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Editors

Editorial

As we continue to reflect upon the chain of political upheavals of 2011, it may be interesting to consider a particular shift in the status of information technology, now that it has been deployed as such a powerful force in facilitating the rise of a new popular voice.

But first, how did this happen? How did a form of communication—developed in the late 1950s with a well-funded US Defense Department initiative in response to the Sputnik threat, then blossoming in the hands of engineer-entrepreneurs in the Silicon Valley of the 1970s into the center of accelerated hyper-capitalism in the 1990s—evolve to become a strange hybrid of a free press, judiciary, and public market?

After all, it was not long ago that information technology seemed to stabilize as a mere outgrowth of capitalism with side benefits for those who could afford the hardware necessary to access it. Its major scruples concerned copyright violators and the contradictions of using a system of distribution in which everything could be duplicated at zero cost. Perhaps the Motion Picture Association of America even looked past its fear of piracy to a further endpoint where people would simply begin to produce their own films themselves. But anyhow, we no longer care what the MPAA thinks, because the scale has shifted significantly—it seems that the internet not only moves songs, movies, documents, and transactions, but a form of consensus and organization that can mobilize civic life itself.

We can say, as if at the end of a Hollywood film, that it was you all along, The Internet, watching over us for the last half-century or so, accelerating global financial trade, presiding over economic deregulation, abstracting borders, shutting down factories and opening cafés and restaurants, making everyone a freelancer in some way—whether a roadside fruit vendor or an engineer. And its early stages accompanied a wave of deregulation that extended from Bretton Woods to Sadat's *Infitah*, to Reagan and Thatcher, and onward.

It is often said that the information age was heavily pushed in the 1970s as a means of revitalizing a stagnant economy. Information systems would create an entirely new trade sector that would work in tandem with a lagging industrial base to smooth communication between disparate locations, but also produce new commodity forms made up entirely of information. Factories could now be run by remote control, new factories could be built to produce these remote controls, and programmers would develop and refine the language transmitted by them.

But what now seems clear, as commentators such as Manuel Castells and Franco Berardi have suggested, is that the information economy is not simply the next logical step following an industrial economy, comparable to the shift from agriculture to industry. The internet is as

unpredictable as popular opinion, and powerful enough to exceed its own economic imperatives. Who could have expected that, beyond the tiresome celebration of social networks as tools for revolutionaries, 2011 would also witness access to information joining water, electricity, roads, and so forth as a basic necessity of civic life, even a human entitlement. Strange times indeed!

—Julieta Aranda, Brian Kuan Wood, Anton Vidokle

X

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Keller Easterling

An Internet of Things

I.

An "internet of things" describes a world embedded with so many digital devices that the space between them consists not of dark circuitry but rather the space of the city itself. The computer has escaped the box, and ordinary objects in space are carriers of digital signals. This capacity seems to finally fulfill the dream of artists and architects of the mid- to late twentieth century, among them Jack Burnham, Cedric Price, Archigram, and Christopher Alexander, who experimented with a cybernetic apparatus for modeling space. It might also be the practical answer to quests by Nicholas Negroponte's *Architecture Machine Group* and architects exploring Artificial Intelligence, who rehearse interplay between digital machines and the space of the city and the body—reciprocal modeling that enhances the capacities of each. On the contemporary scene, manifestoes like Carlo Ratti's "Open Source Architecture" imagine that in digitized space—this web of things—architecture can be constructed in much the same way that a wiki is assembled.

As art and architecture adopt technologies to embrace a new imaginary or model a new relationship, digital technologies often become an essential prosthetic for an idea about form-making. Yet these nourishing and exciting projects also perhaps prematurely stop, short of, or even foreclose on, a much more expansive investigation. Even when resisting the vampiric modernist impulse to declare a new regime, these projects may be drawn into a cul-du-sac; their production of artifacts risks being yet another anecdotal, even marginal, expression in a succession of ideas.

A non-modern question—the artifacts of which have always been with us, the boundaries of which include but exceed all of the above experiments, and the answer to which we already know—is how space, without digital or media enhancement, is itself information.[1]

We are not accustomed to the idea that non-human, inanimate objects possess agency and activity, just as we are not accustomed to the idea that they can carry information unless they are endowed with code/text-based information technologies. While accepting that a technology like mobile telephony has become the world's largest shared platform for information exchange, we are perhaps less accustomed to the idea of space as a technology or medium of information—undeclared information that is not parsed as text or code. Indeed, the more ubiquitous code/text-based information devices become, the harder it is to see spatial technologies and networks that are independent of the digital. Few would look at a concrete highway system or an electrical grid and perceive agency in their static arrangement. Agency might only be ascribed to the moving cars or the electrical current. Spaces and urban

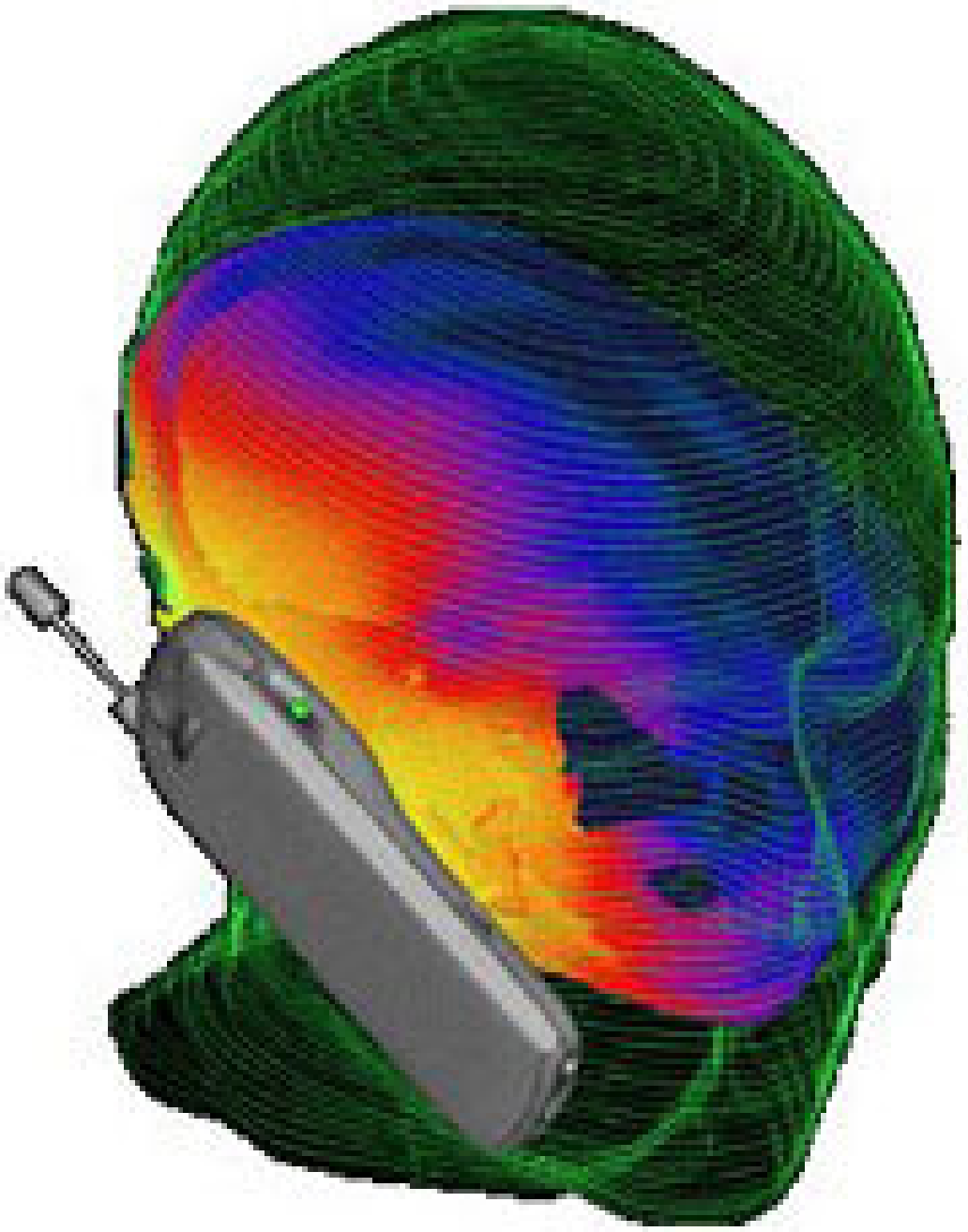
Yona Friedman's pictograms from Negroponte's "Computer Aided Participatory Design" in Soft Architecture Machines.

arrangements are usually treated as collections of objects or volumes, not as actors. Yet the organization itself is active. It is *doing* something, and changes in the organization constitute information. Even so, the idea that information is carried in *activity*, or what we might call active form, must still struggle against many powerful habits of mind.

II.

The projects of Cedric Price and Christopher Alexander are on the threshold of designing an architecture that has become information.[2] It is instructive then to examine why their practices are sometimes relegated to historical oddities or novelties. Price, a London architect active from the 1960s to the early years of the twenty-first century, artfully prefigures the discussion of active form and spatial software or protocol. Fascinated by networks, infrastructure, and the movement of populations, Price puzzled over variable cocktails of skeletal authorship and improvisation. He designed spatial repertoires, building details, infrastructural networks, games, and toys. His constructions were essentially choreographies of human and non-human actors unfolding over time. Price steered his work away from objects, signature buildings, and monuments toward encounter and performance. He found "delight in the unknown." He was interested in "doing less" and wrote that "calculated indolence on the part of the architect … produces great work by others."[3] Price chose to practice like a performer, noting that the architect was usually a "poor performer," "consistently bad."[4] Like a good performer, he focused on interplay. He was relaxed within the power of object form and active form and enjoyed how they worked together to create their own epidemics in the environment. He wrote,

> I consider it unlikely that architecture and planning will match the contribution HushPuppies have made to society today, let alone approach that of the transistor or loop, until a total reappraisal of its particular expertise is self-imposed, or inflicted from outside.



Registered brain activity during cell phone use.

Cover of Architectural Design:A.D., October 1970. The cover drawing is a portrait of Cedric Price by Adrian George.

> Designers and architects would be better employed in devising new languages of comparison from computers, than in using them to confirm the obvious. I would like to suggest that the socio-environmental factors that would stop lonely old people from going mad could be utilized in determining the economic viability of particular intervals of rental vacancy within a newly completed office block—just a suggestion.[5]

At their best, Price's schemes were time-released, located beyond a single site or stage, and poised to upset holistic cybernetic dreams. However, some of Price's projects also aspired to the predictability and predetermination of the holistic scripts of cybernetics, with its quest for homeostasis. For instance, *Potteries Thinkbelt* and *Fun Palace*, collaborations with theater director Joan Littlewood and cybernetician Gordon Pask, were theatrical and educational spaces proposed for London but never built. Price, interested in transportation landscapes, incorporated equipment used in container shipping to choreograph the programmatic components to be kinetic, interactive, and responsive to the user. His *Generator* project, a landscape with minimal construction planned for a wooded area in Florida, was the spatial reflection of a computer game that assigned a repertoire of moves to various players and objects in the landscape. The degree to which these projects were choreographed as tightly integrated, even prescriptive, cybernetic science perhaps foreclosed on their experimentation.

Christopher Alexander's direct application of set theory and network topology to urban morphology similarly illustrates the perils of codification and predetermination. Trained in physics, mathematics, computer science, information science, and architecture, Alexander's work engages both object form and active form, as well as human and non-human actors. But using these techniques he constructs a science that forecloses on the very territory about which he speculates. In his 1965 article "The City is not a Tree," he critiqued what he deemed to be the infrastructural or organizational template of many settlements and cities. A "tree," in Alexander's parlance, is a branching structure in which sets are either completely disconnected from one another or entirely contained within one set without overlapping sets. The branches do not grow together but emanate separately from a single trunk. Alexander demonstrates that Greenbelt, Maryland, Levittown, the Greater London Plan, Brasilia, Kenzo Tange's Tokyo Plan, Chandigarh, Hilberseimer's settlement patterns, and other well-known plans are "trees." He asserts that settlements in "traditional society" developed interconnections and overlaps that did not resemble an arborescent structure, primarily due to the activities of inhabitants rather than the authority and administration of planners. Authority always generates a tree and therefore, in his terms, an "artificial" city.[6]

