform their 3D models. Image: Forensic Architecture, 2017

On the night of 26-27 September 2014, students from the Rural Normal School of Ayotzinapa were attacked in the town of Iguala, Guerrero, by local police in collusion with criminal organisations. Numerous other branches of the Mexican security apparatus either participated in or witnessed the events, including state and federal police and the military. Six people were murdered - including three students - forty wounded, and 43 students were forcibly disappeared.

The whereabouts of the students remains unknown, and their status as 'disappeared' persists to this day. Instead of attempting to solve this historic crime, the Mexican state has failed the victims, and the rest of Mexican society, by constructing a fraudulent and inconsistent narrative of the events of that night.

Forensic Architecture was commissioned by and worked in collaboration with the Equipo Argentino de Antropologia Forense (EAAF) and Centro de Derechos Humanos Miguel Agustín Pro Juárez (Centro Prodh) to conceive of an interactive cartographic platform to map out and examine the different narratives of this event. The project aims to reconstruct, for the first time, the entirety of the known events that took place that night in and around Iguala, and provide a forensic tool for researchers to further the investigation.

The data on which the platform is based is draw from publicly available investigations, videos, media stories, photographs and phone logs.

The first and most important of our sources are two reports by a group of five experts referred to as the International Group of Independent Experts (GIEI). The GIEI was appointed by the Inter-American Commission of Human Rights to carry out - with the consent of both the state and the families of the victims - a thorough investigation of the case. Their year-long work highlighted inconsistencies and irregularities in the official state investigations and proposed a series of recommendations regarding the search for the missing students.

Another important source for the work is a book by journalist John Gibler, 'An Oral History of Infamy'. From October 2014, Gibler undertook interviews with the surviving students of the Iguala attacks. These testimonies provide an invaluable oral history of the event from the point of view of its victims.

Thousands of pages of reports have thereafter been broken down into almost five thousand data-points, each recording a single reported incident, such as an instance of two-way communication, movements or the mishandling of evidence. These data-points have been located, timed and tagged according to the actors involved, and the type of incident they describe. Each data-point is also assigned a narrative description.

The platform enables user to explore the relationship between thousands of events and hundreds of actors, by switching different data-tags on and off.

It demonstrates, in a clear graphic and cartographic form, the level of collusion and coordination between state agencies and organised crime, throughout the night.

Comparing, for example, the movement of different security agencies - municipal, state and federal police forces and the military - in relation to the times and location of the attacks, investigators can identify how each of these groups acted that night and how - actively or by omission - they bear responsibility for what transpired.

The platform also clearly identifies contradictions between the testimonies of the police, surviving students or alleged members of criminal organisations and the findings of the GIEI.

A 'play' function allows users to observe the way events unfolded in time and space, allowing users to explore the different stages of the events and the movements of people and vehicles throughout the night.

The project thus reveals a cartography of violence spanning from the street corner level to the entire state of Guerrero. It describes an act of violence that is no longer a singular event but a prolonged act, which persists to this day in the continued absence of the 43 students.

It also seeks to demonstrate the ways in which collective civil society initiatives, undertaking independent investigations using innovative analytical tools, could help investigate complex crimes and confront criminal impunity and the failures of Mexican law enforcement.

In particular, it reaffirms our commitment to heal the open wound of the Ayotzinapa case, and to work until the truth of the night is clarified, and the students' whereabouts are known.

NOTE: While this platform seeks to employ available data objectively and accurately, the sheer amount of information related to this case means that some inaccuracies might persist. We have made all our data public to enable users to further explore it and suggest corrections or refinements.□

The platform, and the interactive models and videos within it, demonstrate the level of collusion and coordination between state agencies and organised crime throughout the night.
Image: Forensic Architecture, 2017

The Ayotzinapa Platform enables users to explore the relationship between thousands of events and hundreds of actors from the night of 26-27 September 2014.
Image: Forensic Architecture, 2017

Towards a Matheme of Genocide
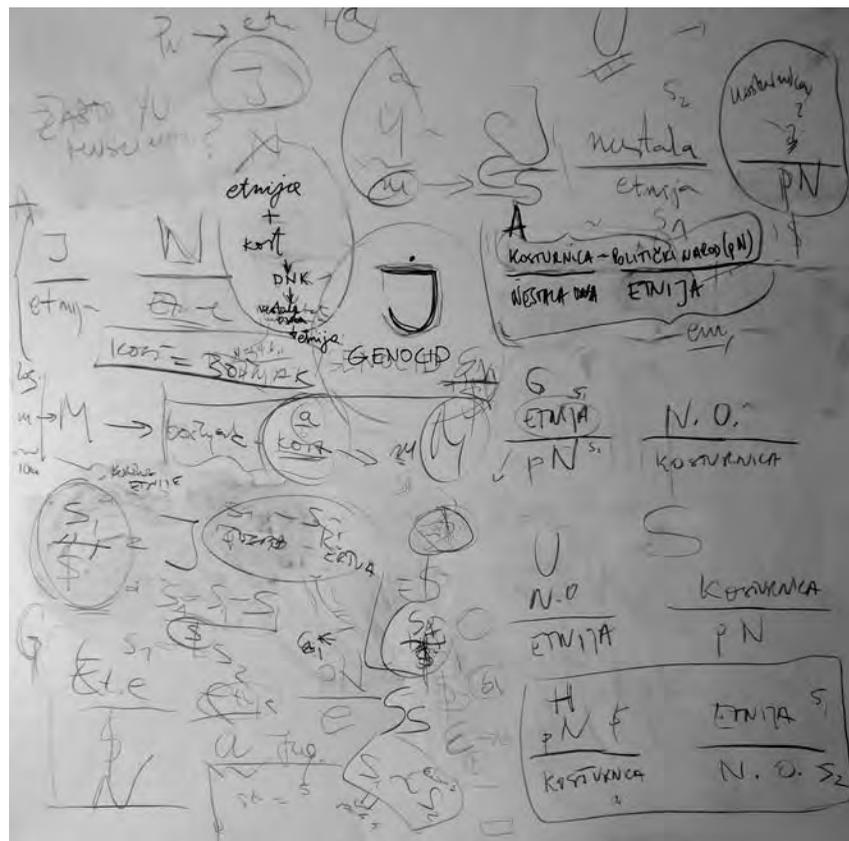
Milica Tomić
Branimir Stojanović

Visual essay

Matheme
Towards the Matheme of Genocide,
black charcoal on white board
Belgrade , 2009
Photo: Milica Tomić

Towards a Matheme of Genocide * is a set of documents of an autodidactic session by Grupa Spomenik discussing the possibility of mathematising genocide. A complex figure of thought, genocide is constructed on no man's land between contemporary science and international law. By attempting to come up with a matheme of genocide, Grupa Spomenik is re-examining the dominant genocide narrative and its key scientific and legal concepts: victim, witness, re-association, identification code, skeletal inventory, un-identified remains, chain of custody, missing person, gene scan, blood sample, etc. Grupa Spomenik is attempting to locate genocide within the four discourses of Lacan's concept of matheme. Lacan's discourses describe the relations of knowledge, truth, subject and object or the social links of the four subjective positions: of the master, the university, the hysteric and the analyst. One of the conclusios of this session is that genocide as an object resists the possibility of mathematisation, for it occupies the place of enjoyment, unrepresentable within Lacan's four discourses.

* What is a Matheme of Genocide? Matheme is not to be confused with the identification case number. It contains the case number, but is more than the case number itself. Matheme talks about the whole network of inter-subjective relationships surrounding the genocide in Srebrenica. Matheme is something that manages to be trans-historical. It carries the truth of genocide.

Branimir Stojanović: Is our discourse the position of the analyst or the hysteric? We could say we speak from the position of the hysteric and that what we are trying to state is from the position of the analyst. What do we want? We would like to try and come up with a matheme of genocide. Is that our task?
Damir Arsenijević: Among others.
Milica Tomić: Not only of genocide, but with all the elements in that…
Damir Arsenijević: The whole topography. We must determine all the positions and politics. By determining the positions, we will determine the politics. We must inscribe ourselves into this.
Branimir Stojanović: Where would genocide be then - in which place?
Damir Arsenijević: Yes, in the place of 'jouissance'. But where is 'jouissance' here?
Branimir Stojanović: 'Jouissance' is somewhere in the middle. 'Jouissance' is here.
Damir Arsenijević: 'Jouissance' is here in the position of absolute impossibility towards all of these?
Branimir Stojanović: Absolutely.
Damir Arsenijević: Well, yes. That is important. Let us then say that this is genocide. But this is now for the big canvas - yes this is genocide.
Milica Tomić: How would absolute 'jouissance' function as the moment of breaking all relationships?
Branimir Stojanović: Well, the incursion of 'jouissance' breaks all discursive structures.
Milica Tomić: Always?
Branimir Stojanović: Always. 'Jouissance' is, if it appears, the sign of the death drive.This is the place that is untouchable.
Milica Tomić: And when 'jouissance' is realised, then we have…
Branimir Stojanović: Then we have a total catastrophe. This is the end of the world. 'Jouissance' is the end of the world.
Milica Tomić: When 'jouissance' is realised, where is it placed within the matheme?
Branimir Stojanović: It is not placed.
Milica Tomić: Wait, this is the end of the world in relation to Yugoslavia, so to speak.
Damir Arsenijević: This is the utter collapse of the symbolic.
Milica Tomić: How then are relationships re-established?
Branimir Stojanović: The way in which it was established in relation to 'jouissance'? It is established through the intervention of science, the discourse of the university intervening in 'jouissance' and attempting to normalise it through the process of re-association.
Milica Tomić: That would be the science of the ICMP [International Commission for Missing Persons]…
Damir Arsenijević: … forensic scientists. How is the ICMP positioned here? Is the ICMP in the position of the master?
Milica Tomić: It can have both positions - the position of the master and the university discourse. Is that not so?
Branimir Stojanović: ICMP is S2 in the place of the master. The problem of liberal discourse is that it completely negates S1. It negates the position of authority. Only liberalism is still managing to sustain the illusion of knowledge without authority. There is no short-circuiting like in Stalinism and Fascism. The question is until when will it manage to present rational models of functioning? These same rational models, without the exteriority of the position of the master, or its performativity, become irrational, for there is no will behind the stating of 'I want this' or an authority claiming 'I want this'.

SUC02SRE - 212D - RF1 &
Site name:
Sućeska
Grave number in the series:
Sućeska 02 - second grave on this site
Related to event:
Srebrenica
Grave type:
It is assumed to be secondary
Excavated case number:
212D - body part/ lower body (from the pelvis to the foot)
DNA sample:
RF1 - one sample of the right femur

ZAL03SRE - 011D - RH2 &
Site name:
Zalužje
Grave number in the series:
Zalužje 03 - the third grave on the site
Grave type:
It is assumed to be tertiary
Related to event:
Srebrenica
Excavated case number:
011D - body part / crushed skull, torso with the right hand and palm
DNA sample:
RF2 - second sample from the right humerus (right upper arm bone / first sample did not produce DNA, and another sample had to be taken)

KRI02ZVO - 093D - LR1 &
Site name:
Križevci
Grave number in the series:
Križevci 02 - the second grave on the site
Grave type:
It is assumed to be secondary
Realated to the event:
Zvornik
Excavated case number:
093D - body / left forearm with the hand DNA sample:
LR1 - sample from the left radius ulna

SUC01SRE - 045D - LH1
Site:
Sućeska
Grave number in the series:
Sućeska 01 - the first grave on the site
Grave type:
It is assumed to be secondary
Related to event:
Srebrenica
Excavated case number:
045D - body / torso to the left humerus
DNA sample:
LH1 - sample from the left humerus (left upper arm bone)

Milica Tomić: Where is the position of the victim in relation to 'jouissance'?

Branimir Stojanović: This is now a question.

Milica Tomić: Then the perpetrators…

Branimir Stojanović: Well, yes, 'perpetrator', 'victim' - what are they…

Damir Arsenijević: Would it be useful to write down who the protagonists of the game are?

Branimir Stojanović: Yes.

Damir Arsenijević: Shall we put it in the middle, to know that 'jouissance' is genocide?

Milica Tomić: Is that it?

Damir Arsenijević: Where are the perpetrators? Where is the international community?

Branimir Stojanović: What would happen if 'jouissance' were to pass through a kind of symbolic sieve? What would be 'a' - the surplus enjoyment - after this?

Milica Tomić: What would 'a' be after this symbolic sieve - which symbolic sieve?

Branimir Stojanović: Well, science, for example.

Milica Tomić: We ought to know what we are talking about.

Damir Arsenijević: They all revolve, in a way, around this residuum - around this.

Milica Tomić: What would the surplus 'jouissance' be? Perhaps that which one may not speak about.

Branimir Stojanović: That is the victim. Is 'a' not the victim?

[break in recording]

Branimir Stojanović: S1 is the master signifier. This is S2. That is the other signifier, or the signifier pair. They do not appear in any other way. They always appear as a signifier pair.

Milica Tomić: That within the signifier pair, which is not the master?

Damir Arsenijević: Could we call it master-Other?

Branimir Stojanović: No, this is not master-Other. You cannot separate them, for they always appear as two, where one has a function to assume. This function is to retroactively share out sense to the other. This retroactivity is the problem. This is why we cannot determine what S1 and S2 are. They are the signifier pair. S1 can never appear without S2.

Milica Tomić: What, signifier…

Branimir Stojanović: A pair! S1 is impossible without S2, and S2 is impossible without S1. They always appear as two. There is never an extracted S1 without S2 or S2 without S1.

Damir Arsenijević: That is why a signifier cannot be alone but always in relation to another signifier.

Branimir Stojanović: Yes, it is the difference itself which distinguishes them, both in relation to itself and the other signifier.

Milica Tomić: Wait, the first discourse that appeared after genocide is what the ICMP was doing, is that right?

Damir Arsenijević: Well, now, I don't know how we can… All the four discourses appear at the same time, in all the moments. We ought to consider who inhabits them at a certain moment and how.

Branimir Stojanović: But this is very tricky. In the Nazi discourse, for example, the mystical object of desire of the Nazi is the one he swallowed and then destroyed. That means there is a relationship of love between the Nazi leader and that which fell out. There is a similar affiliation here, a similar structure, I think.

Damir Arsenijević: All right, but with the Yugoslav Muslim…

Milica Tomić: I would not agree, because I do not think that this is a rela-
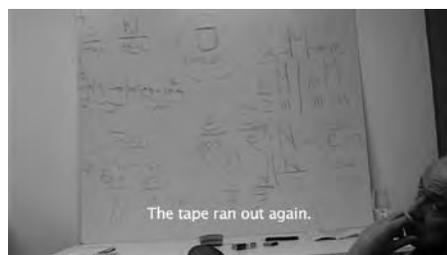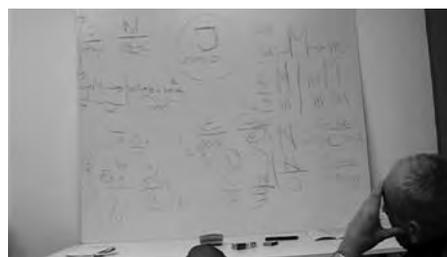
Mathem 1, 2, 3

tionship of a master and…

Branimir Stojanović: Not master in its classical form. The National Socialist leader is a distortion of the position of the master.

Milica Tomić: All right, and how would that be possible here?

Branimir Stojanović: Very simply, we have S1…

Milica Tomić: Wait, you have the Muslim, that came about at one moment, in a community

Damir Arsenijević: … the Yugoslav Muslim.

Milica Tomić: … it is him I am talking about. He was created as a political project and has the place of equal among all, is that not right? So you cannot compare at all…

Damir Arsenijević: I think Milica is right, but from a different perspective. Why do we insist on a difference between genocide and Holocaust?

Branimir Stojanović: That is a good question.

Milica Tomić: In the Nazi discourse the Jews were not at any point a 'legitimate people' with rights equal to those of others, whilst Yugoslav Muslims had equal rights within Yugoslavia. This is a wholly different situation.

Branimir Stojanović: Yes, but how did the Yugoslav Muslim suddenly, from having equal rights, find himself with no rights at all?

Milica Tomić: That is significant and it allows us to define all the positions within this construction. And who demonised the Muslims?

Branimir Stojanović: Well, that is a question! Who made Muslims out of them first, with the small "m"? Up until the 1974 Constitution of Yugoslavia, Muslim was spelled with the small 'm'. Afterwards they became Muslim with the capital 'M'. From then on, using the small 'm' became an act of denigrating Muslims. To me, this seems to be the first symptom.

Damir Arsenijević: But there is a relation here, some political subjectivation, is that right?

Branimir Stojanović: Yes, yes.

Damir Arsenijević: This is a political deactivation in a certain way - desubjectivation.

Milica Tomić: We are now talking only about Muslims. What about all those people who did declare themselves as Yugoslav Muslims, political people, but were killed as ethnic Muslims?

Branimir Stojanović: Whom do you have in mind?

Milica Tomić: I am thinking of those who were half-Serbs, half-Muslims, and of those who refused to declare religious or ethnic affiliation.

Branimir Stojanović: This is then knowledge in the Real, inaccessible to identification, I agree that it is…

Milica Tomić: I think it was all run according to this principle, since how else would that Serbian copper have asked his former Muslim compatriot "How did you survive?!" He knew exactly who was who. He operated by unfolding this knowledge in the Real.

Branimir Stojanović: No, when he saw this Muslim after the war, he wondered how he had survived, for at the level of his murderous fantasy no Muslims survived.

Milica Tomić: Because he keeps a mental archive of who is who, he recognised him when he saw him. This means that everything unfolds in the Real.

Damir Arsenijević: This means that in the phantasm of genocide there are no Muslims any longer.

Branimir Stojanović: There are none. Within this phantasm, his survival beggars belief.

Milica Tomić: In the phantasm of genocide, there are no Muslim men, or males, but there are Muslim women, or females. This gender differentiation

Mathem 4, 5

is important. Were he to impregnate a Muslim woman, she would give birth to a Serbian child, for that child would bear a Serbian name.

Branimir Stojanović: Yes, that is very important. Now, we are writing this 'ž' [woman] small, 'man' small and 'Muslim' big, but from the perspective of the one who kills, that is: 'ž' [woman], 'm' [man], and small 'm' [muslim]. You see, here is Yugoslavia, and you have Bosnia, that is 'J', Yugoslavia. This here is Bosnia. There is 'jouissance' and the small 'a', Bosnia, for example, as the small 'a'. Bosnia was that - she was called "little Yugoslavia."

Damir Arsenijević: Yes, but there is the analogy to Yugoslavia being the unconscious of Europe, and it follows that Bosnia is the unconscious of Yugoslavia.

Branimir Stojanović: Yes, but that relationship between 'jouissance', 'J' big, Yugoslavia, and 'a', small 'a', little Jugoslavija…

Damir Arsenijević: … or the small letter in "muslim."

Branimir Stojanović: Yes, small "muslim." There is Yugoslavia, little Yugoslavia, in the place of the object 'a'.

Milica Tomić: But, don't forget that Yugoslavia was created in Bosnia.

Branimir Stojanović: I just wanted to say that! We have this paradox that the Socialist Federative Republic of Yugoslavia (SFRY) was created in Bosnia.

Milica Tomić: In the Second World War, the SFRY was created in Bosnia. In the eighties, after Tito died, there was much talk about the breakup of Yugoslavia. Old partisans would often say "If the problem opens up in Bosnia, Yugoslavia is finished."

Damir Arsenijević: Where is now Yugoslavia, i.e. the small 'a,' the political subject will be? The political subject that comes with a capital "M."

Branimir Stojanović: Why is 'M' the political subject?

Damir Arsenijević: The capital 'M', Muslim with the capital 'M', from 1974.

Branimir Stojanović: It started in 1971, with amendments to the constitution.

Milica Tomić: 1971 was when the decision was made, and in 1974 the new constitution was adopted. This Muslim with capital 'M' is fascinating because it is unique. Muslims as a constituent people only existed in Yugoslavia. Tito was the first to come up with this idea. Perhaps because of the Nonaligned Movement, in fact, Tito always had that idea.

Branimir Stojanović: I don't think so. I think he was sticking to his view that all the peoples who participated in the People's Liberation Struggle [*Narodna oslobodilačka borba* (NOB) in Serbo-Croatian] have the right to political subjectivation. That was always his axiom.

Damir Arsenijević: Where are we in relation to the genocide signifier? Where is the signifier chain? Shall we begin in this way, or begin with all the politics there were, because politics is the embodiment of certain discourses, certain positions. There was the Yugoslav People's Army [JNA], and the Army of Republika Srpska. There was the UN, as the international community, then the Army of BiH…

Branimir Stojanović: The HVO [Croatian Defence Council]

Damir Arsenijević: They were an army, but they had no contact with Podrinje…

Branimir Stojanović: No… only the armies within genocide.

Damir Arsenijević: Yes, we begin with the genocide situation. We are not dealing with anything else now. […] Well. […] This had to be killed in order for the bone to be hidden. The enjoyment, the small 'a' is a leftover that has to be hidden.

Branimir Stojanović: There is a coincidence between Yugoslavia and, finally, the bone - the object, 'a'.

Damir Arsenijević: That is what we are saying. One of the axioms we are starting from is that this had to happen [the shift from M to m], so that Yugo-

Mathem 6, 7

slavia would be no more.

Branimir Stojanović: That is correct.

Damir Arsenijević: But within which politics is this?

Milica Tomić: I think that Yugoslavia's disappearance was a consequence, rather than the intention. Whose desire was it for Yugoslavia to be no longer?

Branimir Stojanović: That is the question.

Damir Arsenijević: The question also is what Yugoslavia meant. Let's begin with a classic. We have the ethno-national elites.

Branimir Stojanović: Current?

Damir Arsenijević: Yes, they were there then, and now they are still very much here. They bring in capitalism and in that constellation they can be masters… of the smaller republics. There is no Yugoslavia, as a set of ethno-national elites. No, because Yugoslavia is not "and-and-and"… it has a completely different logic.

Branimir Stojanović: This logic means the rule of the people without the elite, people's participation in governance, in the apparatus of power, without this ethno-national elite. This is precisely what was repressed - the people and the production of the *ethnie*. You could say that the same operation happened throughout former Yugoslavia. From the People… to the ethnie, from the People with a capital 'P', which was a constituent of all that Yugoslavia was, we now have ethnies. This is practically an extrapolation from the People to the ethnie. All the ethnies are in the position of the object 'a' - victims - in the end.

Damir Arsenijević: But something remains. Something must have been left over as a surplus from reducing the People into ethnies.

Branimir Stojanović: At that level we have the elite, the ethno-national elite…

Damir Arsenijević: … which had to split amongst … I see now why we placed them this way rather than into a signifying chain.

Branimir Stojanović: You mean like this, one after the other?

Damir Arsenijević: These are the ethno-national elites, are they not?

Branimir Stojanović: What is in the place of the subject, then, as repressed, and what in the place of 'a'?

Damir Arsenijević: The repressed subject is the People - that is the Yugoslav People, no?

Milica Tomić: The split subject $.

Damir Arsenijević: Yes. The object, the cause of desire, comes from the Real. What is real for this symbolic? Shall we think that way?

Milica Tomić: Excuse me, what is above object 'a'?

Damir Arsenijević: Ethnie.

Milica Tomić: Which discourse is this now? How are we viewing this - how did you set it up?

Damir Arsenijević: This is the discourse of the master. This is capital 'G' [M]. What is the Real for this Symbolic Yugoslavia? Yugoslavia is ghostly still.

Branimir Stojanović: In the place of production, practically.

Damir Arsenijević: Yes. What knowledge does this produce? This is the ethno-national elite producing knowledge about the ethnie, is that right? And in fact, they are in this relationship.

Branimir Stojanović: The ethno-national elite and the ethnie cannot be in the same place.

Damir Arsenijević: Why? They are impossible because they have to constantly produce themselves. The ethno-national elite must constantly produce knowledge about the ethnie, recreate the ethnie, because it must keep reinventing it. As such, they are in a position of impossibility. And this is a position of impotence.

Branimir Stojanović: Between Yugoslavia and the subject.

Mathem 8

Mathem 9

Damir Arsenijević: Well, always - was there not always a position of impotence, though with the situation inverted? For then perhaps in the discourse of the hysteric there was a constant production of the People, then this was Yugoslavia, but then you would have - I mean, let's try. Write.

Branimir Stojanović: Discourse of the hysteric, you have the People…

Damir Arsenijević: … then below you have Yugoslavia, and above you have the ethno-national elite and below you have the ethnie.

Milica Tomić: Is that the discourse of the master?

Damir Arsenijević: No, this is the discourse of the hysteric.

Milica Tomić: This down there.

Branimir Stojanović: But it turned out that this is the truth of this. In fact, that this is the starting situation, that this is the truth…

Damir Arsenijević: Let's make all four combinations of this. Let's see, perhaps it is not like this…

Milica Tomić: No, let's wipe it off and start again. Wipe it off.

Branimir Stojanović: I'll wipe it all off.

Milica Tomić: No, not that - that is important.

Branimir Stojanović: Which is? That?

Milica Tomić: Just wipe off this bit on the top. Why wipe off Yugoslavia?

Damir Arsenijević: We'll make it again… older, more beautiful and better!

Milica Tomić: I think it is important not to erase this: 'm', 'M', 'M'.

Damir Arsenijević: Let's do these four scenarios - something intrigues me.

Milica Tomić: Enough, don't wipe off Yugoslavia.

Damir Arsenijević: Here we write 'H' for the hysteric…

Branimir Stojanović: Here the master.

Damir Arsenijević: Here the master - what remains now? The university remains. Who is the agent here? We have the ethnie here. Below we have the elites, is that right?

Milica Tomić: This is in reverse to the discourse of the hysteric.

Damir Arsenijević: And here we have Yugoslavia and below we have People.

Branimir Stojanović: Below you have the analyst.

Damir Arsenijević: This is perfect. I can see already that …

Milica Tomić: Did Yugoslavia appear in the place of the agent?

Damir Arsenijević: To insist, yes.

Milica Tomić: This is the discourse that does not exist?

Damir Arsenijević: No, this is the question of the birth of new politics. This is S2. What is then our knowledge and what is the Other? Here you have…

Branimir Stojanović: … the People and the ethno-national elites.

Milica Tomić: That is correct, especially in relation to the rest. It is better than the option in which the People is underneath…

Damir Arsenijević: … we don't want to keep the People down…

Milica Tomić: When genocide enters into the equation, we said that 'jouissance', 'J' appeared. Does a new discourse also appear, or does 'J' stand alone?

Branimir Stojanović: There is no 'J' by itself.

**Milica Tomić:** Which discourse was in power when 'J' appeared?

Damir Arsenijević: All of the four discourses were there in some way.

Milica Tomić: That cannot be. One had to have prevailed for anything to happen at all.

Damir Arsenijević: Well, that is now the question.

Milica Tomić: Let's see which one of these discourses was in power at that moment. It might be important for the production of genocide.

Damir Arsenijević: What is the point, then, of the discourse of the university here? It produces knowledge about Yugoslavia, of what it was. That has become this multicultural perspective, the unity of differences, if you like.
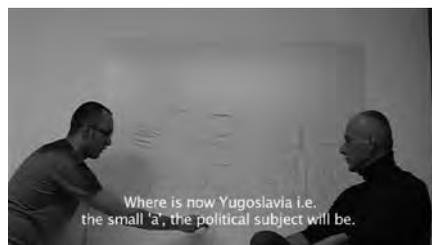
Mathem 10, 11

Branimir Stojanović: You mean it offers this to Yugoslavia?

Damir Arsenijević: No, this is not a question of offering but of defining all of the four discourses, of positioning within each of these discourses and giving meaning to each position. Assuming positions is to establish the sign and the signified, so as to say, 'this is it'. In the multicultural scenario, Yugoslavia is in fact a set of ethnies, right?

Branimir Stojanović: You know, we cannot do it this way. We have swapped the places of the only four elements existing in the world and introduced some completely arbitrary entities. You say that S1 is the ethno-national elite, S2 is the ethnie, as its product, and then you say that People is in the place of the subject and in the place of the waste is Yugoslavia, practically unnecessary.

Milica Tomić: I think we headed the wrong way. Let us return to the identification code we declared a matheme and how it appears once declared a matheme. Let us start from there. Let us start with the lost subject. First desubjectivated, this subject disappears the moment it was killed. It is then brought back through a system of science, as a code, which is gradually ascribed an identity. What does the act of declaring this code a matheme really mean? What does it represent?

Damir Arsenijević: That would make sense. I am thinking about what Branimir said, that we cannot continue this way. There is sense in the fact that we ran after the People, after Yugoslavia, after…

Branimir Stojanović: There is, certainly.

Damir Arsenijević: The ethnie was certainly produced, at least in Bosnia, in relation to genocide.

Branimir Stojanović: That is what I am saying. And how did the other ethnies come about?

Damir Arsenijević: What, other ethnies?

Branimir Stojanović: Within Bosnia today, the Muslim still has the same function he had within Yugoslavia. Today.

Damir Arsenijević: The Muslim still has the same… what? Can you repeat that?

Branimir Stojanović: The same position he had within Yugoslavia he now has within Bosnia itself.

Damir Arsenijević: How does the Muslim have that today?