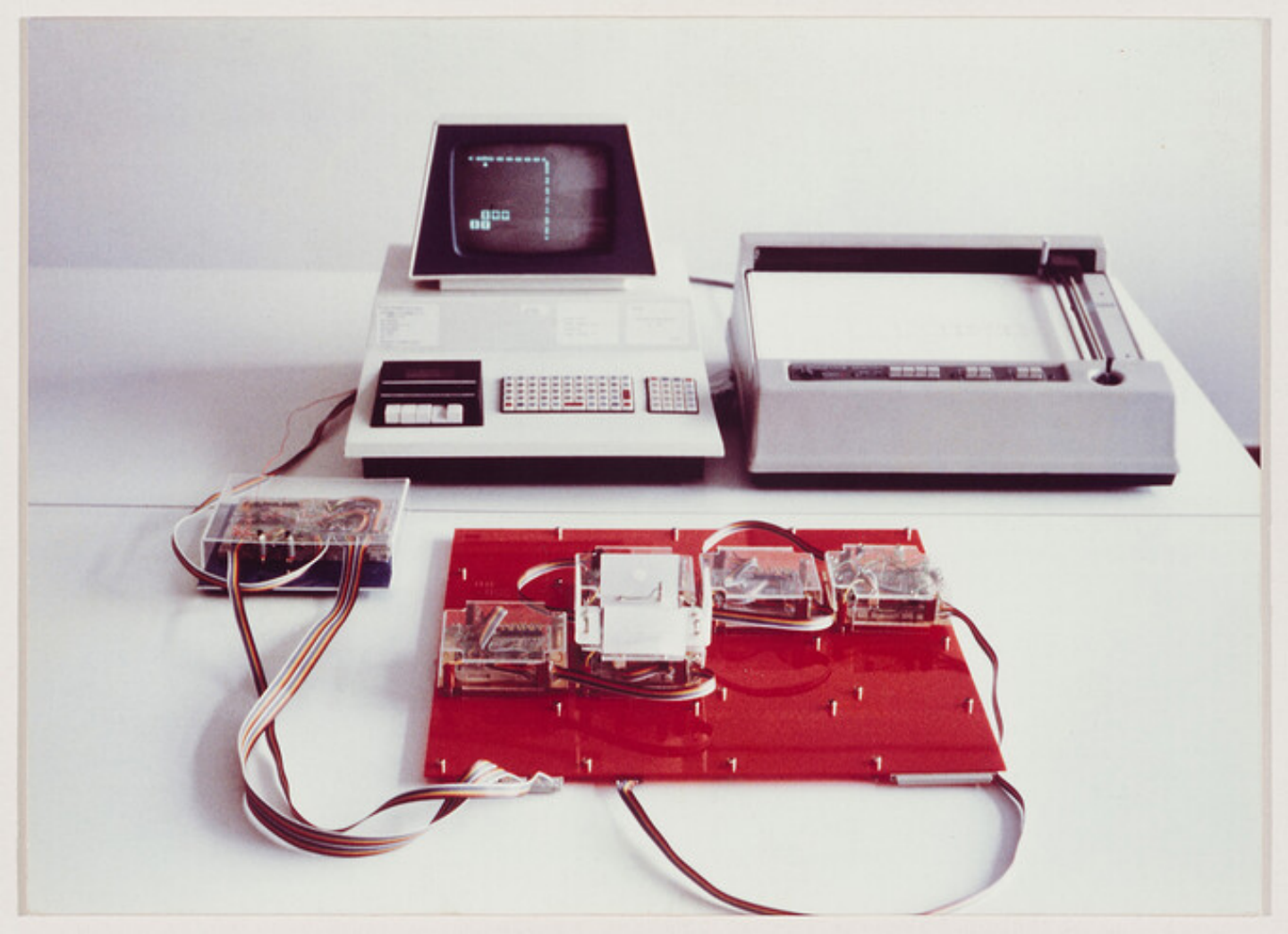
Alexander observed activity in urban space as information. In "The City is not a Tree" he gave a now famous example:

> For example, in Berkeley at the corner of Hearst and Euclid, there is a drugstore, and outside the drugstore a traffic light. In the entrance to the drugstore there is a newsrack where the day's papers are displayed. When the light is red, people who are waiting to cross the street stand idly by the light; and since they have nothing to do, they look at the papers displayed on the newsrack which they can see from where they stand. Some of them just read the headlines, others actually buy a paper while they wait.
>
> This effect makes the newsrack and the traffic light interactive; the newsrack, the newspapers on it, the money going from people's pockets to the dime slot, the people who stop at the light and read papers, the traffic light, the electric impulses which make the lights change, and the sidewalk which the people stand on form a system—they all work together.[7]

For Alexander, this urban system is like a semi-lattice in set theory. Two sets of objects and activities overlap at the newsrack. If diagrammed like a branching structure, the branches overlap and connect. The semi-lattice diagrams "natural" cities like Siena, Liverpool, Kyoto, or Manhattan. The tree segregates urban functions in an organization, while the semi-lattice offers "ambiguity" and "multiplicity" in a structure that is "thick, tougher, more subtle, and more complex." On the one hand, Alexander expands the repertoire of design to include activity. But on the other, he quickly codifies and taxonomizes that activity. He mimics the object of this own critique by reforming the artificial with a "natural" corrective—instead of the tree, the semi-lattice becomes the placeholder. Despite his attempt to incorporate active form and information, Alexander only creates another immobilized form.[8]

IV.

Far from what may be considered the more obscure experiments of architects, the most consequential architecture in the world has already become information. Still somewhat obscure only because of its overwhelming ubiquity, space is itself an infrastructural technology that is mobile and monetized, traveling around the world as a repeatable phenomenon. Compared to the relative trickle of space made by special practitioners, these technologies produce a fire hose blast. The most radical changes to the globalizing world are being written in the protocols or softwares of infrastructural space.



Cedric Price, View of Working Electronic Model of the Generator Project, 1976-1979. Chromogenic color print mounted on cardboard, 12.6 x 17.3 cm. Photo: Cedric Price fonds/Canadian Centre for Architecture, Montréal.

Avoiding some modern habits that shape the projects of Price and Alexander, another kind of artistic endeavor, not reliant on either the digital prosthetic or the predictable cybernetic system, can address this new global infrastructure space. This is not a new but an extra art and mode of making in which *the action is the form*. Action is not necessarily movement but is rather embodied in relationship, relative position and potential in organizations. Action is immanent in the *disposition* of an organization. There is no prescription for architecture, only a technique for performing it. Active forms design a disposition—a set of capacities for shaping space over time. Active forms are forms for handling forms.

The shift from nominative to active that requires so much ideation and analysis in some schools of thought, such as design, is completely ordinary and natural in other disciplines, such as theater. As Price recognized, an aesthetic training in this extra art might resemble that of theater. It requires no special technological apparatus.

The construction of action is the theater performer's stock in trade. An actor adheres to a script but the scripted words are regarded only as traces or artifacts that hint at underlying action. A scene is a string of actions that carry meaning. Actors rarely deal with nominative or descriptive expressions—states of being or mood. One cannot, for instance, play "being a mother." Attempting to do so leads to what is known in the theater as "indicating." As Deleuze has written, "mediocre actresses must weep in order to signify grief."[9] In the theater, infinitive expressions, not representations, are the currency. The director asks the actor, "What are you doing?" It is generally agreed that leading with action or letting a vivid action carry the words rather than the other way around is a durable technique. Again, the action that leads the performance is not necessarily a movement or a gesture. It is rather the driving intent expressed as an active verb. An actor would not play "being a mother," but rather "smothering a child." Uncertainty, or the inability to fix meaning, does not paralyze the actor but rather allows more agility and

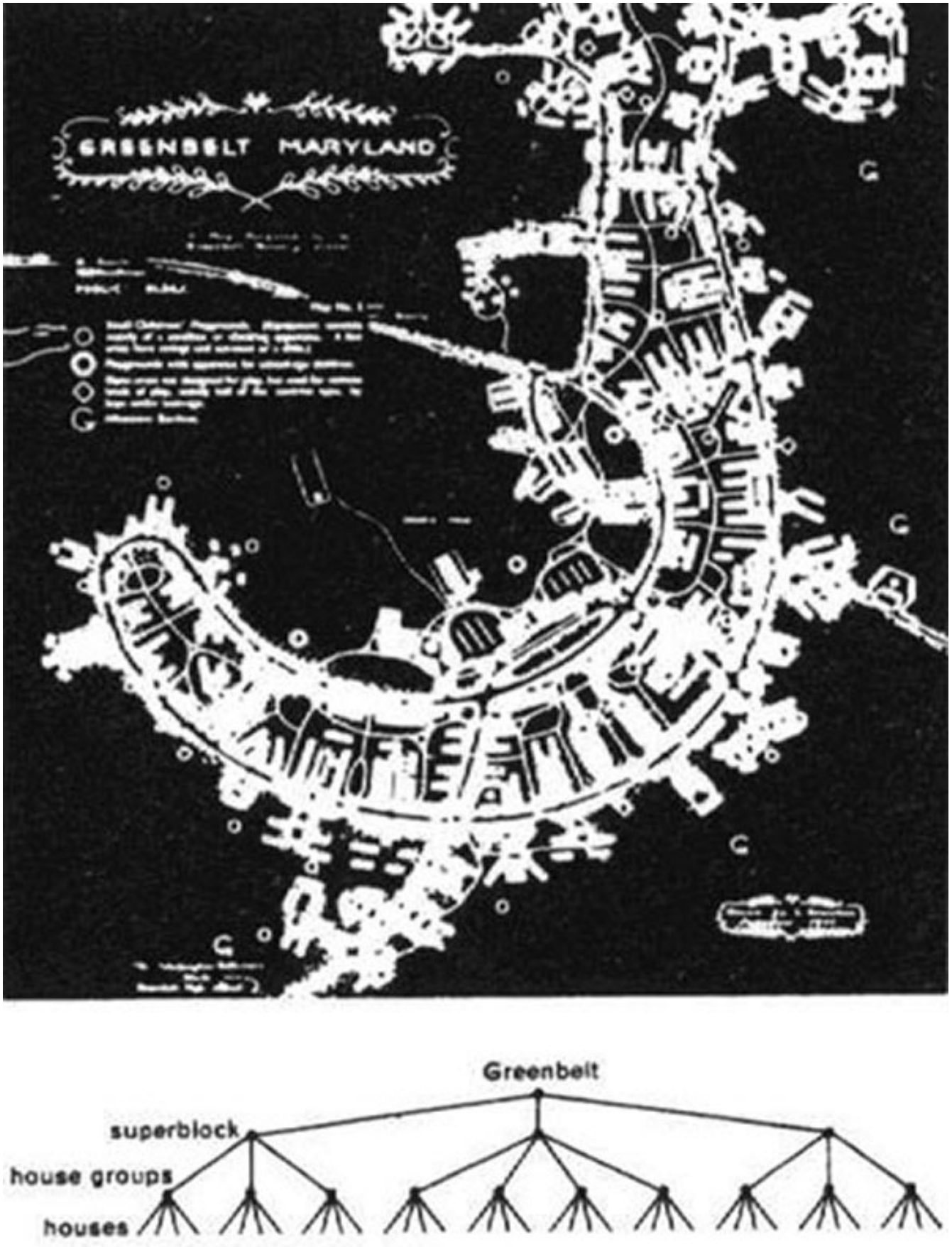
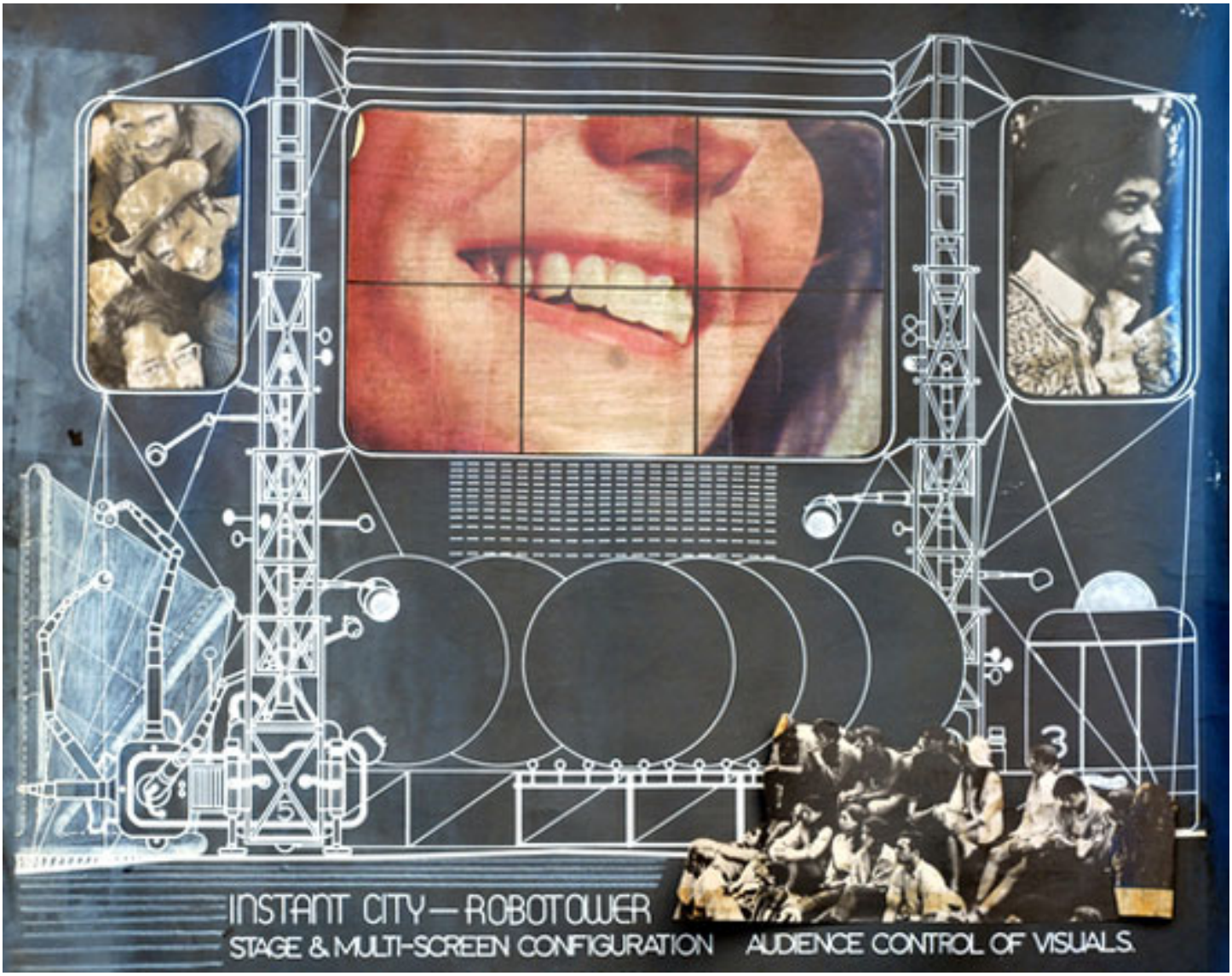


Diagram of Greenbelt, Maryland in Christopher Anderson's book The City is not a Tree.