Branimir Stojanović: The Muslim has a double role, just like in Yugoslavia. He was a Muslim and a Yugoslav, practically the only guarantee of Yugoslavia. This was the split within the Yugoslav Muslim. Today, within Bosnia, he is split into a Bosniak and a Muslim.

Damir Arsenijević: Yes, but what then is a Bosniak? The Bosniak is in fact an ethnie, an attempt at creating…

Branimir Stojanović: … an integrative ethnie, universal unitary glue. The Bosniak is meant to be the glue, just as the Yugoslav was.

Damir Arsenijević: Capital 'M' must become the Bosniak.

**Branimir Stojanović:** Yes, the Muslim ought to be fused into the Bosniak.

Damir Arsenijević: … into Bosniak, so as to enable this ethno-national function. The Muslim cannot be a People. He cannot be what he was in Yugoslavia - he is reduced to being an ethnie.

Milica Tomić: Where?

Branimir Stojanović: In today's Bosnia.

Milica Tomić: To be one of the ethnies. He cannot be a People?

Damir Arsenijević: And again, whose perspective is this from? From the perspective of the master. This is about the Bosniak assuming the place of the victim, about a subjectivation in relation to genocide. A kind of subjectivation of the bones in relation to genocide, as in "these are Bosniak bones",
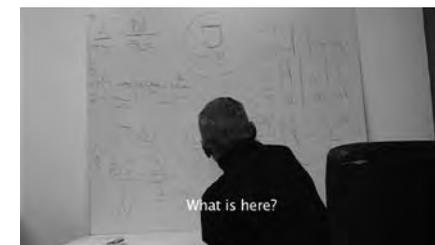
Mathem 12

or rather "these bones are ethnic bones".

Milica Tomić: This is what they become.

Damir Arsenijević: Those bones, in the discourse of the master, can only be ethnic bones. They cannot be any other bones.

Milica Tomić: Or rather, the bones of the one from whom the capital 'M' [Yugoslav Muslim] was taken and who is instead forever inscribed with the small 'm' [denigrated Muslim]. Therefore, the Muslim is the victim. The Muslim is the victim because the capital 'M' was taken from him?

Branimir Stojanović: Because he was desubjectivated.

Milica Tomić: The Yugoslav Muslim with a capital 'M' is the victim, because this capital 'M' was taken from him. This is how he was desubjectivated.

Damir Arsenijević: I said that this cannot be such an easy relationship - something must remain.

Branimir Stojanović: Wait, what about the ideology of ethnification? Who is the producer of the ideology of ethnification?

Damir Arsenijević: Well, fuck it! In the end, it is Europe! Yugoslavia was an anomaly.

Branimir Stojanović: I am saying the same to you.

Damir Arsenijević: Or Europe's unconscious. But we are speaking about different logics, meaning different ideologies.

Branimir Stojanović: Absolutely. You have three different sequences.

Milica Tomić: Pardon me.

Damir Arsenijević: A Serbian soldier could only ever kill a Yugoslav Muslim once he ceased being a Yugoslav Muslim.

Milica Tomić: That means that he was already a victim, even before he turned into the victim. The whole process of demonising Muslims is contained in the act of taking the capital 'M' away, in changing the capitalisation.

Damir Arsenijević: This is what we have written. The small 'm' [muslim] in an ideological constellation becomes the capital 'M', and then in another constellation it becomes 'Bosniak' and 'bones'. What is that, Branimir?

Branimir Stojanović: This is Europe, Yugoslavia, the People and the ethnie.

Milica Tomić: Which discourse is this?

Damir Arsenijević: Which is impossible between Europe and…? Between S1 and S2? The People is impossible. But which people, Branimir?

Branimir Stojanović: People as People - People as the political category.

Milica Tomić: This is the discourse of the master.

Damir Arsenijević: But that is People, not an ethnie.

Branimir Stojanović: Yes, and not the ethnic people. This is People, the political People.

Damir Arsenijević: Political? Let us then say that 'N' is the political People.

Branimir Stojanović: Yes, yes, the political People.

Milica Tomić: What is this Branimir - is this the discourse of the master?

Branimir Stojanović: Aha!

Milica Tomić: Is that the discourse of neoliberal politics?

Branimir Stojanović: Yes, yes! It is peculiar, very peculiar, that liberal politics representing multiculturality is, in fact, the result of the ethnies in the end. Do you understand?

Milica Tomić: Where the People no longer exists, but is an ethnie?

Branimir Stojanović: What is repressed…

Milica Tomić: … is the political People, in fact. Well, that is, as one might say, logical. And what is this capital "E" below?

Branimir Stojanović: Europe.

Milica Tomić: And what is below - Yugoslavia?

Branimir Stojanović: Yes. But perhaps we might need to reverse this.

Damir Arsenijević: Europe there and Yugoslavia…

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Branimir Stojanović: Europe and Yugoslavia, the political People and…

Damir Arsenijević: … the ethnie. Let us see now the discourse of the analyst, for that is the fine line…

Branimir Stojanović: There is an 'e' in the place of the producer.

Milica Tomić: Small 'e', ethnie.

Branimir Stojanović: What is here?

Damir Arsenijević: Yugoslavia.

Branimir Stojanović: And here is…

Damir Arsenijević: … the political People.

Branimir Stojanović: … the political People, and here is Europe.

Milica Tomić: The tape ran out again. I'll turn this off.□

Mathem 15

Grupa Spomenik- Repeating the Dissociation

Damir Arsenijević

From when it started collaborating with theorists in Bosnia and Herzegovina in 2008 to its break-up in 2012, Grupa Spomenik ('Monument Group') internalised and repeated the mechanisms and logic of the dissociation and collapse of Yugoslavia in its work. This paper reflects on how and why this happened, since these four years from 2008-2012 are crucial to understanding important break-throughs and disavowals that the group's work made possible. More importantly, these four years of Grupa Spomenik enable the emergence of parallel histories of the dissolution of various artistic, theoretical and psychoanalytic group dynamics throughout Yugoslavia.

In the summer of 2008, Grupa Spomenik set up the editorial board of the newspaper Mathemes of Re-Association with the following statement:

The Monument Group is establishing the Editorial Board of the newspaper, which will start working on 26. September 2008, on the opening day of the 49th October Salon, and finish on 9 November 2008, on the closing day of the exhibition.

After two months of work in the exhibition space, the editorial board will publish the newspaper Mathemes of Re-Association, which will inform about, and cover the effects of dislocation of the scene of contemporary science and theory from Bosnia and Herzegovina, into Serbia, that is to say, the editorial board space will serve as an intermediary in the debates initiated by these two discourses within Serbia's public and intellectual space.

In the center of the debates are the following concepts: missing persons, victims, mathemes, traumas, and testimonies - concepts that originated through the discourse of contemporary science and theory in Bosnia and Herzegovina. By dislocating of the scientific and theoretical community from Bosnia and Herzegovina into Serbia, a space is being created for the discussion and collaboration with scholarly, administrative, and theoretical community, and interested public in Serbia.

Within the editorial board space, the content of the newspaper will be presented, considered, and developed in two distinct registers:

-Contemporary criminological-forensic scientific community of the International Commission for Missing Persons (ICMP - Sarajevo/Tuzla/Lukavac). During twelve years of its work, using the achievements of complex forensic processes related to the recovery and identification of persons missing from the Srebrenica genocide, ICMP has developed a forensic method of re-associating missing persons; as well as the unique administrative technique of managing post-war traumas. This method of work has become the globally accepted model for identifying missing persons; it is being used in the cases of missing in the war in Iraq, in the terrorist attack on the World Trade Center, in establishing identity and number of persons missing during the Spanish Civil War during the 1930s, but also for identifying victims of natural disasters: the tsunami in South Asia, hurricane Katrina in the US State of Louisiana, and the typhoon Frank in The Philippines.

-Register opened by the youngest generation of theorists of politics and culture of memory, witnessing about trauma, and emancipatory policies from Tuzla and Sarajevo. Lectures and debates will open up a field of criticism of political practices of regimes of knowledge and power, placed around the issue of missing persons with regard to the work of the ICMP. This should initiate a debate with international trauma management instances: scientific institutions, forensic-criminological and juridical communities from the perspective of the anthropology of law, cultural production, and literature.

The Monument Group, 2008, September

Damir Arsenijević, culture theorist; Darinka Popmitić, artist; Svebor Midžić, culture theorist; Branimir Stojanović, theorist of psychoanalysis; Milica Tomić, artist.

The main topic of the work of the Monument Group is the politics of memory.

The main working axioms of the Monument Group are:

- discussion = monument;
- there is no memory without politics

The main working axiom, discussion = monument, the Monument Group realizes through developing a strategy of the production of autonomous discussion space, where a debate about ideology and politics of the 1990s wars in the former Yugoslavia is possible.[1]

What did the dislocation of insights and concepts, forged by the theoretical scene in Bosnia and Herzegovina, in Serbia generate? It generated a different way of re-assembling ourselves beyond the fixed gaze of the perpetrators of crimes and enabled us to pose questions about our capacities as a collective to work together on difficult topics. How can we and how do we associate labour and how do we translate the burden of associating such labour into value? All these remain fundamental questions.

The final sequence of the break-up of Grupa Spomenik was in its second collective encounter with the Goldsmiths-based Forensic Architecture framework in 2012. The split that emerged in the group concerned the ethics of a visit by a gathering of international students to a former concentration camp in Bosnia and Herzegovina. Grupa Spomenik was divided over this question between those of us coming and working in Bosnia and Herzegovina and those of us working and living in Serbia. The words of some of the students at CZKD in Belgrade in April 2012 still echo: 'But we were promised a visit to the camp!' The split, in my opinion, could best be described in the words of Branislav Jakovljević, who writes about the changes in participatory performance:

If participatory performance emerged as a response to rapid industrialization, only to be co-opted by the cultural and entertainment industries, it finds its renewed meaningfulness and efficacy in regions of rapid deindustrialization. New forms of sociality forged in these places remind us that participation is non-synchronized and ex-centric. It insists on solidarity instead of synchronicity, on collaboration instead of manipulation, on engagement instead of interactivity, on distribution instead of accumulation, and on an ethics of involvement instead of aesthetics of immersion.[2]

The split in Grupa Spomenik was between those who insisted on the "ethics of involvement" as opposed to those who embraced the "aesthetics of immersion".

The "ethics of involvement" found its ground in Bosnia and Herzegovina in the DITA factory barricade in Tuzla in 2012 and in subsequent protests in this country in 2014. Other contemporaneous significant splits included the split in the Belgrade Psychoanalytic Society and the split in Učitelj neznalica.

How do we learn from these splits, seemingly disconnected but very much entangled?

Any learning will have to start from the position - Wo Es war, soll Ich werden ('Where it was, I shall be') - in order to return again to what Grupa Spomenik posited: "Where the genocide was, there shall the political subject be" - only this second time hopefully not as farce.□

References
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2. Branislav Jakovljevic, 'For an Art of Participation: Common goods for the commons', *Performance Research* 23 (4-5), 2018: 213

The Queerness of Memory

Ana Hoffner
Excerpts from
"The Queerness of Memory"

For many years now, I have had the shits. It started as a sudden incident, without a cause or explanation. It has become unstoppable and it has not changed for a long time. The descent of my body has become a constant occupation of my life. Next to writing, researching, having relationships, spending time with people in public and private contexts, I am forced to repeatedly think about looseness and find ways to deal with it. Having the shits is not just a problem of the body, it is maybe even more about psychic pain than physical. The condition I'm in has changed what I do and how I think. I'm not exaggerating when I say that shit has shaped my behavior and influenced my fantasies and desire for many years now. At some point, I started dreaming of scenarios enabling me to give myself up completely. Those fantasies were about becoming a bottom for someone who would check my shits. I wished for someone to take control over my body, someone who could make decisions about my physical processes instead of me. How would it be if someone influenced the consistence of my shit by manipulating my intestines, by introducing a different time and frequency to my shitting? I imagined this as a situation in which my mind would no longer be involved in my bodily actions, I would be taken care of and satisfied no matter if I wanted to produce a painful watery looseness or an easygoing well digested piece of shit. Of course, this would require a great deal of trust in the other, a strong bond in both pleasure and violence. Apart from this fantasy (or maybe it is part of it) there is also the utopian thought, that perhaps one day I would stop to shit forever. A life without shit would spare me the daily sight of my disgusting outcomes, I would forget the smell of shit, and most importantly my body would stop hurting. I would be relieved from all of this information I have to constantly deal with: that my body has knowledge about something that I don't have. That it records, collects and remembers influences I cannot fully be aware of.

For a long time having the shits made me feel like I was losing my body. In fact, my impression was that my body had given up on me, and that my only reaction could be to lose interest in the body in return. My physical dissolution was followed by a strong dissatisfaction with everything that seemed to be given or unchangeable. It was as if I had to search constantly for new areas of manipulation, new challenges to develop new scenarios of becoming bottom. As much as I slowly lost interest in bodily issues, the more I discovered the meaning and the function of the voice. I started wondering if 'the voice' in its ephemerality could serve as a better projection site than 'the body' for my fantasies of giving myself up. Would it be possible to find an external carrier to make decisions for me, someone who would manipulate my voice and my speech? Could someone make my voice sound different? Could I then finally stop being occupied by the burden of having a voice and the urge to use it? Although being of a different, less physical quality, the voice had always stressed me out. As much as I wanted my body to be lifted and released from its horrible habit of producing shit, I wanted to be liberated from the pressure of having to speak up, to claim my needs and my rights on my own and to be responsible for my actions. I imagined someone who manipulated my voice as the material component of what I say and how this manipulation would retroact on my speaking and eventually give me relief.

Those fantasies were so strong that I increasingly involved myself in projects which would destabilize all my physical components - and therefore also my voice. For example, I started to take testosterone. I wanted to radically reorganize the way my muscles, my organs, my hair, and in the end also my voice, were constituted by means of an external substance. I was obsessed with the idea of distancing myself as much as possible from the body I used to have, from the voice I used to speak with. Taking testosterone felt like the answer for my longing for an experiment with an open end. The physical changes I then experienced opened a whole new field of thinking that I'm still struggling with and trying to grasp and understand. Although I had a utopian perspective, my undertaking has also been very ambivalent: taking testosterone is not an exclusively positive instrument for the creation of a new body. It is a drug that at that time made me hopeful that I would reach my goal of ultimately distancing, alienating and thus anaesthetizing myself. I was interested in the desire as well as in the painful impossibility of forgetting, erasing and neglecting one's own body, and all the wishes and fantasies that come along with it. At a certain point, I was no longer able to pathologize my condition nor my own longing to neglect my body. I had to work with both.