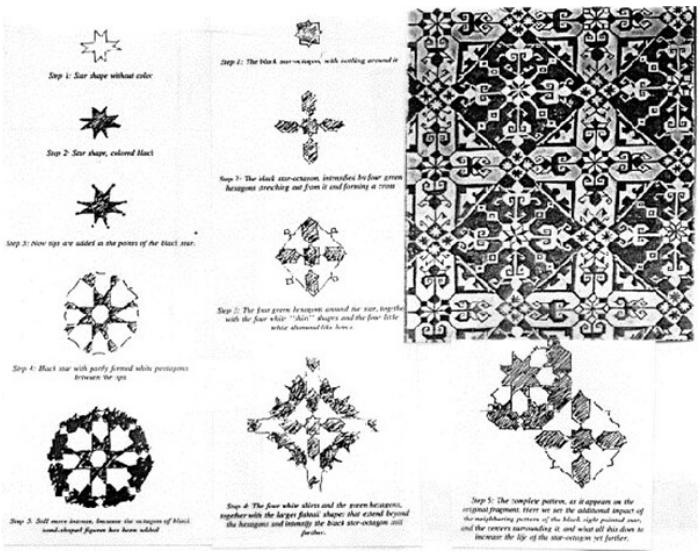


Archigram, Instant City, 1968. Collage.

interaction with other actors. Action is the bearer of information, consequence, change, or event. Action is the material used to make things and create meaning. The actor crafts variables and intentions to shape the information of the play.

While the model of a software as computer code is vivid, one can back out of that model and into a software made of active forms, deltas, and variables in *space itself.* For instance, Bruno Latour critiqued those architectural manipulations in computing or CAD environments "where objects move without being transformed" and are "geometrically manipulated or projected." Stepping back from these practices, Latour writes that "with this kind of project, you do not move an inch out of the modernism framework. You are still focused on the *object* rather than the *thing.*" He has mused about an active software that would not simply reify form as geometry but would instead be intelligent enough to instantly pull up a web of cultural, political, and economic information, thus demonstrating the expanded reach of object form partnered with active form. But stepping back even further, one can only see this imagined software as an enhancement to Latour's larger model of interplay in his actor-network theory, a theory that does not need software or special equipment to exist. The activity in a spatial environment is not reliant on the digital environment. It may be enhanced by a code/text-based software, but a spatial software or protocol can be any platform that establishes variables for space as information.[10]

Dispositional expressions and active forms can be spatial softwares, protocols, or diagrams. A diagram, as Deleuze and Guattari render the idea, is not a representational sketch of an single arrangement but rather an "abstract machine" that is generative of a "real that is yet to come."[11]



Fundamental properties of patterns as outlined in the Nature of Order Volume 1, by Christopher Alexander.

Similarly, Deleuze discusses Foucault's notions of "dispositif" and "social apparatus" as "lines of force," trajectories or "names given to variables."[12] Gregory Bateson wrote that "the switch is the thing that is not except at the moments of its change of setting, and the concept 'switch' has thus a special relation to time. It is related to the notion 'change' rather than to the notion 'object.'"[13] Active forms in urban space can serve as expressions of variability and interdependence, like a calculus function or cos *x*—a software that facilitates relationships while not controlling every outcome. Cos *x* is an explicit expression and yet only manages a multiple set of values. Knowing all of those values is less important than understanding the disposition to form, when graphed, a particular curve.

This extra art is non-modern because active form does not need to kill object form to exist. There is no need for succession, segregation, and competition between these ideas, which already often coexist on a continuum. Object form can be resolutely disengaged from or, alternatively, positioned to become, active form, like a stone in the water. There is no necessity to create active form and no necessity to corral a fixed set of meanings under a new term.[14] There is only the observation that there are modes of form-making that exceed object form in substantial ways—only the need to point to a project that offers additional artistic pleasures and political powers.
The extra art of active form and disposition rehearse an internet of things without the internet.

X

This article is an adaptation of material from the forthcoming book *Extrastatecraft: Global Infrastructure and Political Arts.*

Keller Easterling is an architect and writer from New York City and a professor at Yale University. Her book, *Enduring Innocence: Global Architecture and its Political Masquerades* (MIT, 2005) researches familiar spatial products that have landed in difficult or hyperbolic political situations around the world. A previous book *Organization Space: Landscapes, Highways and Houses in America applies network theory to a discussion of American infrastructure and development formats. A forthcoming book, Extrastatecraft: global infrastructure and political arts, examines global infrastructure networks as a medium of polity. Easterling has lectured and published widely in the United States and internationally. Her research and design work has been most recently exhibited at the Storefront for Art and Architecture in New York, the Rotterdam Biennale, and the Architectural League. She has also published web installations including: Extrastatecraft, Wildcards: a Game of Orgman and Highline: Plotting NYC. Easterling is a professor at Yale University.*

1
I borrow the expression "non-modern" from Bruno Latour. Bruno Latour, *We Have Never Been Modern* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press,1993), 48.

2
Bruno Latour, *We Have Never Been Modern* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press,1993), 48.

3
Cedric Price, Works II (London: Architectural Association, 1984), 18.

4
Cedric Price and HansUlrich Obrist, Re:CP (Birkhäuser Architecture, 1999), 64.

5
"Cedric Price Talks at the AA," AA Files 19 (Spring 1990): 33

6
Christopher Alexander, "The City is not a Tree," *Architectural Forum* , Vol. 122, No. 1 (April, 1965): 58–62 (Part I); and Vol. 122, No. 2 (May 1965): 58–62 (Part II).

7
Ibid.

8
Ibid.

9
Gilles Deleuze, *Proust and Signs: The Complete Text,* trans. Richard Howard (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2000), 39.

10
"Interview with Bruno Latour: Decoding the Collective Experiment," by María J. Prieto and Elise S. Youn, Agglutinations.com, July 05, 2004.(No longer available online.)

11
Gilles Deleuze, Foucault. translated by S. Hand. (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1988), 37; and Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, "On Several Regimes of Signs," A Thousand Plateaus (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987), 141-, 142.

12
Gilles Deleuze, "What is Dispositif?," *Michel Foucault: Philosopher* (New York: Routledge, 1991), 160, 166.

13
Gregory Bateson, "Criteria of Mental Process 1-4," Mind and Nature: A Necessary Unity (New York: Dutton, 1979),"Criteria of Mental Process 1-4," 109.

14
This argument is very careful to avoid modern pronoucements, preferring an inclusive position. For instance, Nicolas Bourriaud's notion of "relational form" is sympathetic, as is his "altermodern" position. Still, this argument hopes to broaden the field in which it and similar notions can be applied. Nicolas Bourriaud, Relational Aesthetics (Paris: Les Presses du Réel, 2002).

For capitalism to sustain itself, to reproduce indefinitely, it needs to incrementally gobble up more and more. It must continually overturn any balanced cycles, as they can lead to stagnation and lost opportunities for growth. Extinctions are drawn to it like filaments to a magnet. The imperative to grow and the need for unrestricted license to devastate are two sides of the same coin—not only mutually dependent but structurally essential. Yet, however deplorable, growth and devastation can be aesthetically generative: they set us on a course toward imagining what the world will look like as it slides toward the inorganic.

By constantly invading and liquidating resource-rich contexts, capitalism encourages images that project what will inevitably be left in its wake: a dead world. And just as one can imagine (or see) patches of devastated and desolate land, a kind of localized post-extraction desertification, one can just as easily imagine this becoming a planetary condition: the globe as a rotating, dead lithosphere, coated in a fine dust of decomposing once-organic particles. Individual patches of dead world synthesized into a continuous crust.

Gean Moreno

Notes on the Inorganic, Part I: Accelerations

1. Grey Goo

In 1986, Dr. K. Eric Drexler, at the time a Research Affiliate at MIT's Artificial Intelligence Laboratory, published Engines of Creation, a book celebrating the growing productive capabilities of nanotechnology and the coming age of mechanochemical manufacturing. He was preparing us for the "assembler breakthrough"—the moment when self-replicating machines as small as molecules would become the driving engines of contemporary technology. Like science fiction, it was a testament of—or from—the future. It came in a warm language of affirmation and delight: a less arduous life was guaranteed by the inevitable emergence of molecular technology. We were moving up, pushing forward, relieving ourselves of unseemly burdens such as those of aging and dying or having to work for a living. But in one chapter in the book—Chapter 11, "Engines of Destruction"—Drexler slips out of character and offers a simple and formal warning, one with enough seductive charge and narrative potential to take on a life of its own:

The early transistorized computers soon beat the most advanced vacuum-tube computers because they were based on superior devices. For the same reason, early assembler-based replicators could beat the most advanced modern organisms. "Plants" with "leaves" no more efficient than today's solar cells could out-compete real plants, crowding the biosphere with an inedible foliage. Tough omnivorous "bacteria" could out-compete real bacteria: they could spread like blowing pollen, replicate swiftly, and reduce the biosphere to dust in a matter of days. Dangerous replicators could easily be too tough, small, and rapidly spreading to stop—at least if we

John Russell, Faerie Poem, 2009. Backlit digital print on vinyl.

make no preparation. We have trouble enough controlling viruses and fruit flies.[1]

In the wake of Drexler's book, the threat related in this paragraph became popularized as the "grey goo problem." It was abhorred in nanotechnology circles, but among science fiction writers and aficionados, it was fashionable and much-loved. The tale, in a more developed stage, involves a swarm of self-replicating, biovorous nano-assemblers run amok. If what it relates was to actually occur, it would be the first and only environmental disaster caused by the field of molecular mechanochemical manufacturing, with a total consumption of the planet taking place in as little as ~104 seconds after the chain of reproduction was first triggered.[2] Either by mimicking biological replicators like bacteria, but aborting or overstepping the boundaries of their intended use (in the sci-fi version), or by being produced in a lab with the capacity to function autonomously (in the scientist's hypothetical version), these molecule-sized machines multiply exponentially by transferring "genetic" algorithms to new units and using our biosphere as fuel. They reproduce until they ingest all life on the planet and leave behind a desolate landscape of grey slime. "Ecophagic nanorobots would regard living things as environmental carbon accumulators and biomass as a valuable ore to be mined for carbon and energy," writes Robert A. Freitas Jr. "Of course, biosystems from which all carbon has been extracted can no longer be alive but would instead become lifeless chemical sludge."[3]

The world ends, then, as a dead, undifferentiated, slimy surface—a massive lithosphere covered in lifeless sludge and nanomass wreckage. The scenario is one of mass, if unintentional, "species" suicide (the replibots) and full biological elimination, fated by the meeting of machines programmed for infinite non-mutational reproduction and an environment with finite energy-producing resources. One ecology doesn't emerge by eating and metabolizing another—an affirmationist escape hatch available to certain flinching strands of apocalyptic sci-fi. This isn't a machines-take-over story. These replibots eat the environment for no reason but to proliferate more replibots, unaffected by the useless grey goo they generate and the acceleration of their own demise. This isn't the production of a new world, but a sped-up, unintentional dissolution of the existing one. One world isn't being transfigured into another; rather, a world is being transfigured into a non-world, dissolved into inorganic slime.

Articles challenging this grey goo scenario quickly appeared, multiplying exponentially like the replibots they targeted. This was hardly surprising. Dependent on large public research grants and seeking application in the private manufacturing sector, the field of nanotechnology quickly deployed its reactive forces. The last thing it needed to contend with was an unsubstantiated speculative doomsday scenario. Drexler himself was at the forefront of efforts to argue that his scenario is highly unlikely and that advances in safety since he wrote his book render it all but impossible.

In the end, the mythological space opened by his gleeful slip into the apocalyptic needed to be fenced off and eradicated. As Drexler explicitly stated in his book—giving us a furtive glance at the economic imperative that guides

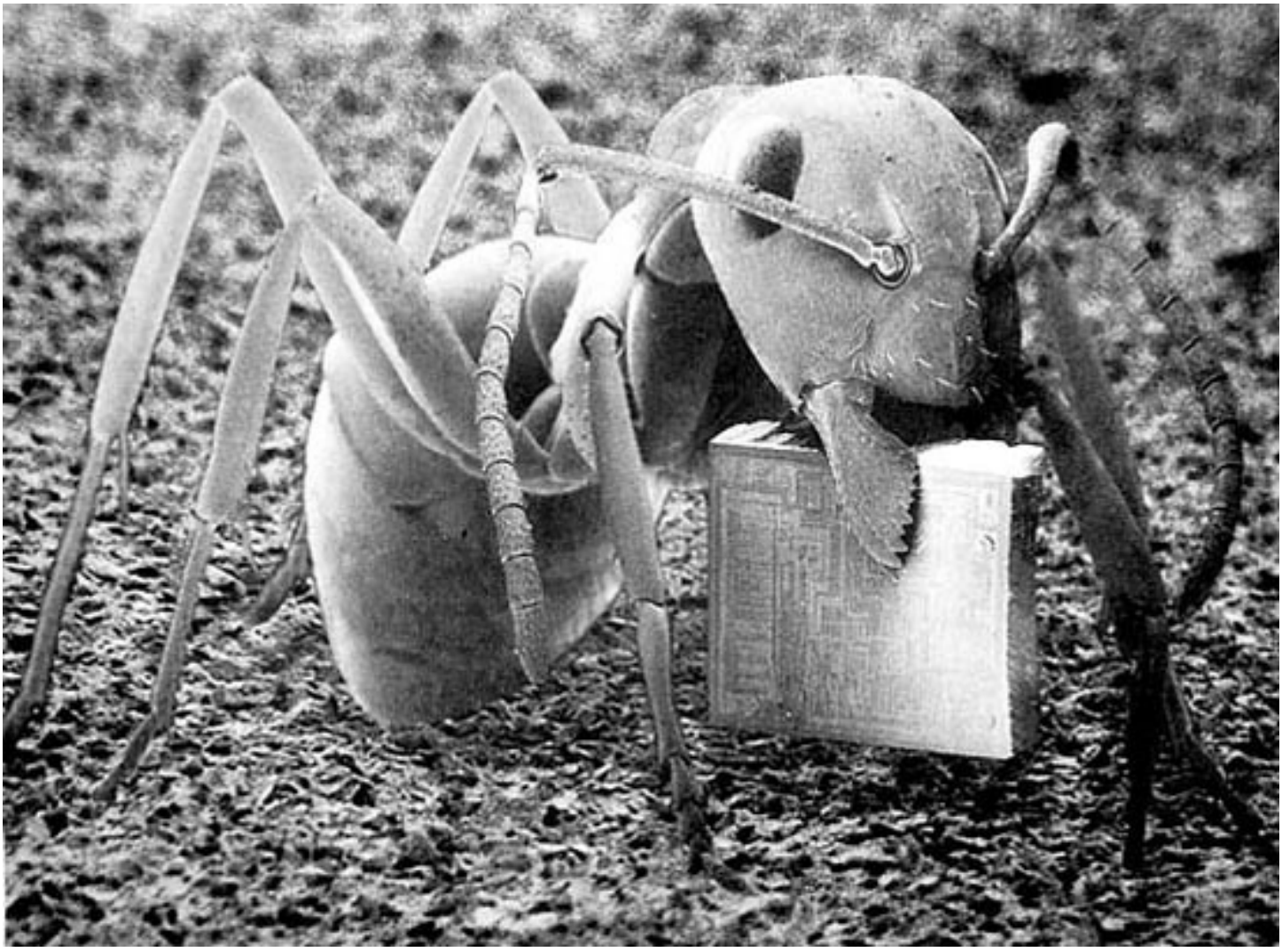


Image of ant captioned "Nanotechnology makes possible devices thousands of times smaller than this ant's microchip"

the project of molecular technology—the market is the "ultimate test." And we all know that a capricious market may suddenly recoil from this sort of risk (even if not from others, as we've come to learn lately), particularly where long-term and high-investment projects that involve untested technologies are concerned. But what is interesting, beyond considering just how irreversibly bound science and the market are, is attempting to explain why this grey goo scenario found such a warm reception beyond cloistered nanotechnology circles, in the culture it was thought to abolish. Why does the scenario still have currency as narrative, while having been completely debunked as hard science? For what amorphous, slippery collective feeling does this scenario serve as an outlet or allegory?

2. The Deeper Cut

The pages that precede the introduction of the grey goo problem in Drexler's book are concerned with the eliminations that will accompany the proliferation of assembler-based replicators and thinking machines. He mentions specifically the elimination of global trade (automated engineering can be localized and shrunk), the elimination of the current parameters of human mortality (the indefinite extension of life through artificial cell-reparation mechanisms), the elimination of human labor due to near absolute automation (replicators producing objects, as well as other replicators to replace and upgrade themselves). All these positively-charged eliminations, however, are secondary to the most terrifying potential consequence of nanotechnology gone awry: the abolition of life, the wholesale destruction of the biological.

Beyond whatever kind of warning the grey goo problem presents in relation to the real advances of nanotechnology, it allegorizes eliminative threats to life that nevertheless exist in other spheres. It absorbs threats that we may not be able to deal with directly, threats that need to be displaced in order to keep them from cutting a gash in our symbolic order—threats that are too

uncomfortable, that indict us too shamefully, that demand too much of us in terms of altering our way of life to encourage anything but displacement or concealment. The cut is too deep. The notion that Drexler's apocalyptic scenario recodes a different, already active process of elimination seems a particularly plausible explanation considering the implausibility of the grey goo threat, according to the very scientist who originally posed the problem.

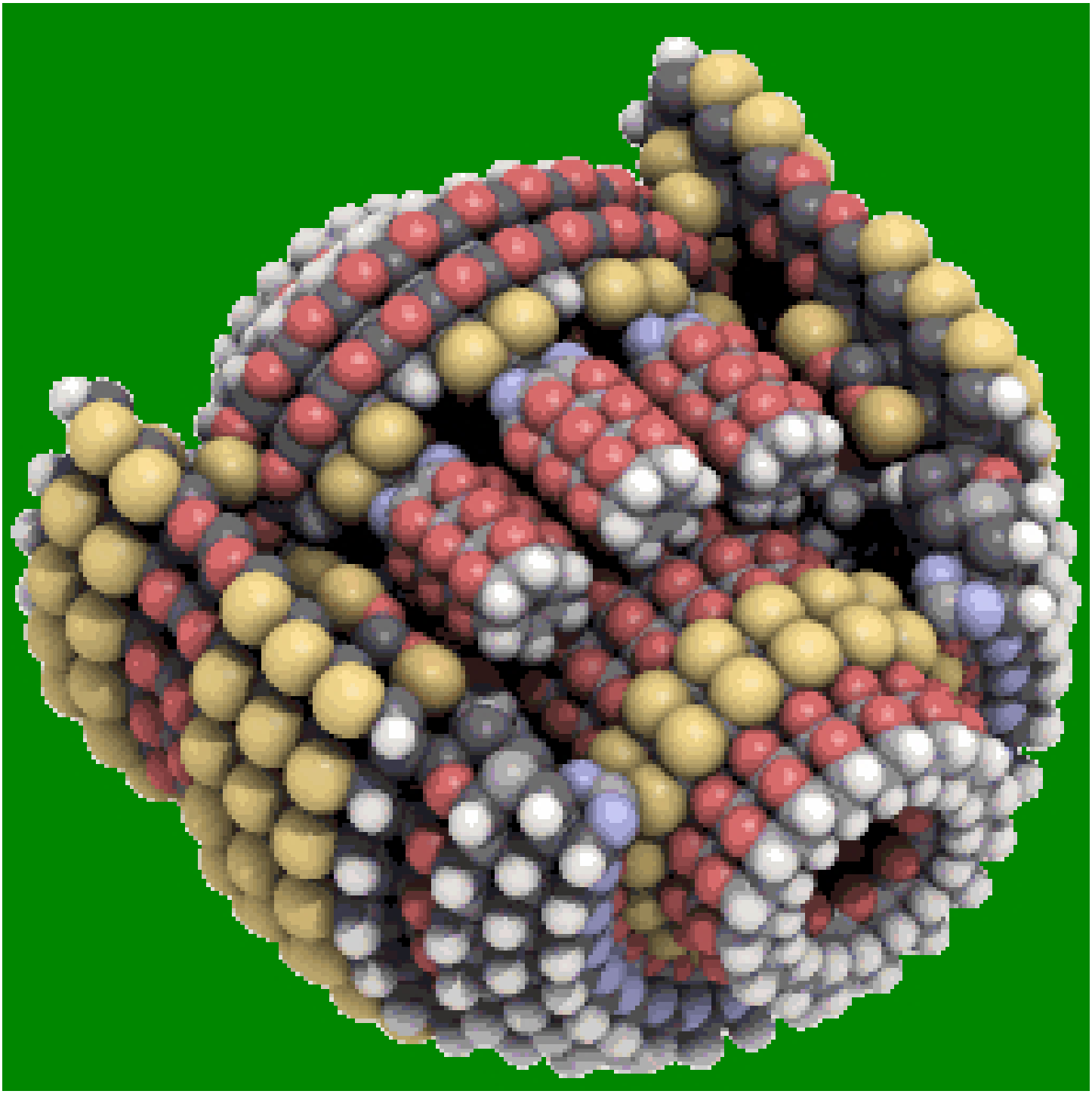
One of the things that the grey goo problem may stage is the very dissipative tendency that is at the core of capitalist production itself—the movement toward resource elimination as the necessary correlation to the expansion of capital. Few would claim to be anything but appalled by capital's dissipative compulsion, just as they would refuse to accept that such an impulse be naturalized as part of the intrinsic dynamic of rational economic development. The innocence that allows us to be hoodwinked in this way belongs to another time. The delusional character of a system predicated on the infinite growth can't be smudged out of the picture so easily anymore. We know that such a system is not viable in the long run, that its predatory practices are indefensible, and yet on so many levels we continue to behave as though capitalism were a necessary and unshakeable system. It's a fatality that we can at most resist through the subtraction of our subjective belief in it, which we often register in private gestures, at reduced scales, with "personal initiative" and demands for "corporate responsibility." We participate, despite ourselves, in a consensual collective fantasy, frayed at its edges but holding, of plenitude and regeneration, of the miracle of the system's unendingness, assailed on every side by apocalyptic fantasies but nowhere extinguished by them, ratifying the old Jamesonean/ *Žižekean* quip that it is easier to imagine the end of the world than the end of capitalism. In fact, it is *Žižek* who never tires of reminding us that in our "post-ideological" world we participate fully in the capitalist game while simultaneously telling ourselves that we don't believe in it at all. We disavow in thought and speech what we adhere to in action.

The naturalization of resource depletion, shielded as much as taxed by our disavowals, cannot help but affect cultural production. Sculpture, in its slouching toward interior design and décor—even if it does so in a reflexive, post-Broodthaersean mood— recognizes its complicated and diminished place in a world where nearly all object production and experience is geared toward commodified urban infrastructure. This reduced ambition anticipates the desertified landscapes to come of post-resource depletion.

Last year, design research collective InfraNet Lab/Lateral Office developed a series of speculative infrastructural projects.[4] Among these was Re-Rigging, an ambitious proposal that sought to develop the offshore oil excavation infrastructure for the Caspian Sea, not yet marching at full speed due to post-1991 border and legal disputes but inevitably on its way nonetheless. The project seeks to render this infrastructure such that potentials embedded at the design stage can be actualized when the rigs eventually become derelict and are left behind (oil extraction has been given a very short lifespan there, hitting its peak between 2020 and 2030). After the oil is used up, the built structures would serve new functions as recreational sites, bird sanctuaries, and the like. What is astonishing in this is that the depletion of petroleum is naturalized as empirical fact—as if it had already happened—and design can only be relevant by factoring that into the process. This is the project's pragmatic realism. A coming decimated landscape—the end point of a process so natural that it can be accounted for before it is even set in motion—becomes a determinant factor in the architectural production of the present.

While it is true that Infra Net/Lateral Office is proposing adaptive and reactive systems, laudably serving as counterpoints to the monological infrastructures of the twentieth century that end up as useless concrete carcasses, the first thing it adapts and reacts to is the will to dissipation that characterizes transnational capital. This translates into a kind of site or even geographical sensitivity: infrastructure is not only conceived to exploit one aspect or resource of a place—in this case, the products of the subsea geology—but as an interface between a multiplicity of elements, conditions, and populations. In the Caspian Sea, the infrastructure proposed by Infra Net/Lateral Office will look to intertwine the subsea, the activity in the sea (the need to sustain and enlarge the populations of sturgeon), and what happens in the air (the migratory patterns of birds which cut right over this body of water), while also building into the system the potential to recuperate the infrastructure after it can no longer serve its original purpose. The passive anticipation of uselessness that accompanied infrastructural building becomes active planning for post-depletion. It's pre-emptive design for the inevitable. In order to curtail the possibility of having only abandoned infrastructure in the end, one has to think from the other side of devastation. Infra Net/Lateral Office explains it in the language of promotional brochures: "The Caspian Sea's oil rig field is retrofitted for post-oil occupation by wildlife, maverick entrepreneurs, and adventure seekers."[5]

Resource depletion, even if still in potentia, establishes "retrospectively" the horizon of possibility and necessity for current design. Inexistent, projected, the deserts to come are the regulative force that determines what will be produced. An architectural need is formulated in such a way that any call to curtail the progress of destruction is rendered romantic. This is the new normal, the way power is extracted from the only future that transnational capital proposes as conducive to its maintenance and growth. Like credit in the financial sphere, pre-emptive design objectifies the future before it even arrives. Pre-emptive design capitulates to an erosion of critical distance in



Animation of MarkIII(k), one of the molecular machines designed by K. Erik Drexler and Nanorex, Inc., categorized as "nanoscale planetary gear."

order to vindicate itself as the pragmatic-ethical option: it is willing to look the bitter truth in the face and devise, in an unsentimental way, the best possible solution for the depletion to come. It doesn't look ahead in order to imagine detours, to insert "retrospectively" counterfactual possibilities into our present. It stares down that romantic option and soberly and pragmatically accepts that the only agency possible is that of the hardboiled and sober social clairvoyant: she knows what's coming, so the best she can do is hide tents and rafts and bottles of water in the houses that the hurricane will devastate. This is just a step removed from "the superstitious compulsion to make some gesture when we are observing a process over which we have no real influence."[6]

InfraNet Lab/Lateral Office, Re-Rigging, 2010. Project for a multifunctional off shore oil platform in the Caspian Sea, ready to be readapted "beyond that moment when the last barrel of oil leaves the sea bed."