It is this embodied constellation of being under heavy control and wishing for a different kind of control that is both the starting point and the closure of my reflection on the period after 1989. It began only after 2000, when I slowly but regularly returned, emotionally and physically, to Yugoslavia. The only thing was that Yugoslavia was not there any more, and, again, I was the last one to know that. What I found instead was a very diverse group of people who, in spite of their differences, were all completely stressed out with transition. It was not the transition from one gender to another that I encountered, but a complex social and political process. The main occupation for almost everyone between Ljubljana, Zagreb, Sarajevo and Beograd was how to become part of the European Union (the idea of Europe had been replaced by the European Union around the same time). When I went back I didn't want to talk about this new problem at first. I wanted to know about everything I had missed since 1989. And I wanted to get together with all those I wasn't able to meet before, especially dykes, butches, and all the rest. But rather than fulfilling my wishes for reconnection, I had to reformulate my own questions and desires because of the reality I had found. My impression was that there had been no time to reflect on the wars before or right after 2000. The geographical distance from Yugoslavia that I experienced as a migrant in Austria was not the cause for the absence of a suitable language about the war, however. The same situation was experienced by everybody else. Transition, as an actual process of the integration, evaluation and establishment of a completely new society, had replaced any productive discourse, any remembrance of the war that could have reestablished the relationships that were lost due to the war. This process of forceful transformation involved everyone who had a connection to the territories of Yugoslavia in new violent scenarios, irrelevant of whether they were living inside or outside of the newly defined countries. The new thing about these situations, which emerged after 2000, was that they had visibly shifted towards queerness.

Since 2001, when a group of Serbian nationalists attacked queer people in a public space who attempted to hold a Pride celebration, homophobic violence in Eastern Europe suddenly became a topic in Serbia on a broader and more public scale than ever before. Its perception and interpretation quickly became part of the politics of European integration, as the degree of tolerance and the security of minority rights were requirements for EU membership. This integration process happened both inside and outside EU borders simultaneously, putting pressure on migrant populations, particularly in Germany and Austria.

When I came back to Vienna after a queer festival in Belgrade in 2008, I had the chance to read something in my first language in a public space, for the first time in my life. "Ljubav zasluž uje respekt" (Love deserves respect) was printed on large posters hanging all over the city. The posters were part of a campaign against homophobia, adopted by the helpline Courage for same-sex and transgender ways of living of the LSVD (an association of lesbians and gays in Berlin Brandenburg). They were rolled out in public space as well as in schools, youth centers and youth clubs, in Berlin and later in Vienna. The campaign was co-funded in Vienna by the municipal authorities, who are responsible for matters of integration and diversity. It was aimed at contributing to the development of strategies against homophobia and intolerance - especially in migrant communities. The

message that love deserves respect was written in Serbian/Croatian/Bosnian and Turkish on a background of kissing couples whose gender and racial affiliation had been picked with utmost care to suggest a loving togetherness despite/due to differences. Homophobia in Eastern Europe was seamlessly connected to migrant communities, the source of violence being very clearly targeted by national and racial identity. The posters made evident how the migrant body was divided: on one hand as the homophobic perpetrator who had to be addressed in his mother tongue, on the other as the potentially violated victim of homophobic violence. Both had to be saved, cured or transformed; both were a target of intervention.

It seemed to be my language, but it was not my voice. It seemed to be queer, but it was not. In fact, the voice of someone who had experienced war, transition, violence and/or migration was absent in this public 'fight' against homophobia. Instead, what was visible for everyone who had witnessed the representation of the wars in Yugoslavia throughout the 90s was that the body of war had been replaced by the queer body (or what was understood to be queer after 2000). It was no longer the picture of emaciated masculinity behind barbed wire, the stories about raped Bosnian women that were circulating, it was the beaten up or killed queer person from exactly the same region. It seemed to be, again, impossible to address all the urgent questions that arise exactly from this shift: How has the historical period after 1989 affected these subjectivities and their voices, in particular, those who were neglected as victims of war in the 1990s and stigmatized as the violated queer body after 2000? How has the eradication, effacement and forgetting of Eastern European histories dismissed or allowed the finding of one's own voice, the navigation through and articulation of the experience of the transitional period, both as the collapse of socialist systems and the integration into the new value system of the European Union? What are the modes and means of articulation within historically shifted institutions of gender, sexuality, race, psychic and physical ability for a subject being repeatedly in transition?

The fact that the war time body has been transformed into the queer body in peace time underlies a fundamental process of disavowal. This was in fact the first indication for me that I'm afflicted by, and working within a discourse of trauma which is so hard to approach that its very reappearance, its continuation (although under different signs) must be neglected, disavowed, pushed away - publicly. What I was interested in, and what I'm still searching for, is a different kind of voice, one that would not simply remember and reestablish its connection to the past by overcoming its own negativity, but a voice that could work with its own ability to disavow. What is or what could be the productivity of disavowal in the sphere of queerness and violence, during and after the wars of the 1990s? And what would happen if the process of transition itself were disavowed?[1] What kind of practices or objects of negotiating the traumatic experience would arise from that?

In their dictionary - The Language of Psychoanalysis - the psychoanalysts Jean Laplanche and Jean-Bertrand Pontalis explain the connection between disavowal and fetishism, which is crucial for the understanding of the relationship between Europe and its Other, as I will show later.[2] They state that, for Freud, disavowal is "a mode of defense which consists in the subject's refusing to recognize the reality of a traumatic perception."[3] What is refused is mainly the perception "of the absence of the woman's penis."[4] In this definition it is possible to see how Freud conceptualized trauma as an integral part of subjectification and not exclusively as an external event. Trauma (and hence disavowal) arises because of the inability to accept (gender) difference or to understand that there is a reality different from one's own. One could also say that what is disavowed is the fact that becoming a subject happens in different modes and terms. Laplanche and Pontalis question very precisely the "hypothetical 'fact of perception'" (the so-called lack of a penis) and push the act of disavowal back to the subject's psyche.[5] The 'lack' is thus not a fact of external reality any more but a presumption of the disavowing subject.

But what is especially interesting is that structurally, disavowal is not generally dismissed by Freud or by those who continued to work with disavowal as a figure of thought.

This is possible because the process of disavowal is not the same as repression (which is an unconscious process, beyond the subject's control). Freud knew that the refusal of what he called external reality is, paradoxically, not neglected, but acknowledged by the disavowing subject. What emerges from this situation is fetishism. And what is typical for the fetishist is that s_he is very well aware of the simultaneous refusal and acknowledgment of the absence of the penis (or any other sexualized object). The fetishist knows that hir fetish is not what s_he makes out of it 'in reality', but this self-awareness would never change or put hir desire in question. The fetishist is constructing and disavowing hir external reality.

Hence, theorizing about the fetish has been developed by a larger number of queer, feminist and postcolonial thinkers. Postcolonial theorist Homi K. Bhabha has elaborated about this splitting of the subject in two (the fetishist knowing but still wanting hir object) into the figure of ambivalence in his book The Location of Culture.[6] What is (still) striking about Bhabha's theory is that he takes the division between Europe and its colonies as a fundamental ground to redefine actual global relations, which are mostly subsumed (and thus simplified) as cultural differences. By integrating psychoanalytical theory into colonial history, Bhabha proposes several figures of thought (such as ambivalence) that intervene in present-day social and political relationships between Europe and its Other. The period after 1989 could indeed be described through the notion of ambivalence, but also the ongoing transition after 2000 and the gap that has transformed the subject of war to the queer subject. The relationship between the European Union and those waiting on its threshold is one of an ongoing ambivalent character. But what is ambivalence exactly and how does it work?

For Bhabha, ambivalence is a powerful strategy to govern and establish colonial rule (the way Europe exercised power over its colonies for centuries), but also a strategy of subverting the mechanisms of this very rule. He describes first how the colonial governments produced a "desire for a reformed, recognizable Other as a subject of a difference that is almost the same but not quite."[7] This requirement was not simply fulfilled by the colonized, nor was it simply rejected or ignored. It produced colonial mimicry, a process of imitation as a double articulation, in which disavowal became paramount.[8] It is the disavowal of the imposed cultural norms that enables a process of imitating and mimicking the colonizers in order to become the "reformed, recognizable Other". But imitation always differs from the original and will never replace it, thus there can never be a successful or complete adoption of what the colonizers ask for. The imposed cultural norms are thus refused and acknowledged at the same time, and become floating fetishized objects.

Here again, it is important to understand disavowal as differentiated from repression. Bhabha refers to Freud in order to emphasize that disavowal is the "vicissitude of the idea" while repression is the "vicissitude of affect."[9] Disavowal is not to be mistaken as a neglect of cultural difference in general. Bhabha's use of the term is performed rather as a method of criticism, which does not engage in the reconstruction of the repressed or rely upon the originality of affect. According to Bhabha, disavowal questions the imposed cultural norms through a "strategy of ambivalence in the structure of identification that occurs precisely in the elliptical in-between."[10]

It doesn't allow for the identification with nor the neglect of one's own belonging to binary structures such as East/West, and becomes a fundamental element for the creation of a different articulation, one that is neither fully subjected nor fully liberated. 'Almost the same but not quite' seems like the perfect description of the process of Eastern European transition, as a site of cultural regulations in which the Eastern European subject had to learn to transform according to the expectations of the new social and political system. The most important demand of the discourse surrounding European integration was characterized by the condition of double temporality: one was asked to disavow one's own past (of totalitarianism, war, violence and later homophobia) and become a new subject, as if all that history had never happened.

But without completely embodying the Western history of capitalism, this new subject

References

1. As explained throughout this book, I understand the whole transitional period of Eastern European societies after 1989, after 2000 as a queer time: it has in fact already produced a queer voice, a voice that might enable us in the present to articulate the queerness of the past. And by that I don't only mean the wars in Yugoslavia, as they have reshaped a whole culturally diverse territory and established new national, political, social, and cultural borders. The anti-war activism that emerged in the 1990s (Women in Black being one of numerous examples) has found its continuation in queer activism after 2000 (the collective Queer Beograd being here another example).

2. Jean Laplanche and Jean-Bertrand Pontalis, The Language of Psychoanalysis (London: Karnac Books, 1988).

3. Ibid. 118.

4. Ibid.

5. Ibid.

6. Homi K. Bhabha, The Location of Culture (London: Routledge, 1994).

7. Ibid., 86.

8. Ibid.

9. Ibid., 132.

10. Ibid., 60.

Nach der Trans 1

Nach der Trans 2

Nach der Trans 3

could only be 'almost the same but not quite'. Imitating and mimicking the regulation of transition produces, therefore, constant necessary interventions in the politics of time. If transition is a time after totalitarianism that consists of rejecting the past, a time of post-ness, then we have to declare this time to be over by using the same strategy of temporal distancing - disvowing transition again and again.

After the Transformation
Video installation, colour/sound, 15:52, 2013.

The physical effects/repercussions vanished shortly after I stopped testosterone treatment, but my voice will remain changed. I decided to take lessons in voice training, not to achieve a clearly identifiable gendered voice, but to explore the ambiguous space in-between. Working with voice coach Iris Gattol became an almost performative practice based on physicality and embodiment, rather than a discursive form of knowledge production.

The documentation of this process led to the video installation "After the Transformation". I gathered the visual, textual and audio material imagining a scenario that actively constructs time, history, and memory rather than narrating a personal biography. The voice training had begun to structure itself more and more around the question of how to shift the performance of gender and to step out of the process of transitioning at the same time, of how to stop being a body in transition. I constantly reflected on this process, first through writing a text in which I formulated my experiences and wishes for a potential future, as well as a fictional past of the voice.

I included thoughts about the sociopolitical transformation after 1989 and the regulations of Eastern European transition since the fall of the Iron Curtain, but never mentioned the historical moment explicitly. In a next step I used this text during my voice exercises, which led to discussions with the voice coach about the possibility of referring to historical sociopolitical change through the transformation of voice.

I then documented this process with photography and sound, and eventually edited a video with all three components: the sound layer establishes continuity, while the still images are frequently interrupted by text fragments.

"After the Transformation" can be read as a fictional scenario about an interruption in both the transformation of gender and the dominant narratives of Eastern European transition. It's situated in an impossible present in which the field of performing gender seems to have been left behind. Iris Gattol and I display our interest in the material quality of sound and voice itself, of its ranges and pitches. Our practice negotiates the contemporary scientia sexualis of transgenderism, of that which defines, categorizes and classifies gender and sexual identities. And yet we are also situated in a double field of medical institutionalization and medical service, always socially and economically gendered. Who is paying for this treatment, and who is, in fact, treating whom? In the first image, Iris Gattol and I are facing each other; we both appear in feminine, tight blouses of a soft, almost white color. The setting is an undefined space. The still images appear in a flash, followed by the sound of a camera, the familiar sound of a photo shoot. The images disappear before any valid connection between the depicted bodies and the masculine/feminine voices can be made. I montaged voice and body in a way that does not allow for the illusion of their belonging together. In its function as documentation, the footage seems difficult to identify and thus unreliable. But what kind of voice does a viewer imagine when looking at gendered and racialized bodies?

The sound of a camera can also be heard in the video. I have placed it exactly at the moments when pictures flash up. The camera sounds function as the one reliable reference point during the documentation. The spoken text consists of fragmented dialogue sequences that are full of stumbling, interruptions, unfinished sentences and exercises with syllables. The text frames, appearing in moments of silence, are based on a more consistent narrative and introduce the historical context, however fragmented. The text is written from the coach's perspective and refers to a 'he', while I, the person in training,

speak from my own perspective, using 'me' and 'I'. Is this the body that belongs to the queer voice - the object of interest, as well as the target of an observing or instructing gaze? While the text itself talks about queer desires for ambiguity and uncertainty, it is written from an authoritative position, that of a representative of a medical institution. By making our voices difficult to correlate with the figures on screen, the work is an attempt to intervene in present-day visual memory concerning transgender appearances.

There is a shift in "After the transformation". When we start talking about the transformation of the European space after the Cold War, the main temporal signifier, the year 1989, is not explicitly named as the reminder of a historical trauma, but appears through embodied experience only. For example, there are moments when it becomes evident that the voice training takes place in German, thus it stays specific and cannot refer to any other socio-political or historical context. The training can only unfold in dialogue in relation to another language, and thus could also be seen as a setting for practising a Western European language. It is as if the video should 'forget' the painful events that happened during the radical change of a political and social system. The trauma appears only retrospectively and can only be seen and interpreted from the point of view of the present.

After the Transformation

Just now, there was this quality, not squeaking, but something masculine. … It's not like when I say 'hihi'; it's different. … It's the same pitch but it sounds different. … Here it is again. Could you start there; or is it too deep? … Let's see, we'll work on it. If it's too deep, we can begin higher. … Because at 'I started voice training' the voice is the lowest. At the end of the sentence the voice is the deepest.

> *'I started voice training.' … The shades of grey also fit quite well, because this is exactly how I want to read the text. … Should we do paragraph by paragraph?*

Let's do paragraph by paragraph.