3. Last Stop

When we speak of "post-Fordism," "immaterial labor," "cognitive capitalism," "precarity," and so forth, we are certainly speaking of the material conditions and effects of capitalism as it currently functions. However, these are its conditions as it explicitly relates to us. What if we attempt to take stock of it from a different vantage point? What if we read capitalism not as it manifests itself in relation to human bodies but as its destination reveals it to be: an Alien monstrosity, an insatiable Thing that appropriates the energy of everything it touches and, in the process, propels the world toward the inorganic? After all, aren't depletion and dissolution its underlying logics, accompanying its rampant drive to growth, its myth of unending prosperity? Isn't it consistently and egregiously dragging things—natural resources, ways of life, communal values, traditional forms of social organization, symbolic systems, laboring bodies, public spheres, social safety nets, self-sufficient economies, entire populations (animal and human), the destabilizing potential of formal innovation in aesthetic production, happiness—to their terminus point, either to complete annihilation or to subsumption under a logic of general equivalence? What if we propose that capitalism has something like agency and that this agency is manifested in ecophagic material practices? Capitalism eats the world. Whatever transformations it generates are just stages in its monstrous digestive process.

Surely this is what someone like Nick Land has in mind when he proposes that "the history of capitalism is an invasion from the future by an artificial intelligent space that must assemble itself entirely from the enemy's resources."[7] It feeds on what it finds, leaving behind a metaphorical grey chemical sludge. This alien intelligence from the future seems committed to bringing about an ultimate inorganic state, the apocalypse of that final drag of everything into the post-biological, and it is working incrementally as it moves forward through history in order to realize the future it left "behind." Like a swarm of replibots run amok, capitalism feeds on this world in order to swell itself, but maybe not to swell into anything more than an enlarged, raging version of itself—like a massive hurricane, all spinning forces looking to avoid any shoreline (political and economic alternatives) that may serves as a counterforce, chasing the conditions that will allow it to speed up and grow even more. And like the replibots, its own demise, too, may be announced in the devastation it leaves behind, but it counteracts this on at least two fronts: by generating myths of interplanetary travel and post-biological 'life' (the Singularity and so forth)

Man diving into the polluted Yamuna river, northern India.

and pushing technological unfolding down these roads; and by generating abstract financial instruments that allow it to "create value ex nihilo," as Alex Williams argues:

What is necessary is to think the in-itself of capitalism outside of any correlation to the human ... For surely what all analyses of capitalism have presumed to date is the capitalist "for-us" (construed in positive or negative terms), whereas capital is ultimately a machine which has almost no relation to humanity whatsoever, it intersects with us, it has us as moving parts, but it ultimately is not *of* or *for-us*. Capital properly thought is a vast inhuman form, a genuinely alien life form (in that it is entirely non-organic) of which we know all-too-little. A new investigation of this form must proceed precisely as an anti-anthropomorphic cartography, a study in alien finance, a *Xenoeconomics* ... Marx's labor theory of value fails to think the capitalist in-itself, the ability to create value ex nihilo (i.e., credit, and all financial instruments constructed from variations on this theme). For Marx credit, "virtual capital," and speculation built upon it is "the highest form of madness." Instead we ought to think of credit-based "virtual" capital as the highest form of capital. This is not a mere semantic shift, but rather a revolutionary inversion of the L[abor] T[heory of] V[alue], following Deleuze & Guattari in considering capitalism-as-process, conducted upon pre-existing social forms, disassembling and reassembling them to suit its own nefarious and presently obscure ends. As process rather than concrete "thing" we must consider its true nature to be contained in its destination, rather than the primitive building blocks from which it originally constituted itself (i.e., in the worlds of "virtual" capital rather than the alienation of human labor, which is surely merely an initial staging post).[8]

A split, at some point, is easy to imagine: capitalism continues to expand virtually, while the landscapes it once extracted resources from are left useless. The end of the world again, before the end of capitalism. The end of us. Granted some license, we can graft the slimed and dead world that the grey goo problem promises to an imaginary point at which capitalism has realized the goal inherent to its compulsion to deplete. It's the look of its destination. As is always the case with allegory, it's not that one scene replicates another, but that it recodes it in order to cast it in high-relief through imperfect but suggestive correspondences. One scene becomes a figural machine through which another one can be explained or approximated, particularly where direct representation is found wanting, where the stiff edges of verisimilitude prohibit accurate depiction, where bodies are asked to generate an understanding of their own abolishment.

4. Increased Velocity

Seeing as the ground has shifted beneath current cultural production, a question to consider is: What new options appear on the horizon for cultural production by opening an "inhuman" perspective on this grey goo capitalism? How do we do more than find the best compromise for a dissipative tendency that forcefully encodes itself in cultural objects, that works from the get-go to confiscate and annul divergent options to the kind of aesthetic artifacts that reinforce its naturalization?

Surely, there is the possibility of generating resistance, of finding new ways to counter the compulsion to expand at any cost, of articulating and producing or prefiguring new ways of living that challenge capitalism. In short, there is the possibility of refusing any perspective that puts us under erasure, that disregards a priori whatever participatory, resistant, transformational, insurrectionary, and emancipatory gestures we may still muster. There may be no need to undermine just yet what we may be able to accomplish, the ways in which we can still locate sites in which to intervene politically and/or where we can generate economic difference that challenges the logic and kinds of relations that capitalism allows, rendering visible practices that are currently discounted or repressed. This is what marks intelligent, politically infused cultural projects as relevant in a lifeworld no longer free of the tendency to absolute commodification and ruthless co-optation.

Not long ago, Franco Berardi wrote about one of the continuities between modernity and what has followed it: the idea of acceleration as an underlying principle. He proposes that, despite whatever changes characterize the social transition out of modernity, the drive to speed things up has survived the shift from the manufacturing sphere to the semiotic one. These days,

when the main tool for production ceases to be material labor and becomes cognitive labor, acceleration enters another phase, another dimension, because an increase in semiocapitalist productivity comes essentially from the acceleration of the info-sphere—the environment from

Walead Beshty, FedEx® Large Kraft Box ©2005 FEDEX 330510, First Overnight, Los Angeles-London trk#798173003782, October 2-5, 2009, 2009. Laminated Mirropane, FedEx shipping box, accrued FedEx tracking and shipping labels, silicone, metal, and shipping tap.

which information arrives in your brain.[9]

As is always the case with Berardi, he is interested in how these things function in relation to the human body. His metric is always anthropocentric. He finds a crisis point where the production of semiotic goods exceeds, in speed of production and management of quantity, the human brain's capacity for attention. For him, it is a question of processing time for the brain—or, rather, of the lack of this necessary time and the injunction to make things increasingly easier that follows this shortage. Everything must be easier, less meaningful, so that we can take in more of it, sacrificing robust experiences for the sake of mere informational ingestion. "More and more signs buy less and less meaning" as "our relationship to the world … become[s] purely functional, operational—probably faster, but precarious."[10]

Berardi's suggested resistance to this is to call for a reactivation of the relationship of language to desire, to put the body back in the circulation of signs as a way to ground this circulation again, to make it sensuous, to rein it in so that it functions within the time constraints that the brain imposes. But what of a different tactic, one that is the very opposite of this: an aesthetics that pivots on testing acceleration, in speeding things up even further, disintegrating things more ruthlessly? If we tap capitalism's dissipative compulsion as a force to be deliberately folded back into our practices, does it have anything to offer besides an acceleration of its methods? Can we draw unexpected morphologies and affects by intensifying this will to deplete? Can we push until mutations imminent to its perpetually recurring processes become manifest? Can we force random glitches in its patterns of reproduction? Can we speed up until the very notion of "making it easier" is no longer feasible, a kind of kaleidoscopic and liquid complexity spinning at desperate velocities foreclosing on it? Can we embrace the inorganic as a way to crack open pockets of resistance to it, to perturb our implacable movement toward it, to discover unexpected potentialities?[11]

X

Continued in "Notes on the Inorganic, Part II: Terminal Velocity"

Gean Moreno is an artist and writer based in Miami. His work has been exhibited at the North Miami MoCA, Kunsthaus Palais Thum and Taxis in Bregenz, Institute of Visual Arts in Milwaukee, Haifa Museum in Israel, Arndt & Partner in Zürich, and Invisible-Exports in New York. He has contributed texts to various magazines and catalogues. In 2008, he founded [NAME] Publications, a platform for book-based projects.

1
K. Eric Drexler, *Engines of Creation: The Coming Era of Nanotechnology* (New York: Anchor Press, 1986), 172.

2
Robert A. Freitas Jr., "The Grey Goo Problem," excerpted version of article "Some Limits to Global Ecophagy by Biovorous Nanoreplicators, with Public Policy Recommendations" (originally 2000), published on KurzweilAI.net, March 20, 2001. See http://www.kurzweilai.net/the-gray-goo-problem#r2 .

3
Ibid.

4
Projects were collected in Infanet Lab/Lateral Office, *Coupling: Strategies for Infrastructural Opportunism* (New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 2011).

5
Ibid., 33.

6
Slavoj Zižek, *First as Tragedy, Then as Farce* (London and New York: Verso, 2009), 11.

7
Nick Land, "Machinic Desire," *Textual Practice* , Vol. 7 No. 3 (1993): 479.

8
Alex Williams, "Xenoeconomics and Capital Unbound," Splintering Bone Ashes, 2008. See http://splinteringboneashes.blogspot.com/2008/10/xenoeconomics-and-capital-unbound.html .

9
Franco Berardi Bifo, "Time, Acceleration, and Violence," *e-flux journal* no. 27 (September 2011). See http://pdf.e-flux-systems.com/journal/time-acceleration-and-violence .

10
Ibid.

11
Or: are these questions mere manifestations of our naivete, ways of duping ourselves into participating in a fantasy or a symptom generated by a dissipative compulsion that advances regardless of how we position ourselves in relation to it? Are we surrendering more than we mean to when we take this treacherous path? Are these questions blindly groping for a kind of fetish aesthetics that allow us to have our transnational capitalism while claiming to be able to challenge it—to recover critical distance—from the inside? In other words, are they part of the general logic of our "post-ideologic" moment: a way to be radical at the level of the proposal, while acting in ways that help entrench and naturalize the structural necessities of the system at every other level? One should tread cautiously here.

Gregory Sholette

After OWS: Social Practice Art, Abstraction, and the Limits of the Social

In the third chapter of Herman Melville's *Moby Dick*, the novel's protagonist, Ishmael, enters the Spouter Inn in search of passage onto a whaling ship. He soon encounters an age-darkened oil painting in the entranceway and becomes perplexed. The canvas is so covered in scratches and smoky residue that it's all but impossible to make sense of. Throwing open a window to gain more light, Ishmael attempts to describe what he sees:

> what most puzzled and confounded you was a long, limber, portentous, black mass of something hovering in the center of the picture over three blue, dim, perpendicular lines floating in a nameless yeast. A boggy, soggy, squitchy picture truly, enough to drive a nervous man distracted.[1]

Ishmael renders the painting virtually abstract, or non-objective, as his act of interpretation comes to an impasse. But his comprehension of the image is not merely blocked by the marred, smoky surface. The materiality, or "thingness" of the work simultaneously frustrates, and fascinates him by denying him access to its meaning. I think of this truculent, besmoked painting often, especially when contemplating the growing allure of socially engaged art among younger artists, including those students who, by dint of previous training, lean toward craft-based object making.

Anyone who teaches visual art is familiar with the following problem. Two seemingly opposite pedagogical poles appear to be collapsing. On one side is the singularity of artistic vision expressed as a commitment to a particular material or medium. On the other is an ever-increasing pressure on students to work collaboratively through social and participatory formats, often in a public context outside the white cube. One of the most common catchall terms for the latter tendency is *social practice art*. Currently, there are about half a dozen college-level programs promoting its study. However, if you include the many instructors who regularly engage their students in political, interventionist, or participatory art projects, the tilt toward socially engaged art begins to look more like a full-blown pedagogical shift, at least in the United States.

The studio art classroom, as opposed to the lecture hall or seminar space, is where these contradictions are most apparent, and often most disarming. Any given cohort of entry-level students (graduate or undergraduate) includes both object makers and social practitioners. Similarly, the faculty at non-specialized art schools, and universities tend to express a range of aesthetic interests with varying degrees of engagement in art's material production. But most significantly, the studio classroom is where art's institutional socialization begins, and where the student

Doug Ashford, Six Moments in 1967 #3, 2008-2011.

encounters a very contemporary problem—let's call it the ontological crisis of artistic *subjecthood*—the infinite regress of self-definitions and anti-definitions that have plagued every nascent artist since Marcel Duchamp and Moholy Nagy's rejection of the "magic of the hand."[2] If one can purchase plumbing equipment and successfully display it in a museum, or have an abstract artwork made to order over the telephone, then what exactly defines the artist today, at least in a professional sense? The assembly line studio practices of artists like Damien Hirst and Jeff Koons serve to exacerbate this crisis. Uncertain about the fundaments of their profession, instructors (like me) perform a kind of ontological triage on identity-punctured art novices. (I will confess that this surgery is often also an act of self-healing.)

Stephen Wright may not be the first cultural theorist to link contemporary art's object-anxiety with the definitional crisis of the contemporary artist herself, but Wright is distinguished by his view of this ontological precariousness as a potentially liberating moment, rather than as a problem to solve. He writes, "Envisaging an art without artwork, without authorship, and without spectatorship has an immediate consequence: art ceases to be visible as such."[3] Without a visible "work," *sans* artistic reception, there would appear to be no way in which Wright's militantly discreet cultural labor could be framed as art, not even by the "art police." Adopting philosopher Jacques Rancière's definition of the aesthetics of politics, Wright rejects the manner in which critics, curators, and art historians delineate the category of art and amplify one cultural discourse over the noise of others.[4] By embracing, rather than avoiding invisibility, everyday occurrences, and noise, Wright elaborates a way for artists to leap out of prescribed aesthetic frames, past the policing of artistic borders, and move directly into a cultural "usership" within non-art social relations, including political activism.