After he had finished taking testosterone, after his muscles, his beard and his body hair had regressed, he started voice training. During the time of the transformation his voice had undergone changes, it had changed its tone and had gotten deeper. My instructions were supposed to strengthen his expanded vocal range, they were supposed to enable a fluent transition between extreme pitches. By studying modulation and variation his voice would be able to unfold its full range. For the transformation had not only opened up possibilities, it had caused a voice break. His voice would break, exhausted itself and cracked, then there was no voice at all. Voice loss.

It's already quite deep, is this the outcome you want? Or could it be a little bit stronger but higher?

> *It was maybe a bit monotonous now.*

But that's not unmasculine.

> *It should convey something ambiguous, ambivalent, difficult. It should convey something beyond the content.*

Then you should start higher, so you don't have to fall back on the lowest note. We can leave it a bit open and think that there is something behind, it does not sound like you are at your limits. You can start there and after 'voice training' I'll stop again maybe.

Through body workout and breathing exercises he realized soon that he could easily find his low voice. It was more about a process of constructing memory than exercising. He couldn't learn any new skills, but he could remember something that had until recently been unknown to him. While he located the memory of his voice, which obviously was part of his body but has not always been there, he could create his own history.

How does it feel?

> *Better, because it's louder.*
> *Maybe it's a bit too black and white, maybe the grey is still missing.*

Then let's make an intermediary step. I'll show you an exercise. … I don't know exactly what you want, probably it should not be so clear.

> *It should not be so clear because it's about the ambivalence and difficulty. The text is a narration,*
> *it is about telling a story and writing this story. But it is not only about writing one's own story,*
> *but about how history is written. There are the connections of what I told you before: voice, body,*
> *government body. It should all resonate in this ambivalence, ambiguity, difficulty. It should be*
> *inscribed into this tone and not just conveyed by narration.*

Then I think this sound, the one you just had, fits perfectly because it allows for both. If it's too low, it's too forced into a masculine direction.

The voice training took place in a dialogue with me and therefore in a relation to another language. It made him imagine how this story could look like and how he might be telling it, after he had developed his low voice in another language, in a language, which could give him a new past. He imagined how he would have constructed a memory, which was more than a simple practice and how he could have found a way of remembering that was not there before.

> *I'll try again, I'll read the next paragraph. … I'll try louder. … Is it better?*

It sounds a bit intense, but it resonates better.

His story was about a transformation, at a time, when the transformation was long over. History had turned the transformation into the past by constructing a memory. After the transformation his new voice had gained a new history. Having studied modulation and variation, it could unfold its full range and fluently transition between extreme pitches. The construction of memory had enabled the overcoming of the voice break. The construction of history had made a new present without remembering a time before the transformation.

> *When I talk about transformation, some complications should be introduced. I mean this sentence:*
> *My story was about… It is the transformation of the voice. But I mean the transformation after '89.*
> *The nineties and the transitional processes, all this should somehow resonate with this text.*

Then integrate it into your image.

> *Or in the next sentence it becomes even more apparent: History had turned…*

During the time of the transformation his voice had undergone changes, it had changed its tone and had gotten deeper. My instructions were supposed to strengthen his expanded vocal range, they were supposed to enable a fluent transition between extreme pitches. By studying modulation and variation his voice would be able to unfold its full range. For the transformation had not only opened up possibilities, it had caused a voice break. His voice would break, exhausted itself and cracked, then there was no voice at all. Voice loss.

I think the voice was much more full now. … I would like to try out something. Can you say 'ne-ne'. … It's about closing the vocal cords a little bit.

The voice training took place in a dialogue with me and therefore in a relation to another language.

And I love it, when it's squeaking. Now take the word "transformation" and try to build this into this position.

But this is very pressed…

For me this is not pressure, it's just sharp. If you say, it's about the collapse of the systems I don't know if something like this could work, something sharp. … Right, then you could do it like this, you could toughen your the voice. … Let's try this sentence: My story was about a transformation, at a time when the transformation was long over.

Now it was very exaggerated, but ok.

History had turned the transformation into the past by constructing a memory. After the transformation his new voice had gained a new history. Having studied modulation and variation, it could unfold its full range and fluently transition between extreme pitches. The construction of memory had enabled the overcoming of the voice break. The construction of history had made a new present without remembering a time before the transformation.□

The Spatiliaties of Inconsistency

Coco Fusco
Empty Plaza
2012

Inspired by the 2011 Arab Spring, Coco Fusco chose the empty Plaza de la Revolución in Havana as the site for her meditation on public space, revolutionary promise, and memory. Fusco's video punctuates views of the Plaza's current architecture with long takes documenting Fusco's passage through the vacant square, intermingled with archival footage depicting scenes from post-revolutionary Cuba.

"The absence of public in some plazas seemed just as resonant and provocative as its presence in others," Fusco noted. "Cuba's Plaza of the Revolution is one such place - a stark, inhospitable arena where all the major political events of the past half-century have been marked by mass choreography, militarized displays and rhetorical flourish. I decided to create a piece about that legendary site - an empty stage filled with memories, through which every foreign visitor passes, while nowadays many, if not most, Cubans flee."

above and below:
Coco Fusco
The Empty Plaza / La Plaza Vacia, 2012
Single channel video
Dimensions variable
Courtesy Alexander Gray Associates,
New York © Coco Fusco/Artists Rights
Society (ARS), New York

Coco Fusco, The Empty Plaza / La Plaza Vacia, 2012, Single channel video, Dimensions variable
Courtesy Alexander Gray Associates, New York © Coco Fusco/Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York

Ben Gravile
Quotations of Chairman Mao (part 1)

As I landed in Shanghai China I bought a copy of Quotations of chairman Mao (the world's second most published book after the bible) and started to read and photograph what I saw of new China.

A misinformed western perception of the east and china changed after a couple of days in Shanghai, as I walked around an up market area I saw a young western nanny pushing a Chinese baby towards a creche and then been in a nightclub where two europeans danced half naked for the crowd of young Chinese shanghai residents, or the advert showing cruises on a boat where westerners would serve you lunch and dinner and were at your beck and call. I had just left the propaganda museum when I saw the western nanny and had seen all the images associated with their quest to infuse a population of 600 million "poor and blank" Chinese to work for the sate and communism. I saw the image of land workers walking triumphantly from the fields and fat rich american imperialists suppressing african americans with beatings and low wages to the huge prints of the Chinese army bearing down on evil looking enemy soldiers. These were images I saw as a child often with a mocking description of the propaganda at hand, it was refreshing if unrealistic to see male and female land workers walking with purpose or pride and a belief after a day toiling on a collective farm. Growing up in England I never heard anyone say anything positive about the country I lived in, other than the heroic history of war and a royal family and the upper class who were for some reason better than other people, there was nothing positive about workers and the importance of people, all I saw was contempt from the state who had and still have a determination to destroy what little power the people have. It wasn't until the 1990's that I heard peoples opinion change and I heard people talk positively about England, by then workers unions and rights were virtually destroyed and the country had been sold.

The myth of china persists both in the country and outside, with a population of 1.397 billion (2016) and suppressed information and the great fire wall of china not allowing western web sites and news services, its hard to understand what china really is, there are clues, it has one of the highest suicide rates in the world, poor human rights and seeing adverts in Shanghai for the prevention of loneliness in the elderly the push towards a burgeoning middle class has fragmented society to the haves and have nots. The cultural change from the early nineties economically has created bustling cities with never ending adverts of glossy people with expensive products and a nightlife to match with clubs bars and restaurants open all night from cities that had very little to offer after six in the evening thirty years ago. A generation growing up under the single child policy (1979-2015) has seen a more independent youth growing up with an attention overload from parents and grandparents whose interests in western culture and african american culture has made electronic dance music and hip hop fuel a desire for change, increasing debt amongst the youth, and taste for western designs, its a sort of boom and bust with protectionism. And how does china's youth become creative if you are not able to question your surroundings and authority, this is why China are the best in the world at replicating products and manufacturing. Drive through a city and see all its hundreds of factories which supplies 60% of the worlds christmas decorations or a town where there is a sea of towers where they test the newly produced elevators that supply the thousands of high rise apartment buildings is an idea of the modern collectivism in china of long hours and poor wages for the uneducated and low skilled which fuels the middle class and elite. This seems to be the new capitalist mantra of China the exact same the west has peddled for time and desperately holds on to.

Book inserts, Quotations of chairman Mao (1966)

To Resist: The Dream of a Ridiculous Man

Kumjana Novakova

Visual essay

A brief note on 'voyeurs of the utopian through a resisting body' by Johannes Gierlinger, but also a brief note on some of our responsibilities in art today.

The beginning of the previous century was marked by dreams of never-ending progress and futuristic utopias. The century ended, however, with nostalgia for past times and anti-consumerist and degrowth movements. The present century cannot find a home in either of the two and is marked by the impossibility of articulating its own paradigm. The conflict can hardly be simplified to dichotomies such as modern/postmodern or capitalist/post-capitalist. Rather, the only characteristic of current times on which we can all agree seems to be that of ever-growing noise - the noise of eccentric modernities running independently of each other in time and space in a world that resembles a buzzing factory of nothing. Parallel temporalities and spatialities are the constantly sliding background against which we exist as fluid subjectivities whose identity is uncomfortably shaped by rejecting rather than choosing, discontent rather than content, and with a growing feeling of entrapment and anxiety. Drifting above wasted concepts and ideologies, confronted with rising right-wing groups and a failed left, the fluid subject develops defence mechanisms and constantly tracks escape routes in a search for eco-social justice, cultivating values and ways of relating to other people and to nature other than those embodied and reproduced by the totality of capital. The fluid subject goes off - rather than in - acting, choosing and forming 'off-spaces' (as in arts - spaces outside of the value-exchange system and the commodity world, used for the public and by the public only) and in some cases even pursuing life 'off the grid', i.e. unconnected to or served by publicly or privately managed utilities.

Thus, on the background of this, art and courageous imagination have come to be widely regarded as the last recourse for resistant subjectivities. Consequently, what are the responsibilities of art? Which are the forms the struggle assumes in art practice and theory? What is a revolutionary, radical art practice today?

The notes below are part of a conversation with Johannes Gierlinger which took place when Johannes accepted an invitation to submit a visual essay for this first issue of the reshaped art journal *The Large Glass*. Our collaboration and friendship had been mostly shaped by the questions above, mostly in our work in cinema. The background and the main focus of our dialogue is the art of cinema and the art of the image today, particularly within documentary and post-documentary sensibilities and methodology. The following notes and visual essay are our notebooks, diary-like entries, and represent an open invitation for all concerned to join the discussion.

1. To Resist

"She said that through the images of one body, perhaps one's own or the other's, we have the opportunity to realize that we are part of an opposition."

Ultimately, art and society belong to the same stream of history. So wrote Hohendahl,[1] building on Adorno's claim that art does not transcend history: art is a (specific) historic form.

An image, as an artwork, while reflecting on society, embodies society. A re-presentation of the present. As an artefact of the nowness. Even if the represented present is the value exchange world contradicting the very idea of art as such in its non-exchange value.

As an aesthetic embodiment of society, art stands in opposition to all that is 'anaesthetic', dull and numb. In its opposition to dullness or numbness, wouldn't aesthetic stand for responsiveness, for an ability to react, for an ability to counter-act? An ability to stand up. A human action on the public stage.

An ability to resist.

Consequently, could one define an artwork as a contemporary historical form with the function of resisting the present, resisting the society it embodies, as a human action on the public stage that offers alternatives?

To reshape the present and reform society - to act for the body of the future - one needs to resist.

Art becomes research, documentation, political contextualization. Resistance.

Showing an image is somehow an act of conserving the image, which is primarily a political act. The invisible becomes visible. The screen, or the dispositive, becomes a site of political and social resistance. The hope is that an alternative regime of information and consequently an alternative regime of knowledge production is created.

And, our ability to look and listen regenerates. Even if the resistant, emancipatory capacities are commodified by the all present capital, we regenerate the ability to still rethink resistance and emancipation.

We produce commonness, on the opposite of the common goods.

"[…] today the energies of freedom are emerging in us, and […] this is exactly the point where one can speak of art […] this is, so to speak, a kind of science of freedom."[2]

Freedom as a miracle of infinite improbability, and nevertheless possible.

2. Memory

"All of them would remember differently."

Memory. A term used for a variety of systems in the brain with different characteristics. In all cases, however, it implies the ability to reinvoke or repeat a specific mental image or a physical act.[3]

Not so recently, Rancière saw cinema as a history of illustrious figures - a form of history that preserves memory through its very being.

I imagine cinema as an archaeology of the present, excavating memories of the present from the debris of noise and creating the memory of the archive. The repository of all memories of the world, protected from the crouching noise of the totality of the capital. Meaning opposes noise.

We do not remember, we rewrite memory much as history is rewritten. Statues also die. We take an image, we create a memory - we show an image, we inscribe a memory - we preserve a memory. We project an image, inscribing it in the collective self, learning how to look at it and read it to the body of the future. We learn how to remember it. Successful remembering depends, as in Plato and Aristotle, on having a clean surface, a well-ordered background and clearly inscribed figures or images.[4]

Chris Marker asked how one can remember thirst?

History is that time in which those who have no right to occupy the same place can occupy the same image.

Memory is the space in the present in which those who have no right to occupy the same place occupy the same image. Those who struggle, who resist, take the image. Like anti-monuments of historical consciousness. As, "the tradition of the oppressed teaches us that the 'state of emergency' in which we live is not the exception but the rule. We must attain to a conception of history that is in keeping with this insight. Then we shall clearly realize that it is our task to bring about a real state of emergency, and this will improve our position in the struggle against Fascism."[5]

"He who had once begun to open the fan of memory, never comes to the end of its segments. No image satisfies him, for he has seen that it can be unfolded, and only in its folds does the truth reside."[6]

3. To Dream

"A sentence that perhaps includes the words revolution, failure and dream."

The infinite freedom of imagination. An adventure. Like an experience that disrupts the flow of our everyday life so as to crystallize its innermost core.
Sleep, as the last space we have outside of the system. Dreaming, as the last space of articulation outside of the capitalocentric vision.
Social daydreaming is a vocation.

An image of happiness? Is it an opposition or an experiment?