Initially, this program would appear to fulfill a certain early-twentieth-century avant-garde injunction that art must dissolve into life, while aligning itself with certain 1960s conceptual artists who sought to become autodidacts in collaboration with "citizen's initiatives, amateur scientists' projects, and so on."[5] Except that both of those efforts landed art back in private and museum collections. But let's say that Wright's un-framed *usership* is conceivably already taking place; just think of the explosion of informal, noisy cultural activity associated with Occupy Wall Street.

In an unexpected move, OWS has not embraced invisibility or rejected an audience. Rather the movement instead has claimed its own cultural terrain, and has done so in full public view. OWS confronts the police, both literally, as well as figuratively, interweaving both short-term tactics, and longer-range strategies for returning privatized space to common use. It's as though something long held back was streaming forth, suddenly animated, but bringing along with it a shadowy archive of other histories, and other attempts at self-realization, like a surge of long-silent dark matter spilling irrepressibly into the light. This emergent swarm-archive insists that the hazy, smoky residue of time become noisily present for all to see.[6] In a rapidly gentrifying city like New York the materialization of the past is always a challenge. Meanwhile, Zuccotti Park and other OWS encampments revealed a mix of high-tech digital media and handmade signs, a mix of the archaic and the new as if beneath the internet there is cardboard.

All this complicates the classroom context. After all, instructors can hardly follow Wright's prescription simply by refusing to engage with art's institutional frame, at least not until before that glorious moment when all delimiting social divisions are swept away in the ecstasy of revolution.[7] Prior to that day of liberation, any failure to reproduce one's own academic field simply amounts to professional suicide. On the other hand, dissolving art into a corrupt world appears equally dishonest, and merely adds fuel to a neoliberal agenda that seeks to eliminate all economically "useless" areas of study as philosophy, poetry, classical languages, and all other non-commercial forms of "culture."[8]

I teach at a school where a significant number of undergraduate and graduate students make paintings, sometimes in a traditional way, which is to say, in a realistically representational, mode, and other times they produce a variation of post-war abstraction. I do not claim that this necessarily excludes the realm of "the social" as a concrete presence, especially as it manifests itself nowadays in the omnipresence of portable electronic devices linked together through the internet. Digital images turn up as source material for student drawings and paintings; while working from photographic sources is hardly new, it seems that portraits of friends, family, pets, and self are more captivating when rendered in low resolution with acidy smart phone colors. Fast-paced paging through crowd-sourced databases such as Flickr or Google has also become second nature when researching new project ideas. But more to the point, a certain compulsory "connectivity" infests student art assignments, even those rooted in traditional media. One young student of mine made oil paintings of strangers she had image-grabbed from live video chat room encounters. At her final critique, she opened a laptop and an assortment of random online voyeurs dropped in to watch us. First, a duo of giggly women appeared, followed by a young man who stared blankly at us from the other side of a webcam, apparently masturbating just out of frame. Naturally, issues of privacy emerged (our privacy, as well as that of the online strangers), and this provided an opening for us to explore broader issues of what constitutes artistic subject matter nowadays. Nevertheless, until the laptop was at last snapped shut, the intrusion of "the social" into the classroom oscillated between diversion and disruption as the specificity of the student's paintings faded further into the background of our discussion.

Granted, this example is somewhat superficial and represents only the outward collision between older, skill-based art traditions and portable electronics / social networks. Far more difficult to nail down is the place of "archaic" media such as drawing, painting, and sculpture in the sphere of social practice and performance art. No doubt some of you will think of street art, protest props, or *papier- mâché* puppets. Or perhaps what comes to mind are those climate-controlled layers of lard and honey and felt that once accompanied lectures by iconoclast Joseph Beuys, and that nowadays sit in some swanky kunsthalle, art center, or museum. Once again, to go beyond shallow assumptions of social media's invasion of traditional art practices, let me put the question differently: Where does

Doug Ashford, Six Moments in 1967 #5, 2008-2011.

abstraction and the non-representational intersect with the social? Or, put the other way around: *What is the limit of the social within the social itself*? I wish to propose that one way to approach this question is through Jane Bennett's concept of the agency of "thinghood," the "material agency of natural bodies and technological artifacts."[9]

Bennett, a political scientist by training, wants to articulate a non-human materiality in much the same way that Michel Foucault explored culture as an objectified force of human affect and desire, most famously including institutional discipline. Bennett, however, introduces us to a world of *vibrant matter*, in which concrete forces sometimes appear as obstacles to overcome, and sometimes as obstacles that overcome us (consider Hurricane Katrina in 2005, or the massive Japanese

Group Material's "Democracy" exhibition at the Dia Art Center, 1990.

tsunami of several months ago). Ultimately, these extra-societal agencies must be understood as forces to be reckoned with, as well as engaged with,[10] though always in a critical manner.[11]

The recognition of a resistant *thingness* at work within the social, including those human-originated technologies that have gone on to operate virtually independent of us, may in fact mark a point of conceptual convergence for those contrary artistic poles discussed above: the immaterial, social practitioner and the studio-based artist. Note how artist, activist, and teacher Doug Ashford, who worked with the socially engaged artists' collective Group Material for over fifteen years, grapples with the role of the abstract object in a series of paintings he has worked on over the past few years:

> I'm wondering what it means these days to employ abstract images as a participant in social organizing efforts. For many years I was a collaborator in Group Material, an artistic process determined by the idea that social liberation could be created through the displacement of art into the world, and the world into the spaces of art.[12]

Ashford seems to suggest that his current interest in abstract art and object making was foreshadowed by Group Material's collaborative installation practice. In 1990, he and other members of the collective organized the "Democracy" exhibition for the Dia Art Foundation's short-lived exhibition space on Mercer Street in Manhattan. They transformed Dia's gallery into a classroom, complete with rows of desks and chalkboards. Around the "classroom" hung a selection of artwork arranged "salon-style" overlapping against bright red walls, an anti-white cube gesture similar to a Group Material design "signature." With "Democracy," as with many of their installation projects, the collective sought to generate a different kind of space within the art gallery, a social arena in which learning could take place directly or indirectly through an art whose form and/or content focused on questions of inclusivity and participation:

> Today I'm interested in how our exhibition designs

> assigned democracy's unpredictability and inclusivity to an imaginable shape, a shape you could feel, a shape that is always irregular and fluctuating: an abstraction.[13]

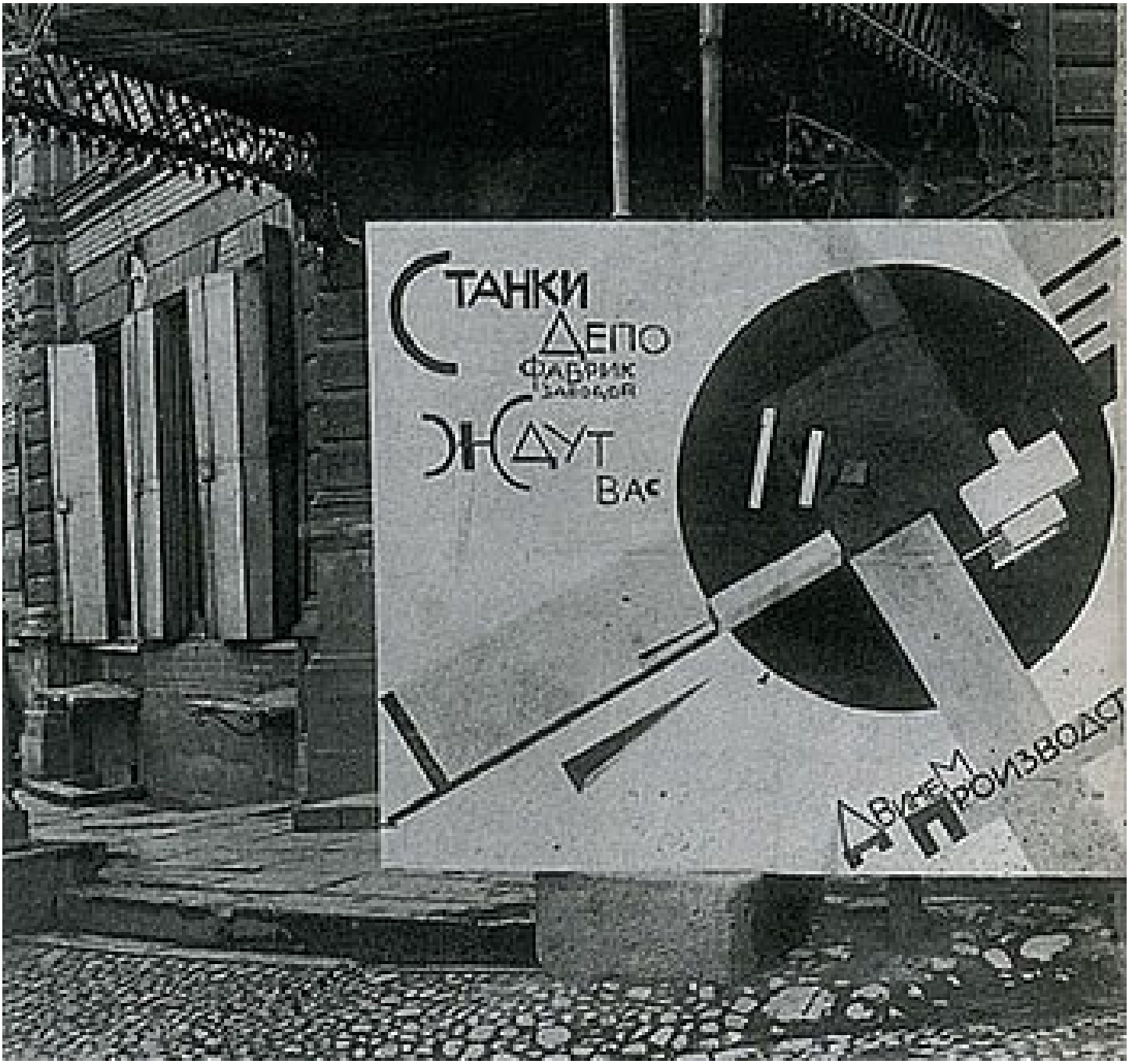
Ashford takes his hunch a bit further, in the form of a challenge: "Is abstract painting a clue to the irregular shape I experienced at Group Material shows and our modeling of democracy?" Can something so abstract even be visualized? Or is the question really about the intersection of a certain aesthetic vocabulary with everyday social routines? After all, Group Material's project is but one attempt by artists to make something ineffably abstract into a concrete force or agency, or to attempt the opposite by dematerializing the well-worn world of the social into an aesthetically informed spectacle through the strange agency of abstraction.

Grainy images of large, suprematist shapes in the streets of 1920s Belarus flash up in my mind as I write this last sentence. Aimed at inspiring new ways of thinking and new forms of organizing during the early years of the revolution, these startling plastic forms were generated by Soviet Commissar of Art Kasimir Malevich and his colleagues at the Vitebsk School of Art. Suprematist pedagogy also took place inside the classroom. Students not only constructed three-dimensional geometric forms in a radical break with realist traditions, they also understood abstraction to be central to the realization of a new "creative collectivity."[14] This mental recollection is replaced by another black-and-white photograph, this time on the cover of the *Los Angeles Times*. It depicts Suzanne Lacy and Leslie Labowitz's discerning 1977 media event *In Mourning and in Rage*, which was staged before news cameras on the steps of Los Angeles City Hall to call attention to the victims of the brutal Hillside Strangler. The performance begins with a troupe of preternaturally tall, veiled figures slowly emerging from a funeral hearse to silently protest a culture they believe promotes female victimhood.[15] The concise geometry of the forms and staging is a quintessential Western artistic trope morphed into public spectacle in pursuit of social justice. But there is a reciprocal way to examine the agency of *thingness* and social practice, one that is less about abstract forms intervening in social content, and more about the social itself as a kind of abstraction, or perhaps more accurately, as a merging of biological agency with mechanical and mnemonic forces.

Operating the "people's microphone," or "human microphone," is simple enough. Made famous by OWS as a response to a New York City ban on amplified sound at Zuccotti Park, a group of listeners broadcasts a speaker's words by loudly repeated them in unison. For larger gatherings, a second wave of repetition is sometimes necessary. On one level, this cultural innovation appears to be a "flesh and blood" substitute for an electronic technology that large public meetings have come to depend upon. On another level, the people's mic introduces mechanization directly into human-to-human interaction by alternating segments of speech with interruptions to generate gain, a series of discontinuous procedures that send physical ripples through a congregation transformed, one could say, into a temporary, self-regulating cybernetic community, an undulating cyberorganism. Likewise, the entire OWS panoply of hand-drawn or pirated imagery —made with thin-point or chisel-tipped markers, bits of torn masking tape, clipped newspaper, collaged laser prints, spray paint stencils, as well as charcoal and acrylic, and limitless pieces of recycled beige cardboard— exhibited the unmistakable qualities of an archive even before the encampment was power-scrubbed into history. Here I am approaching the idea of the archive not as a precise collection of thematic documents that uphold this or that school or historical interpretation, but instead envision it as a site of conceptual "objects," as well as an unbounded material accumulation capable of becoming a force of spirited intervention in the present. In this sense, Zuccotti Park, along with all other OWS encampments, embodies an archive *avant la lettre*, that is to say, a collection of materials, biopolitical practices, and everyday concrete documents waiting to be recognized as an interpretable text. Sadly, in New York City, the moment of this "reading" began at 1 a.m. on November 15 when the NYPD began to clear the park.