"The individual's images, his feelings, his mood belong to him alone, he lives completely in his own world; and being completely alone means, psychologically speaking, dreaming. […]
An individual turns from mere self-identity to becoming a self or "the" individual, and the dreamer awakens in that unfathomable moment when he decides not only to seek to know "what hit him," but seeks also to strive into and take hold of the dynamics in these events, "himself"-the moment, that is, when he resolves to bring continuity or consequence into a life that rises and falls, falls and rises. Only then does he make something. That which he makes… is history."[7]

"I will begin about my dream. Yes, I dreamed a dream, my dream of the third of November. They tease me now, telling me it was only a dream. But does it matter whether it was a dream or reality, if the dream made known to me the truth? If once one has recognized the truth and seen it, you know that it is the truth and that there is no other and there cannot be, whether you are asleep or awake. Let it be a dream, so be it, but that real life of which you make so much I had meant to extinguish by suicide, and my dream, my dream - oh, it revealed to me a different life, renewed, grand and full of power!"[8]

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voyeurs of the utopian through a resisting body

by Johannes Gierlinger

Page 139 - 149: Text and images by Johannes Gierlinger, 2014

Page 150 -151
Collage from various images and texts:
Map Bialystok, 1976
Archival material, Decentrum Squat Bialystok, 2005

Page 152
Collage from various images and texts:
Images destroyed Białystok, German Invasion, approx. 1942/1943
Various archival texts, approx. 1944
Portrait: Chaika Grossman - Jewish Partisan & Resistance Fighter
Portrait: Mordechai Tenenbaum - Leader of the Białystok Ghetto Uprising
Image Białystok Wegierko Drama Theatre, approx.1960
Image member of Esperanto Movement, approx. 1900

Page 153
Collage from various images and texts:
Image: Women on the Streets of Białystok, approx. 1932
Various archival textmaterial: Białystok Pogrom; Anarchist Movements
Group image: Anarchists Krynki, approx. 1905
Portrait: Anarchist Niomke Friedman, approx. 1905

Page 153 - 159
Text and images by Johannes Gierlinger, 2017
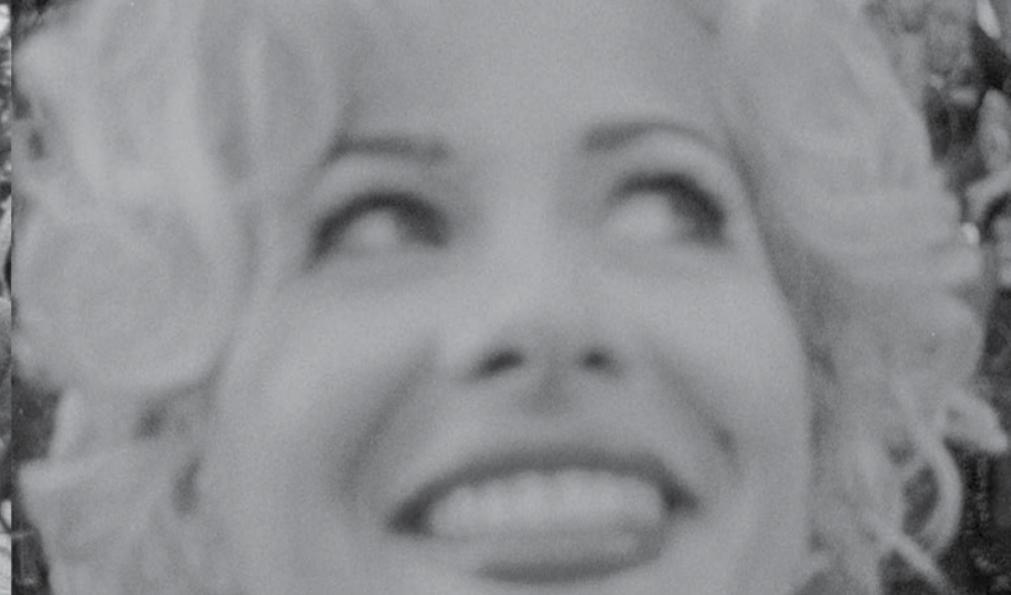
From Anglo-Norman *resistre*   to resist   to overcome   **The latin word re- + sistere**
Middle French *resister*   to withstand   to sustain   141
Latin *resistere*, from *re- + sistere*   to endure   to stand

If you are truly dividing the earth into zones, I declare this a new one. Time is out of whack. What will these impressions be like in a year's time? Perhaps it'll meld into other impressions? One of many stories. Maybe you never really arrive... you´re just venturing off anew. That applies to this city. A city that completed its first year of existence with the words: Nuevo Extremo. New Ending. I'll take it as written. New Ending. It´s a paradox, but it works. A beginning and an end are a decent prerequisite, someone once told me. What happens in between though? I was about to set out again, and that feeling pulsed through the people as well. They once again fascinated me. Something was in the air, but in our conversations we couldn't put our finger on it. So we started discussing what it feels like to pursue something that you are always a step behind. That shouldn't invoke a sad picture, quite the opposite actually. It was the old workers crossing the paths of younger people. The pictures are almost identical to the ones taken 30 years ago... at least I think so. I imagine pictures exist twice. Only the protagonists are younger, they of the future.

To voyeur the utopian with a resisting body

He wanted to get on the bus, but realized that neither he, nor the woman who stood next to him, fit into it.
He said: Maybe our bodies are too good to be crushed. Who likes masses of bodies?.
She said that through the images of one body, perhaps one's own or the another's, we have the opportunity to realize that we are part of an opposition. This thus resistant body leaves traces, traces that have inscribed themselves into itself this body and traces that remain on the path of this resistance: on you, me, them, him, her, us. These traces allow us to accept each other at a mutual sight: it is the body of history. It is the body of the future.
This body is one's own, it is the one next to you, above you, below you, it is the one who comes, who walks, who seems alien, who remembers, and who forgets, who seems familiar, who crushes, the one of the past, the future. The one of all cities. The one of all books. The one of the present, which is passing by right now. The one of all songs and of this: New Order - Dreams never end. (A moment we rarely realize.)
Then she moved to something different and said: I've transcribed parts of a movie, some with time code, some just like that, and in some parts I

do not know what time or code is. And with some parts I do not know what is readable and what is encrypted. How fortunate: We know not to know everything. Both looked at each other. At one point he looked at a child passing by, holding a hobbyhorse in her hands and a deep memory of one of his journeys returned. Now suddenly he started to speak, but he didn´t really speak, it was more as if she was reading a thought bubble aobove his head: As we drove down the hills of the City of Iquique a man in a yellow jumpsuite was riding a hobby horse. We passed by and Ignatius asked: Hey Amigo, are you crazy? The man answered: No I´m not crazy, but the horse is crazy. Then the man rode into the dark night.
She looked at him and continiued with her monologue. You remember. This body sticks on all sides. It screams: We are always resistant! We stick together. This body is our story. This story is resisting. This resistance can be absorbed by the gaze. This gaze is a voyeur. An avatar of gazes. One looks through theise eyes with an attitude of doubt, until it absorbs and makes one understand that there can be neither one nor the other, that there will be a picture before and after. AND maybe one in between. Rememeber the Chilenian city. Remember the guy and the horse. We are now looking different.
The traveler always says: Are

there any real avatars? Masks? Except for the short story he told, he did not say anything while she was speaking. She concluded: We now accept that we are not just

"voyeurs of the utopian through a resisting body"

but also

"voyeurs of the utopian by a resisting gaze".

He looked onto the floor and said nothing. Perhaps he doesn´t like his gaze.
Then she left while I was still standing there and observed the whole scenaerio.
But who was I?
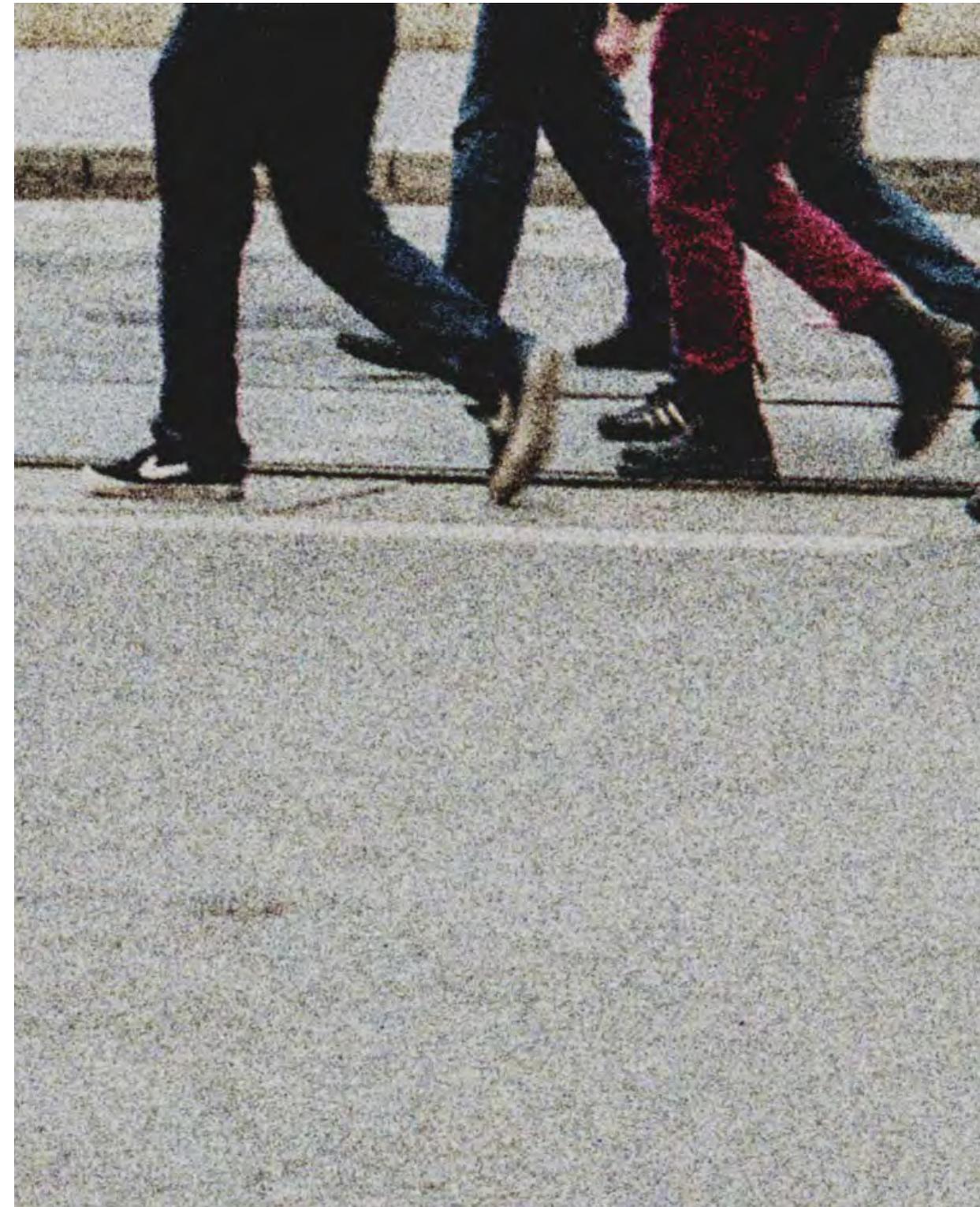
On May 17, 2014, she noted:
A group of people demonstrated against a radical right-wing rally in Vienna. On this day, the planned rally was prevented. On this day 4 stones flew. On this day pepper spray was sprayed... and this picture was taken. And this. On this day, this woman was arrested. On this day, this group continued after the demonstration ended. They are now 4 years older.

Critic

Etymology

Borrowed from Middle French critique, from Latin criticus, from Ancient Greek κριτικός (kritikós, "of or for judging, able to discern"), from κρίνω (krínō, "I judge)

Noun

critic (plural critics)

A person who appraises the works of others.
A specialist in judging works of art.
One who criticizes; a person who finds fault.
An opponent.
Obsolete form of critique (an act of criticism)

From Anglo-Norman *memorie*
from Latin *memoria*
from Proto-Indo-European *(s)mer*

related Ancient Greek μνήμη (mneme, "memory")
μέρμερος (mérmeros, "anxious")
μέριμνα (mérimna, "care, thought")

The english word memory
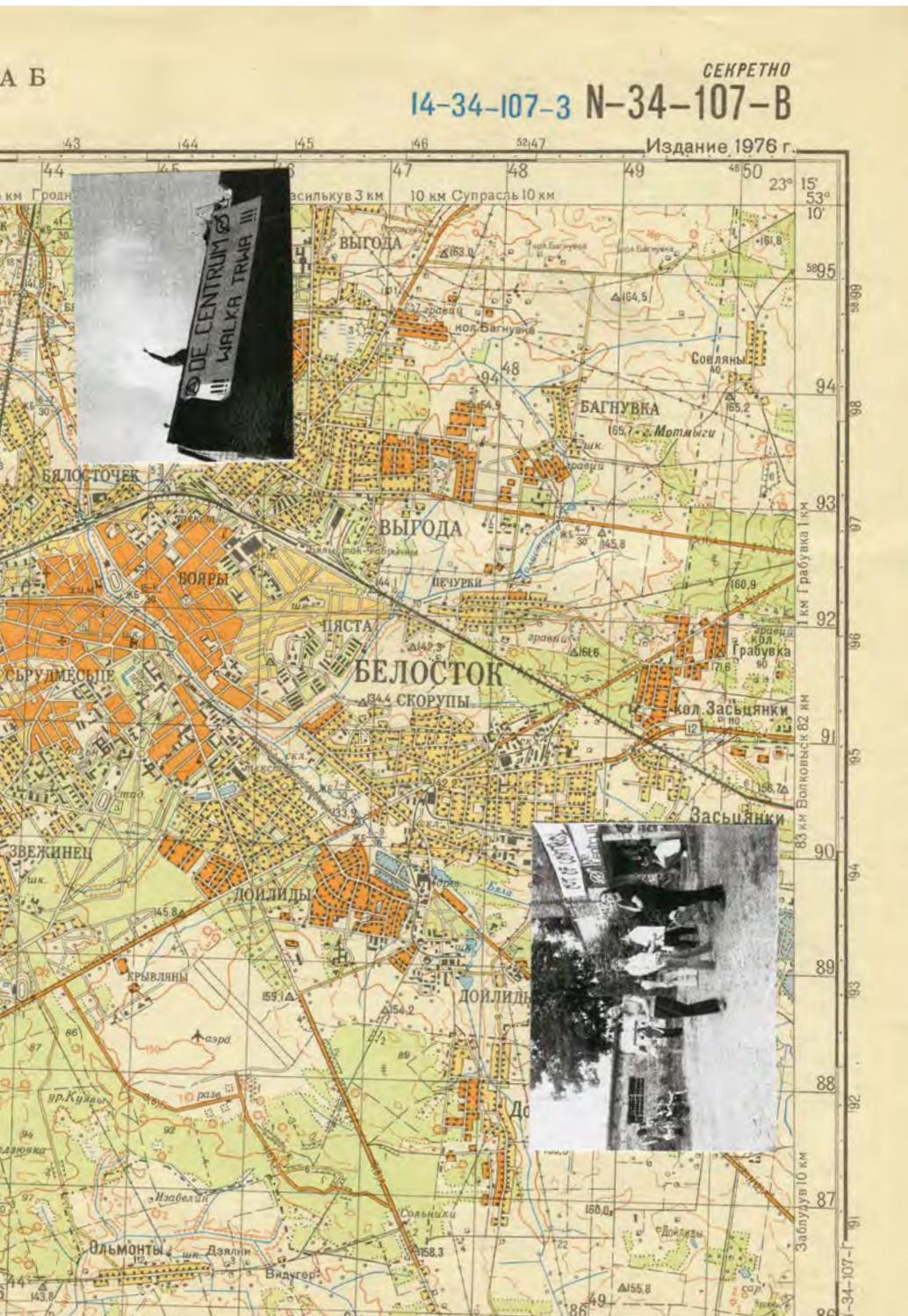
00:05:41,360 --> 00:05:44,200
An instant away,
in front of a old factory,

00:05:44,320 --> 00:05:47,120
a woman is reading
Shakespeare´s Hamlet.