Mic check at OWS. Photo: AP

Embracing Bennett's material vibrancy within social practice means recognizing not only the role of extra-human technologies and abstract concepts like democracy, but also the corporeal presence of "nature," not in some sugary, universal form, but as a negation that radically confronts human culture with alterity. This line of thinking might, for instance, nudge a project focused on the interaction of human and natural ecologies within a



Painted board by UNOVIS on a street in Vitebsk.

downtown waterfront or inner-city park—to cite a couple of examples I am familiar with—into a reflection about what the river might demand from society, as opposed to what it offers city residents.[16]

Likewise, if we think of putting "art" to work explaining or engaging participants in an abstract notion like democracy, as Group Material sought to do, we could, with more effort, turn this procedure around and consider how an abstraction like democracy might manifest itself in physical, even aesthetic forms. At the same time that art's previously hidden sociality materialized within OWS, or the internet, or via the steady stream of collective practices that have blossomed over the past fifteen years, there is a danger that a range of techniques, non-discursive ways of thinking, and material forces will be rendered obsolete, regressive, or invisible. Such an approach might also help terminate endless debates about artistic deskilling whose concrete art-world manifestations have less to do with theoretical niceties like immaterial labor than they do with the unspoken hierarchy between a class of idea-artists and a lower class whose skills are called upon to fabricate

'FIGHTING BACK'—Veiled women holding a militant memorial service on the City Hall ste
Times photo by Ben Ole

Feminists Hold Strangling Victims Rites

A coalition of women from feminist organizations held a militant memorial service on the City Hall steps Tuesday for the victims in the Hillside Strangler slayings and for women who have been raped or beaten in Los Angeles.

Their faces veiled, the women, bearing red capes to symbolize their [illegible] rejected statistics on violent crimes against women and chanted, "Women fight back."

Joan Robins, of the Rape Crisis Hotline, said the coalition is demanding self-defense training in all levels of public school as part of the regular physical education curriculum, placing telephone numbers of rape crisis hotlines in a special emergency listing in telephone directories and city [illegible] port of rape prevention projects.

Councilwoman Pat Russell [illegible] sponded that the City Council [illegible] supporting the demands where could and was instituting an emergency shelter for rape victims.

Councilwoman Joy Picus said City Hall has started self-defense class

Suzanne Lacy and Leslie Labowitz's media event In Mourning and in Rage as it appeared on the cover of the Los Angeles Times, 1977.

projects.

Returning to the darkness of the Spouter Inn, Ishmael eventually believes he can recognize what the obscure mass at the center of the half-lit painting represents. In a reading foreshadowing the impending drama, he offers

> a final theory of my own, partly based upon the aggregated opinions of many aged persons with whom I conversed upon the subject. The picture represents a Cape-Horner in a great hurricane; the half-foundered ship weltering there with its three dismantled masts alone visible; and an exasperated whale, purposing to spring clean over the craft, is in the enormous act of impaling himself upon the three mast-heads.

Perhaps, rather than thinking of social practice art as a strategy for unlikely survival against the forces of neoliberal enterprise culture and its strip-mining of creativity, we could inscribe this still-emerging narrative with a stubborn sense of materiality and a vibrant *itness*, that if nothing else would challenge unspoken hierarchies, and divisions of labor, because a critical, social practice should above all acknowledge the limits of the social within the social itself.

X

Gregory Sholette is a New York-based artist, writer, and founding member of *Political Art Documentation/Distribution* (PAD/D: 1980-1988), and *REPOhistory* (1989-2000). His recent publications include *Dark Matter: Art and Politics in an Age of Enterprise Culture* (Pluto Press, 2011); *Collectivism After Modernism: The Art of Social Imagination after 1945 (with Blake Stimson) ; and The Interventionists: A Users Manual for the Creative Disruption of Everyday Life (with Nato Thompson). An Assistant Professor of Sculpture at Queens College: City University of New York (CUNY), he is involved in the experimental program Social Practice Queens, an MFA focused on new forms of public art; he is also a member of Gulf Labor Coalition ; the Institute for Wishful Thinking; the Art & Labor Working Group of OWS, and he is currently creating a new installation for the Queens Museum of Art's New York City Panorama, as well as co-curating with Oliver Ressler the exhibition "It's the Political Economy Stupid!" for the Austrian Cultural Forum, NY. See www.gregorysholette.com and darkmatterarchives.net for more information.*

1
Herman Melville, *Mobu-Dick: or, the Whale* (Waking Lion Press, 2009), 7.

2
See the interview with Marcel Duchamp following his "retirement" from making art.

3
Stephen Wright, "Users and Usership of Art: Challenging Expert Culture" (2007), transform, http://web.archive.org/web/20121022055430/transform.eipcp.net/correspondence/1180961069 .

4
Rancière's definition of the police is cited by Wright, ibid.

5
Wright's text does not focus as much on the artist's troubled identity as on artistic reception; I have therefore taken some liberties in applying his thinking to the question of practice itself.

6
For more about OWS and the concept of the archive, see my forthcoming text "Occupology, Swarmology, Whateverology: the city of (dis)order versus the people's archive," in the online version of *Art Journal*. And about the concept of art's missing mass, see my book *Dark Matter: Art and Politics in the Age of Enterprise Culture* (Pluto Press, 2011).

7
I am referring here to Karl Marx's oft-quoted remark from *The German Ideology* that "in communist society, where nobody has one exclusive sphere of activity but each can become accomplished in any branch he wishes, society regulates the general production and thus makes it possible for me to do one thing today and another tomorrow, to hunt in the morning, fish in the afternoon, rear cattle in the evening, criticize after dinner, just as I have a mind, without ever becoming hunter, fisherman, shepherd or critic."

8
For an excellent reference to this process of corporatized education, see Edufactory Journal, http://web.archive.org/web/20120221194325/edu-factory.org/wp/journal/ .

9
Jane Bennett, *Vibrant Matter: A Political Ecology of Things* (Duke UP Books, 2009), xiii & 1.

10
Ibid, 4.

11
Jane Bennett is not the first thinker to take materiality and its affect on art, science, or politics seriously. Certainly Theodor Adorno's concept of negative dialectics grapples with the category of *nonidentity*, applying it not only to the realm of ontology, but also to aesthetics, and in ways that exceed in their critical force such currently fashionable writers as Jacques Rancière. But Bennett explicitly distances herself from this approach, arguing that Adorno still holds out hope of reconciling the unspeakable *otherness* of things with human knowledge (Ibid, 14), and that Rancière admits only those who can engage in human discourse into the realm of political participation, thus leaving aside other beings, forces, animals, and things (Ibid, 106). By contrast, Bennett's vibrant matter acknowledges the full-on agency of the non-human in itself, without need for human definition, acceptance, instrumentality, or intervention. Still, I suspect that despite her resistance to Marxism, Bennett's ideas are strangely closer to those of Walter Benjamin, perhaps more so that she might acknowledge. I am thinking here of Benjamin's positive appraisal of surrealist photography in which everyday things dulled by familiarity reassert themselves through uncanny estrangement. But also his interest in the politics of dreaming and fantasy, let's call this the vibrancy of the historical unconscious, or of the archive *from below* .

12
All quotes are from Doug Ashford and Angelo Bellfatto, "Sometimes We Say Hopes, or When We Want to Say Hopes, or Wishes, or Aspirations," in *Interiors* (Bard CCS and Sternberg Press, forthcoming), originally presented as a conversation at The New Museum, April 29-30, 2011.

13
Ibid.

14
Aleksandra S. Shatskikh, *Vitebsk: the Life of Art* (Yale UP, 2007), 137.

15
See https://blogs.getty.edu/pacificstandardtime/explore-the-era/worksofart/in-mourning-and-in-rage-media-performance-at-los-angeles-city-hall/ .

16
Nicholas Mirzoeff writes about an attempt to "occupy" the recent UN Climate Change Convention in Durbin, South Africa by indigenous people who call for the "decolonization of the atmosphere," a tacit recognition of the planet's rights, in "Occupy Climate Change," *Occupy! Gazette* 3 (December 15, 2011): 32, 34.

Sven Lütticken

General Performance

Rather than signaling the end of the labor regime that has marked the past decades, the current crisis is the becoming-explicit of its internal contradictions. As the Constructivist critic Nikolai Tarabukin put it: the future art under communism would be *work transformed.*[1] From the 1970s on, this goal has increasingly been realized in unexpected ways, as new forms of labor have emerged that redefine work in performative terms. In recasting performance as action, the current activism not so much negates as *modulates* the by now quite aged "new labor."

1. New Labor

The term "performance" is slippery even within relatively well-defined contexts. In today's economy, it not only refers to the productivity of one's labor but also to one's actual, quasi-theatrical self-presentation, one's self-performance in an economy where work has become more dependent on immaterial factors. As an artist or writer or curator, you perform when you do your job, but your job also includes giving talks, going to openings, being in the right place at the right time. Transcending the limits of the specific domain of performance art, then, is what I would call *general performance* as the basis of the new labor. The emergence of new forms of performance in art in the 1960s was itself a factor in the emergence of this contemporary form of labor, which is, after all, connected to a culturalization of the economy. Some artistic practices from the 1960s and beyond can, as both exemplary and eccentric manifestations of the new regime, help to bring it into focus.

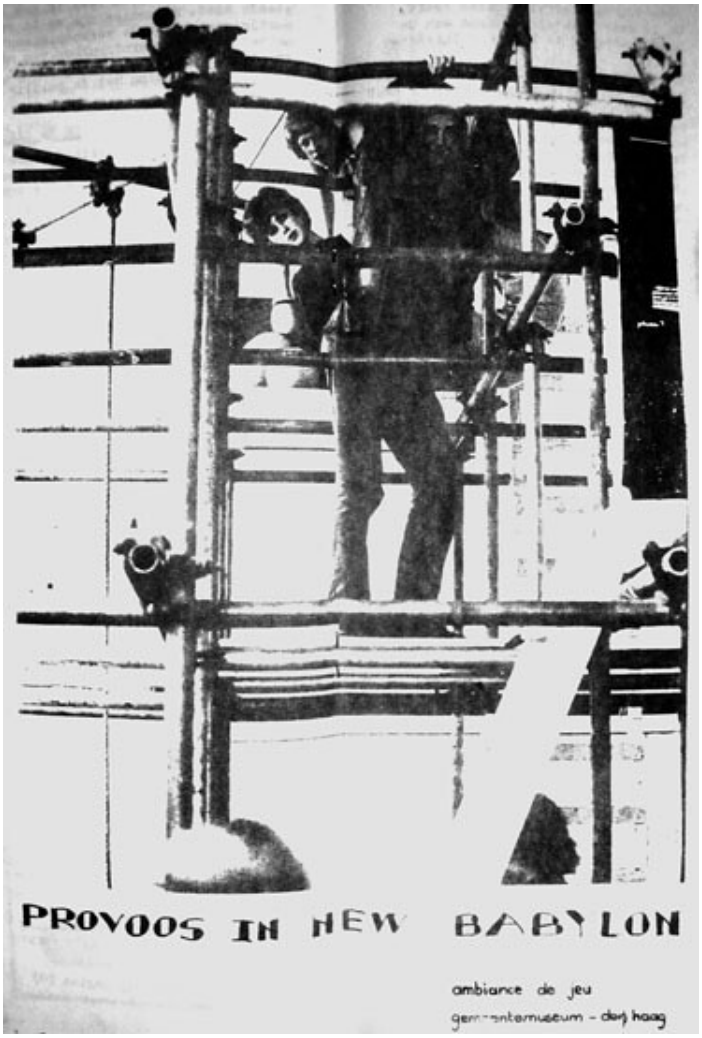
The work of John Cage and its reception by a young generation of artists around 1960 signaled a *generalization* of artistic performance. In the early versions of the score for Cage's *4'33''*, which was written in different notational systems, the piece was presented as being "for any instrument or combination of instruments," though the piano version would be the dominant one. The version in proportional notation consists of vertical lines indicating duration—pure time. Here one may wonder why there has to be "any instrument" at all, and in 1962 Cage radicalized the piece as *0'00''*, also known as *4'33''* no. 2: this was now a "solo to be performed in any way by anyone," consisting of the performance of "a disciplined action." The written score clarifies: "No two performances to be of the same action, nor may that action be the performance of a 'musical' composition."[2] This score, it has been noted, can be seen as Cage's response to the development of a new kind of performance by a young generation of artists associated with Fluxus and happenings—indeed, Cage's score is dedicated to Yoko Ono and her then-husband Toshi Ichoyangi.[3] This performance was *generic* in that it did not fit any disciplinary categories; it was also potentially *general*, no longer containable in traditional artistic frameworks.

The Kommune 1 on the cover of Wolf Vostell, Aktionen, Happenings und Demonstrationen seit 1965. Eine Dokumentation, 1970.

If the 1960s were marked by a prolonged critique of medium-specificity and by the emergence of generic visual art, there were various routes to the post-specific. One, traced expertly by Thierry de Duve, centered around the modernist painting, which when reduced to a bare canvas, to its physical medium, turned into an "arbitrary object" among others.[4] This, the triumph of the readymade at the heart of modernism, was the development that Greenberg and Fried desperately tried to stave off in the 1960s. By contrast, the impact of Cage—which the young artists, especially Kaprow, hybridized with their interpretation of "action painting"—placed the emphasis on performance as a form of intermedia.[5] Various strands, both Cagean and more expressionist-actionist, intersected and become pop phenomena, thus enacting the transition from the artistic-generic to the general—from Yoko and John's relationship performance, to Joseph Beuys's media messianism, Wim T. Schippers's Dutch Fluxus TV comedy shows, and the German Kommune 1, cofounded by sometime Situationist Dieter Kunzelmann,— which made it into many magazines and onto the cover of Wolf Vostell's 1970 anthology of *Aktionen*.