00:05:47,400 --> 00:05:49,360
Words in Esperanto.

00:05:50,400 --> 00:05:54,360
Is there another language meaning
'the one who hopes'?

00:05:55,280 --> 00:05:58,920
Once, this city was the centre
of a great labour movement,

00:05:59,440 --> 00:06:02,600
and of an ethnic diversity,
where Jews, Poles, Russians,

00:06:02,760 --> 00:06:05,760
Germans, Belarusians,
Tatars lived together.

00:06:06,640 --> 00:06:09,320
It was called
'Manchester of the north'.

00:06:09,920 --> 00:06:12,240
This factory was part of it.

00:06:12,400 --> 00:06:16,360
Later part of the Jewish ghetto
erected by the Nazis.

00:06:16,520 --> 00:06:19,840
At the beginning of the 21st century

00:06:20,000 --> 00:06:22,560
it turned into an anarchist centre.

00:06:22,880 --> 00:06:25,840
They called it appropriately:
Decentrum.

00:06:26,280 --> 00:06:30,680
Most people remembering
the labour movement are dead

00:06:30,880 --> 00:06:34,640
and those who remember
the anarchist times have left.

00:06:35,120 --> 00:06:38,000
All of them would
remember differently.

Numerous acts of armed resistance, the building of a network of essential social services under the most difficult conditions, and a general strike are among the latest examples.

In Poland there is only one large ghetto left, in the city of Lodz, comprises over 10,000 Jews producing for Germany under the hardest slave labour conditions.

Several months ago the Germans began mass executions of Jewish workers here. The ghetto answered with a general strike. This succeeded, and the Germans were compelled to suspend the slaughter for some time.

Grim Struggle

One report retells a story of grim struggle last year by the last few thousand heroic workers of the Warsaw ghetto against the might of the German Army and police and storm troopers.

It also brings news of armed resistance in Bialystok and says the battle was "of the same rank as the Battle of Warsaw Ghetto." It lasted a whole month.

There were acts of armed resistance in other ghettoes also.

Even in the death camps of Sobibor, Belgec and Treblinka—murder camps with gas chambers installed for the mass slaughter of Jews—came revolts.

Treblinka, where German hangmen murdered hundreds of thousands of Jews, was captured and destroyed a few months ago by the Jews themselves.

Partisan Units

The Jews killed all the German and Ukrainian police guards, took their arms, set fire to all the build[ings]

http://a3.ec-images.myspacecdn.com/images01/81/ab886082fe1503869f5b6eeb625435e8/l.jpg

**an
idea of
history**

The anti-Jewish rioting at Bia[lystok] Russia, seems now ended. The [troops] are in full control, and in view [of the] outcry raised it is certain that the [au]thorities will not permit a renew[al of] the horrors witnessed at Bialystok entire region is greatly excited [and] to fear that the Bialystok massac[re] only the signal for a general att[ack on] the Jews throughout the pale [and] Poland, but if any such conspira[cy ex]isted it is too late to carry o[ut its] plans, as the most imperative ord[ers to] prevent further outbreaks have [been] issued to the governors and gov[ernor] general from St. Petersburg.

When the Associated Press [corre]spondent arrived at Bialystok the [riot] was already over, but on all side[s there] was revolting evidence of savag[e bes]tiality on the part of the blood-d[runk] mobs, which sacked and burned the Jewish houses, shops and stores. For seventy-two hours, with a slight abatement during the daytime, the mad orgy of blood and pillage went on unchecked. The inhumanity displayed would have done credit to the Mongol hordes of Genghis Khan in his conquests of China and central Asia in the thirteenth century.

At first police and troops urged on the mob, but finally, when dismayed by the bloody deeds accomplished, they reluctantly sought to obey the orders of their superiors to put an end to the work of the rapacious bands of roughs, who were so far beyond control of the local forces that regiment after regiment had to be thrown into the city be[fore] order could be restored.

[Du]ring the rioting the Jews were [hunte]d down by ferocious pursuers, [and] in the majority of cases, were [not con]tent with killing more victims, [but tore] them to pieces, like wild anim[als] while this was in progress [police] either stood idly by, or, as w[as] frequently the case, fired into [hous]es and shops where Jews were c[owering]

Getting Up a Case.

Whenever there is a "pogrom," the Russian officials never fail to declare that the Jews are the originators of the disturbance. The way in which evidence is manufactured to give colour to the assertion has been revealed by the recent arrest of an anarchist by the name of Bermann, who was charged with several attempts on the lives of police officials in various cities. In Ekaterinoslav he poured sulphuric acid on a police lieutenant, and the latter was naturally excited when he brought Bermann to the station. So Bermann made a clean breast of it, and said: "I have got two names, Alexieff and Bermann, the former when I have to play a Russian, and the latter when I have to be a Jew. My specialty is attacks on policemen, and I am employed by the secret service. So I attempted the life of the chief of police of Minsk with a revolver of poor make, aiming the wrong way. I was arrested and promptly discharged. So don't trouble yourself here, either, and let me go, for you will have to do so sooner or later." Bermann-Alexieff is one of the many employed by the police as State witnesses to prove that the Jews attacked the police, as was said in explanation of the Bialystok massacre.

AN ANARCHIST BOMB.

ATTEMPT ON A PREFECT OF POLICE.

LONDON, Monday, October 24.

An Anarchist outrage is reported at Bialystok, near the junction of the St. Petersburg to Warsaw and Konigsberg to Odessa railway.

A workman threw a bomb into the office of the Prefect of Police.

The explosion wrecked the office, killing the assassin and severely injuring several inmates of the offices.
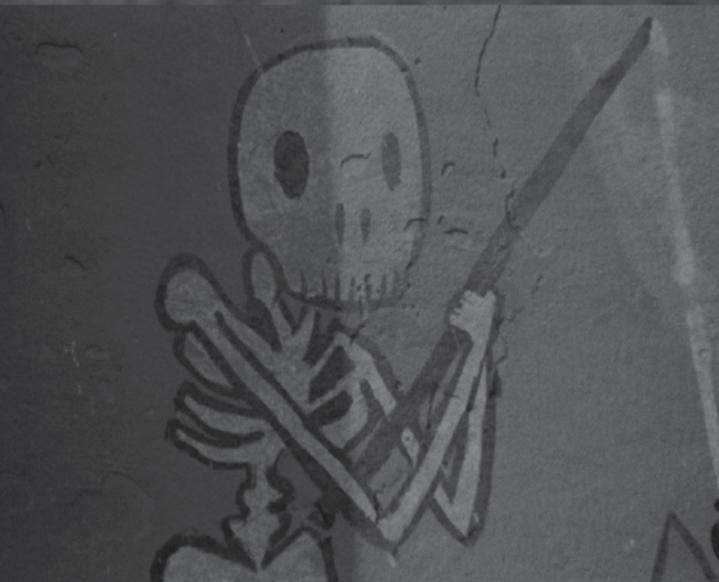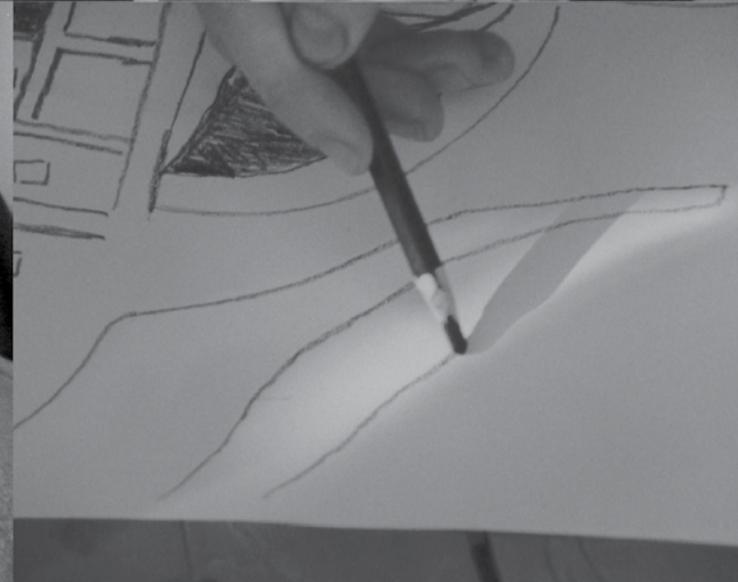
**a history
of ideas**

Perhaps from Proto-Germanic *draugmas*
deception, illusion, phantasm

Old Norse *draugr*
ghost, apparition

Old English *dream*
joy, mirth, noisy merriment, music

The english word dream

In a crowd of people, one hopes to find at least one answer to a question. An answer which is , if you listen carefully, formed from the sum of the individual conversations and word fragments to a coherent sentence. A sentence that perhaps includes the words revolution, failure and dream. I always said: The only revolutionary thought is to wake up the dreamer.

One could lay the images of the two cities on top of another and hope that the resulting image is one that has never been seen before. An image that confronts us, without being fragile. An image that looks back, like cities do. Gazes where you don´t borrow eyes, like in the Persian saying.. But instead trust one 's own eyes. One contemplates There are connections you have to generate. It seems like an error that one tries to theorize subjectivity, Psyche will be equated with space. Like a museum. Perhaps this picture should hang in a museum and the visitors would while looking at it decipher an encrypted part of their life.
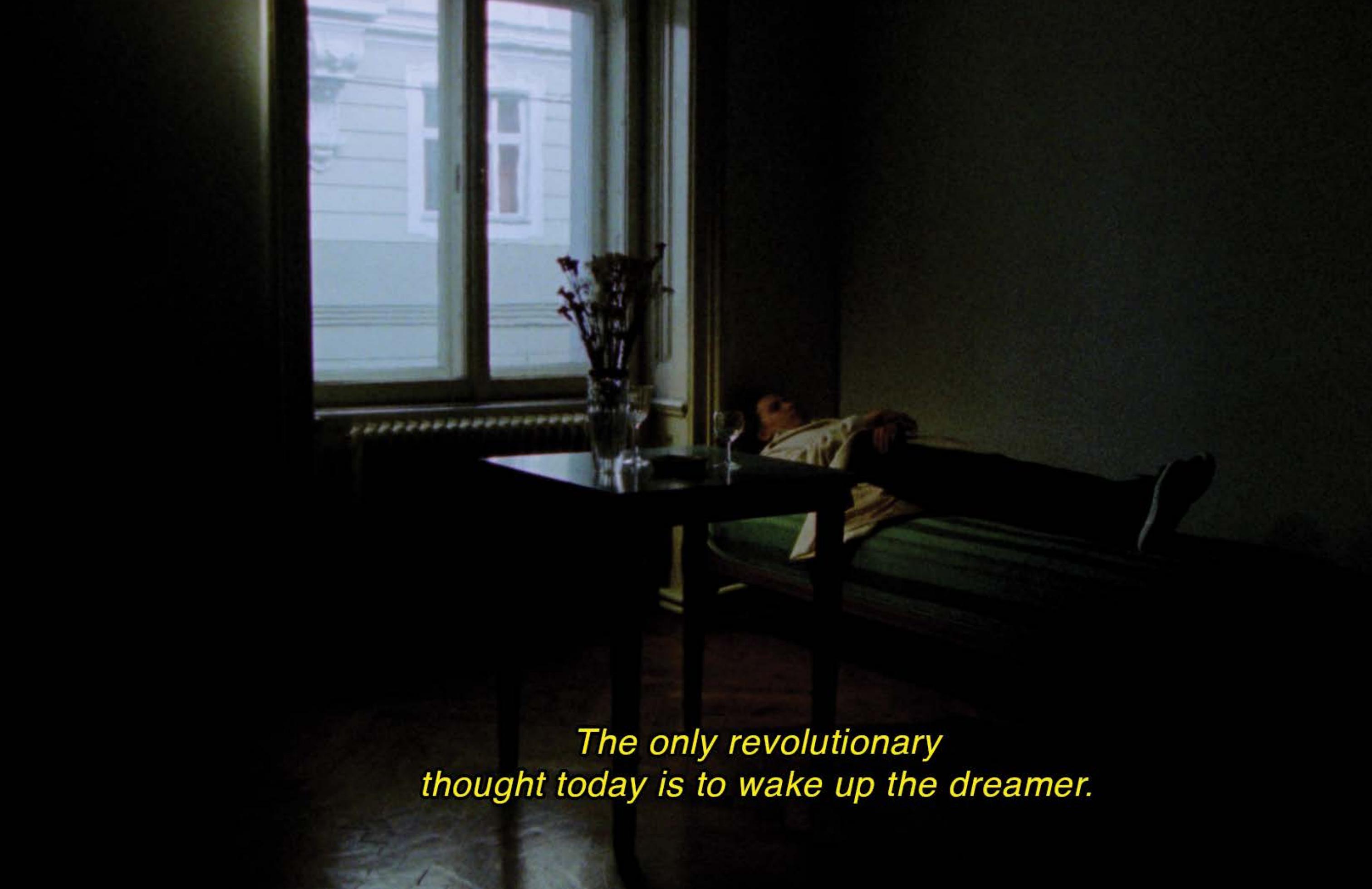
The only revolutionary
thought today is to wake up the dreamer.

All That We Have in Common

18 April 2018, Museum of Contemporary Art Skopje

The exhibition *All That We Have in Common* addressed aspects of uncertainty - including precariousness, vulnerability and existential unpredictability - in a variety of social, political and cultural contexts. Instability is causing great suffering throughout the world as people find themselves bereft of former social constellations and deprived of their rights, exposed to symbolic and material acts of violence - conflicts, transitions, labour abuse, migration, injustices and gender inequality. In these conditions of precariousness, the question arises whether it is possible to undertake practices directed towards a common good: Is it possible to cooperate in joint actions in a context where uncertainty is simultaneously 'common' to all but also the chief factor that separates us from each other? How can disparate and restless entities find ways to act in unity?

Eighteen artists were selected to display their works in this exhibition, present precariousness in a wide variety of contexts. The tragic issues addressed in their works include conditions of political manipulation, social misery and exclusion and cultural subjugation. Their works also invite us to engage in active self-exploration, digging into our experiences and attitudes in an effort to become more involved in the present.

The exhibition thus raises awareness of our shared conditions of uncertainty while enjoining us to commit ourselves to some motivated action to overcome this precarity. The selection of works inspires us to think about the ways we perceive current conditions and encourages us to think about how our personal vision, responsibility and involvement can be socially shared.

Ištvan Išt Huzjan: Earth Reflections (Odsevi zemlje) | 2015

Anri Sala:Long Sorrow | 2005 Video

Maja Bajevic: Arts, Crafts and Facts | 2015
Video

Maria Papadimitriou: Why Look at Animals?
AGRIMIKÁ, 2015 Video

Hristina Ivanoska: The missing document: performance no.8 (A letter form Lenin) | 2018

CONTRIBUTORS

Ai Weiwei is a Chinese contemporary artist and activist. His father's (Ai Qing) original surname was written Jiang (蒋). Ai Weiwei collaborated with Swiss architects Herzog & de Meuron as the artistic consultant on the Beijing National Stadium for the 2008 Summer Olympics. As a political activist he has been critical of the Chinese Government's stance on democracy and human rights. He has investigated government corruption and cover-ups, in particular the Sichuan corruption scandal following the collapse of so-called "tofu-dreg schools" in the 2008 Sichuan earthquake. In 2011, following his arrest at Beijing Capital International Airport on 3 April, he was held for 81 days without any official charges being filed; officials alluded to their allegations of "economic crimes". He is one of the leading cultural figures of his generation and serves as an example for free expression both in China and internationally.

Anthony Downey is an academic, editor and writer. He is Professor of Visual Culture in the Middle East and North Africa within the Faculty of Arts, Design and Media at Birmingham City University. Recent and upcoming publications include *Zones of Indistinction: Contemporary Visual Culture and the Cultural Logic of Late-Modernity* (forthcoming, Sternberg Press, 2019); *Don't Shrink Me to the Size of a Bullet: The Works of Hiwa K* (Walther König Books, 2017); *Future Imperfect: Contemporary Art Practices and Cultural Institutions in the Middle East* (Sternberg Press, 2016); *Dissonant Archives: Contemporary Visual Culture and Contested Narratives in the Middle East* (I.B. Tauris, 2015); and *Art and Politics Now* (Thames and Hudson, 2014). In 2019, he will launch a new series of books, *Research/Practice: 25 Artists/25 Projects* (Sternberg Press, 2019).

Forensic Architecture is an independent research agency based at Goldsmiths, University of London. The interdisciplinary team of investigators includes architects, scholars, artists, filmmakers, software developers, investigative journalists, archaeologists, lawyers, and scientists. Their evidence is presented in political and legal forums, truth commissions, courts, and human rights reports. Forensic Architecture also undertakes historical and theoretical examinations of the history and present status of forensic practices in articulating notions of public truth.

Stephen Duncombe is Professor of Media and Culture at New York University. He teaches and writes on the history of mass and alternative media and the intersection of culture and politics. He is the author of Dream: Re-Imagining Progressive Politics in an Age of Fantasy (The New Press, 2007) and Notes From Underground: Zines and the Politics of Underground Culture (Verso, 1997). He is editor of the Cultural Resistance Reader (Verso, 2002), co-editor, along with Maxwell Tremblay, of White Riot: Punk Rock and the Politics of Race (Verso, 2011), and writes on the intersection of culture and politics for a range of scholarly and popular publications. Duncombe is also the creator of Open Utopia, an open-access, open-source, web-based edition of Thomas More's Utopia and is co-founder and co-director of the Center for Artistic Activism.

Grant Kester is a Professor of Art History in the Visual Arts department at the University of California at San Diego and the founding editor of FIELD: A Journal of Socially Engaged Art Criticism. His publications include *Art, Activism and Oppositionality: Essays from Afterimage* (Duke University Press, 1998), *Conversation Pieces: Community and Communication in Modern Art* (University of California Press, 2004), *The One and the Many: Contemporary Collaborative Art in a Global Context* (Duke University Press, 2011) and *Collective Situations: Readings in Contemporary Latin American Art 1995-2010*, co-edited with Bill Kelley, Jr. (Duke University Press, 2017). His current book project is *Autonomy and Answerability: The Aesthetics of Socially Engaged Art.*

Maja Ćirić is an independent curator and art critic experienced in leading and contributing to international art projects. Maja's practice, that is based on terms of criticality and post-globalism, is a critique of the dominant curatorial geopolitics. Maja received a PhD in art and media theory from the University of Arts in Belgrade (Dissertation title: Institutional Critique and Curating). Maja's areas of concern span from curating as institutional critique through to the research of methodology and epistemology of curating, and to the international and transnational circulation of ideas and curating. Maja is a recipient of Lazar Trifunović Award for Art Criticism (Belgrade), CEC ArtsLink Independent Projects Award (New York), ISCP Curator Award (New York), Dedalus Foundation and Independent Curators International Curatorial Research Award.

MTL is a collective based in New York that combines research, aesthetics and activism with artistic practice. It includes artist and organizer Nitasha Dhillon and Amin Husain, lawyer, artist and organizer. MTL builds on the experiences and movement-generated theory produced recently to deepen solidarity, foster shared analysis, and produce formations that allow groups to retain the specificities of their struggles in coalition while moving together and separately towards decolonial freedom.

Steve Lambert is an artist who works with issues of advertising and the use of public space. He made international news after the 2008 US election with The New York Times "Special Edition,"a replica of the "paper of record" announcing the end of the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan and other good news. In the Summer of 2011 he began a tour of Capitalism Works For Me! True/False - a 9 x 20ft sign allowing people to vote on whether capitalism worked for them He is also the founder of the Center for Artistic Activism.

Dmitry Vilensky is an artist, curator, and author of numerous texts on contemporary art and activism. He is co-founder of the group Chto Delat and co-editor of the eponymous newspaper. In 2013, he co-founded the School for Engaged Art in St. Petersburg. Vilensky's practice embraces artistic projects, public actions, and seminars directed at the art of political narrative. With the art group Chto Delat, Vilensky has taken part in numerous exhibitions, conferences, seminars, and theatrical performances.

Rena Rädle & Vladan Jeremić are Belgrade-based artists whose research-oriented work comprises drawing, text, video, photography, installation and intervention in public space. In their collaborative practice Rena & Vladan explore the relation between art and politics, unveiling the contradictions of today's societies and developing transformative potentials of art in the context of social struggles. They engage with current debates and struggles in collaboration with social movements and disseminate their art works through reproduction in various media.

Bojan Ivanov is an art historian. He completed his graduate and postgraduate studies at the Institute of Art History and Archaeology in the Faculty of Philosophy at the University of SS Cyril and Methodius in Skopje. He has been publishing studies, reviews and essays on the Macedonian contemporary arts scene on the pages of the domestic daily press and art magazines and journals since 1983. He is a founder of *Mala Galerija* in Skopje.

Elena Veljanovska is a freelance curator and cultural manager. She graduated from the Institute of Art History and Archaeology in the Faculty of Philosophy at the University SS Cyril and Methodius in Skopje. Her work experience includes work with the Cultural Center Tocka, Skopje, Line I+M, a platform for new media art and technology, which she directed until 2010. In 2012–2015 she was actively involved in the creation of the Association of the Independent Cultural Scene JADRO, and she works as an executive director and curator in Kontrapunkt, Skopje. Among her latest projects is the CRIC-Festival of critical culture. In 2009 she was a guest-curator in the Stedefreund gallery in Berlin and a co-curator of the Macedonian Pavilion at the 53rd International Art Exhibition in Venice.

Damir Arsenijević works in the fields of critical theory and psychoanalysis. His art and theoretical interventions establish settings for the discussion of painful topics after the war and genocide in former Yugoslavia as our commons. He was a Fulbright Visiting Scholar and Professor at the Department of Rhetoric, UC Berkeley in 2011/12. Currently, he is a Leverhulme Fellow at De Montfort University, Leicester, UK, leading the project 'Love after Genocide'. He founded the Psychoanalytic Seminar Tuzla in Bosnia and Herzegovina which opens up the public space for the exploration of the unconscious of war and genocide.

Branimir Stojanović is a psychoanalyst in Belgrade and an international associated member of SALP. He is the founder of the journal of the Belgrade Psychoanalytic Association Archive of Psychoanalysis and has been its editor-in-chief from 2008 to 2010. He was the founding member of the School for History and Theory of Painting, the art-theory group Monument, focusing on questions of disintegration, war and genocide in Yugoslavia, and a founding member of an archive-library of Yugoslav humanities *Teacher Ignoramus and His Committees*. He is a member of the Belgrade Psychoanalytic Association.

Milica Tomić is Yugoslavian-born artist and Head of IZK-Institute for Contemporary Art (TU Graz). Her work centres on unearthing and bringing to public debate issues related to political violence, economic underpinnings and social amnesia. As a response to the commitment to social change and the new forms of collectivity it engenders, Milica Tomić has made a marked shift from individual to collective artistic practice. She is a founding member of the new Yugoslav art/theory group, "Grupa Spomenik" [Monument Group, 2002]; she conceived and initiated the cross-disciplinary project and Working Group Four Faces of Omarska [2010].

Kim Charnley is an art theorist and contemporary art historian who writes about art activism and institutional critique, among other issues to do with the politics of art. He has published in *Art Journal, Historical Materialism and Art and the Public Sphere*. In 2017, he edited and provided an introduction for a collection of the essays of activist artist, theorist and curator Gregory Sholette, entitled *Delirium and Resistance: Activist Art and Capitalist Crisis* (Pluto Books).

Johannes Gierlinger studied Digital Media & Art in Salzburg, Istanbul and at the Academy of Fine Arts Vienna. His films and installations deal with memory, history and resistance as wella with the forms of representation. Within an essayistic form he explores readings, doubts and possible future images. Thereby he tries to examine a world by a flaneur-like act of seeking and by creating connections through confrontation and scrutiny of images. Gierlingers work has been screened and exhibited at various filmfestivals and institutions.

Ben Graville is a photographer, he received a diploma in photography from N.E.S.C.O.T. in 1991. He travelled and worked in various areas of photography including furniture and studio work. From 2001 to 2006 he worked in press agencies specializing in criminal and civil law for Photonews and Central news. Graville also worked for the newspaper *The Independent* between 2006 and 2009. Parallel to his professional practice, he creates variations on the theme of documentary and photojournalism incorporating ideas from the art world which through different projects he has exhibited and published internationally.

Eyal Weizman is Professor of Spatial and Visual Cultures, and Director of Forensic Architecture. He is a founding member of the architectural collective DAAR in Beit Sahour/Palestine. His books include Forensic Architecture: Violence at the Threshold of Detectability (2017), The Conflict Shoreline (with Fazal Sheikh, 2015), FORENSIS (with Anselm Franke, 2014), Mengele's Skull (with Thomas Keenan at Sterenberg Press, 2012), Forensic Architecture (dOCUMENTA13 notebook, 2012), The Least of All Possible Evils (Verso 2011), Hollow Land (Verso, 2007), A Civilian Occupation (Verso, 2003), the series Territories 1, 2 and 3, Yellow Rhythms and many articles in journals, magazines, and edited books. He has worked with a variety of NGOs worldwide and was a member of the B'Tselem board of directors.

Kumjana Novakova works in the field of creative documentary cinema and audio-visual arts since 2006. Her formal education combines social sciences and research studies in Sofia, Sarajevo, Bologna and Amsterdam. She was the co-founder and director of the Pravo Ljudski Film Festival in Sarajevo. She collaborates as a film curator with several film festivals and cinema platforms worldwide. She teaches documentary cinema at Béla Tarr's film factory and at the non-fiction department at ESCAC in Barcelona. Kumjana develops projects between cinema and contemporary art, exploring the interplay between identities and memories. Her works have been exhibited at international festivals and galleries. She currently works as a film curator at the Museum of Contemporary Arts in Skopje.

Ana Hoffner is engaged in an art practice that excavates moments of crisis and conflict in history and politics. Hoffner's performances, video and photo installations seek to introduce temporalities, relations and spaces in-between established perspectives and memories of iconic images and highly performative events. Hoffner employs means of appropriation such as restaging photographs, interviews and reports and desynchronization of body and voice, sound and image. She* has finished the PhD in Practice Program at the Academy of Fine Arts Vienna in 2014.

Coco Fusco, interdisciplinary artist and writer, explores the politics of gender, race, war, and identity through multi-media productions incorporating large-scale projections, closed-circuit television, web-based live streaming performances with audience interaction, as well as performances at cultural events that actively engage with the audience. Fusco has performed, lectured, exhibited, and curated internationally since 1988. Her work has been included in two Whitney Biennials (2008 and 1993), the Mercosul Biennial (2011), the Sydney Biennale (1992), the Johannesburg Biennial (1997), the Shanghai Biennale (2004), and Performa05. She is an associate professor and Director of Intermedia Initiatives at Parsons The New School for Design in New York.

Tihomir Topuzovski received his doctoral degree from the University of Birmingham in the UK. He also has two BAs in Philosophy and Art, and an MA in Art, and has received numerous academic achievement awards and research grants. He was a postdoctoral researcher at the Centre for Baltic and East European Studies in the Södertörn University in Stockholm. His research is at the intersection of philosophy, politics and the visual arta. He is currently collaborating on a research project on the politicisation of spaces and artistic practices, developing a new understanding of temporary urbanism. Topuzovski currently works as a research leader in the interdisciplinary programme of the Museum of Contemporary Art in Skopje and is editor-in-chief of the journal *The Large Glass*. He has published a number of papers and participated in individual and group exhibitions.

Mira Gakina is an art historian and a director of the Museum of Contemporary Art in Skopje. She graduated from the Institute of History of Art and Archaeology at the Faculty of Philosophy in Skopje and completed her postgraduate studies at the Faculty of Philosophy of the University of Zagreb. She gained her PhD in Art Management at the Faculty of Philosophy in Skopje. She has curated a number of exhibitions in the country and abroad and has presented her work in New York, Krakow, Berlin, Ljubljana, Texas and Zagreb. She has published her writings in diverse publications, catalogues, books and magazines.

Jovanka Popova is a curator and programme coordinator at the Press to Exit project space and curator at the Museum of Contemporary Art in Skopje. She completed her B.A. and M.A. at the Faculty of Philosophy Institute for History of Art in Skopje. She has curated exhibitions in the contemporary art field in Macedonia and worked on international curatorial projects. She has also presented her work at the Humboldt University, the Central European University in Budapest, the Goethe University in Frankfurt, the Hankuk University of Foreign Studies in Seoul, the Kunst Historisches Institut in Florence, the Bahcesehir University in Istanbul, the Trondheim Academy of Fine Arts and other institutions. She is a president of the Macedonian Section of the AICA International Association of Art Critics.