The new performance thus quickly outgrew the confines of rarefied avant-garde art events; generic performance became truly general performance. Last year, former Kommune 1 protagonist Rainer Langhans did a much-publicized stint on the German version of *I'm a Celebrity, Get Me Out of Here*.[6] But one should not interpret such genealogies in the rather tired terms of co-optation. General performance in art cannot be separated from the wider transformation of work *in terms of performance.* This means that, yes, there will be cases that seem tailor-made for Peter Bürger-style complaints; nonetheless, this implication of *aesthetic general performance* in the establishment of a regime of *economic general performance* is not a fatal flaw but a *precondition* for whatever critical potential the former may have. Aesthetic general performance is a faulty prototype, a demonstration model with whims.

One important manner in which the transition to post-Fordism was theorized in the 1960s was through the discourse of automation and play. Constant, for one, emphasized that automation would make human labor increasingly unnecessary, leading to new forms of occupation, of life as play. Huizinga's *homo ludens*, whom industrial capitalism had relegated to the past, would become a reality once more.[7] In 1966, a life-size "test space" for Constant's New Babylon was constructed in Rotterdam. Entitled *Ambiance de jeu*, it contained rooms that included a crawl space, a "sonorium," a large metal scaffolding, a labyrinth of doors (an idea adapted from the Situationist labyrinth planned for the Stedelijk Museum in 1959, which was never realized), and an "odoratorium." Because Constant and his team were anxious for feedback from visitors, they provided a wall on which comments could be scrawled as well as a table with questionnaires and phones that could tape spoken comments. In this rather technocratic setup, play is a matter of planning. When, in 1973, Constant looked back on this experiment, he stressed the need for giving the out-of-work subject of the future something to do, and this something could only be the exploration of a dynamic, perpetually changing environment.[8]



The Provos in Constant's Ambiance de jeu, as depicted in Provo #4.

Constant considered the young Provos shaking up Dutch society in the 1960s to be the precursors of tomorrow's New Babylonians.[9] The Provo movement presented itself as a playful multitude, as the "provotariat." Constant and his *homo ludens* were crucial points of reference in Provo's magazine; one issue had a photo showing "Provos in New Babylon," young people climbing on the metal scaffolding of Constant's *Ambiance de jeu.*[10] Provo was a coalition between a small anarchist group centered around Roel van Duyn, and the one-man movement Robert Jasper Grootveld, whose anti-smoking happenings had galvanized Amsterdam's disaffected youth. Grootveld, who waged war on tobacco and addiction and

Kommune 1 protagonist Rainer Langhans on TV show I'm a Celebrity, Get Me Out of Here.

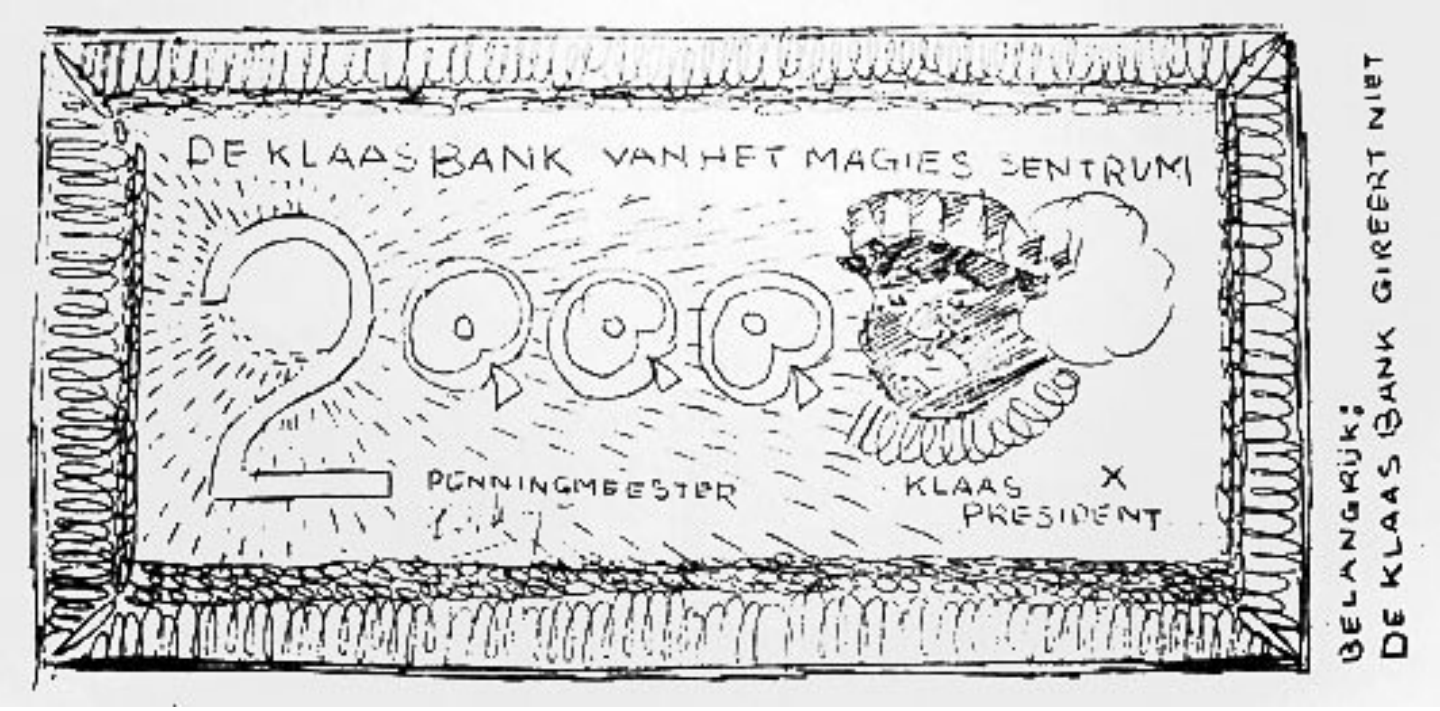
appropriated what he knew about American happenings to stage absurd rituals in public space, constructed a personal mythology in an inimitable (and virtually untranslatable) discourse.[11] A self-proclaimed exhibitionist, Grootveld early on engineered the confluence of the avant-garde and the mass media, becoming a celebrity self-performer—although his happenings of 1964-67 generated a kind of publicity that was not easily normalized.[12]

A central feature of Grootveld's private mythology was his semi-secular saint, Saint Nicholas or Sinterklaas—Klaas for short.[13] "Klaas must come," Grootveld maintained prophetically. The coming of Klaas, that central mytheme of Grootveld's 1960s discourse, was given an economic slant in the Klaasbank, a semi-fictitious bank whose motto was that "Klaas Must Pay Some Day."[14] Absorbing Constant's idealistic take on the abolition of work through automation, but linking it to an analysis of financial collapse, the Great Depression, and inflation (a phenomenon he witnessed firsthand during a trip to Italy in 1966, when the idea for the Klaasbank was born), Grootveld proposed a bank that would allow the continuing production and consumption of goods once unemployment was the dominant form of life; a bank with a new kind of currency.[15]

If the latter remained vague and hypothetical, the phrase "Klaas Must Pay Some Day" reads as a canny take on the progressive financialization of post-industrial capitalism, on the financial abyss underlying the new labor. Like more recent alternative banks, the Klaasbank may not have *worked*, but it *functioned* as a symptomatic indicator of profound shifts. The Klaasbank was still marked by the ideology of growth; it sought to safeguard growth by providing ludic self-performers with dodgy credit. Today, the collapse of a real credit-based economy sees performers scrambling to find sustainable modes of practice, of life—seeking to bank on *time* in a different way than the economy of futures.

2. Economy of Time

The Marxist analysis of the production of surplus value was rooted in discrete and quantifiable time; different types of labor requiring different levels of skill or physical



Klaasbank cheque on letter to mayor Van Hall, 1966.

hardship are paid accordingly, but all on the basis of regular, measurable working hours. When labor becomes general performance, time-as-measure erodes; "flexible working hours" means that all hours are potentially working hours, and every encounter potentially becomes a form of networking and hence self-performance. In a curious way, the recent interest in time-banking tends to restore time as the measure of value.
Early-twentieth-century examples of time-banking, which are invoked as models for contemporary forms, are in turn indebted to the Equitable Labor Exchange developed in the 1830s by Robert Owen, and to Marx and Engels's insistence on the abolition of money under communism, when socialized production would enable the direct expression of value in its "natural, adequate, and absolute measure, *time*."[16]

While the introduction of time-based currencies in time-banks erases the difference between actual working hours and paid working hours that produces surplus value in industrial capitalism (you work for ten hours but get paid for nine), by making time into a currency, Owen, Marx, and contemporary time-bankers replicate a crucial feature of industrial capitalism. The time-bank is not the end of money but its primitivist rebirth. However, the e-flux time/bank, as a time-bank for cultural workers, reflects a crucial change: the postings, to the extent that they are more than advertising for the self-employed unemployed, are so diverse and individual as to make comparison extremely difficult. We have come a long way since Owen's Equitable Labor Exchange; in the post-Fordist regime, fixed capital (technology) cooperates with surplus-value adding "immaterial labor" to destroy the status of abstracted labor (labor power and labor time) as the measure and source of wealth, without destroying capitalism in the process. As the production of value becomes ever less transparent—since it is no longer anchored in labor time—value is up for grabs. Abandoning labor time as the source of value means that labor itself changes. While repetitive industrial labor is to a large extent farmed out to low-wage countries (or migrants from low-wage countries), "immaterial" laborers in advanced economies are no longer exclusively or primarily seen as purveyors of abstract labor power, but as people who bring something unique to the process. General performance is labor beyond measure; it is the qualitative performance of time rather than its quantitative use.[17] In practice this means high incomes for the few and precarity for the many.

At a moment when various European countries have abandoned the desperate ploy of the last two decades to integrate art into a "creative industry" that would be able to replace industries that have gone east, imposing drastic cutbacks that are designed to widen the gap between successful "high performers" and the rest, this attempt at a partial restoration of time-as-measure is at the very least suggestive. However, it is highly problematic, as Stroom in The Hague has done, to burden time-banks with grand claims about alternative economies and mutual aid in a time of crisis.[18] Such economies and such aid exist, in informal ways, and it is hard to see what is gained by formalizing them—unless it is the use of the time-bank listings for purposes of, precisely, self-performance. In

spite of or because of its problematic aspects, time-banking is part of a constellation of developments that sheds light on the pressing antinomies of our temporal economy.

Hans van Houwelingen and Jonas Staal, Allegories of Good and Bad Government, 2011. Exhibition at W139, Amsterdam. Photo: Idan Shilon.

Another element of this constellation is formed by what I would call time-camps. In the case of the project *Allegories of Good and Bad Government* by Hans van Houwelingen and Jonas Staal at W139, artists and politicians were literally camping in the space for a number of days, debating all day long and withdrawing into their tents at night—a set-up designed to recall Big Brother houses and televisual "jungle camps." Sung Hwan Kim's quasi-secret two-week workshop, in association with Casco in Utrecht, in an Amsterdam apartment in June 2011, is another extreme case. Since what Franco Berardi calls contemporary "cybertime" is marked by our feelings of insufficiency about never having enough of the damn thing (time) to accomplish all the things we should, it is acutely stressful, but being inside such distended events brings with it an odd sense of calm.[19] Here one is part of swarm of similar subjectivities, and at some point the pressure to perform may ebb and new forms of cooperation may emerge. There are additional examples that could and should be analyzed in more detail; here I just want to compare the time-camp as such with the recent interest in time-banks. In different ways, they both seek to counter the "eventalization" that is part and parcel of the prevailing economic regime. But of course neither time-banks nor time-camps are abstract negations of the current economy; they too bear its mark. They are part of a set of sometimes conflicting attempts to think and act within but also against and beyond the current working conditions.

Fittingly, the tent camp in W139 was succeeded by a tent camp associated with the Occupy movement that was set up on the adjacent Beursplein, next to the Amsterdam stock exchange—with Jonas Staal among the participants. Because the international crisis has manifested itself (for the time being) only in a mitigated form in the Netherlands, the Dutch Occupy movement did not take off. Yet a case such as the "Reading at Occupy Amsterdam Group," with collective reading and discussion sessions held in a tent, is significant: such reading groups have proliferated, both

within and outside institutional contexts (or in their margins). They too are small time-camps, zones of intensity; and in the absence of any great mass movement, the small "Occupy Amsterdam" encampment became visible as a radicalized time-camp, as an occupation less of a small square than of hours, days, weeks, and months. In contrast to time-camps within art institutions, here the occupation of time exceeds the boundaries of the culturalized economy.

In this sense, such an encampment almost seems made to illustrate Berardi's point—a familiar one, but well-made—that

> the development of productive forces, as a global network of cognitive labor that Marx called the "general intellect," has provoked an enormous increase in the productive potency of labor. This potency can no longer be semiotized, organized, and contained by the social form of capitalism. Capitalism is no longer able to semiotize and organize the social potency of cognitive productivity, because value can no longer be defined in terms of average necessary work time. Therefore, the old forms of private property and salaried labor are no longer able to semiotize and organize the deterritorialized nature of capital and social labor.[20]

As a kind of reverse co-optation, a number of contemporary practices take performance beyond the limits of "actually existing" general performance. However, this development should not be seen in beatific terms. The liberated potency of general performance is a destructive as well as constructive force.

3. Performance into Action

Adorno criticized Huzinga's *Homo Ludens* for failing to acknowledge that the repetitive element in play is an afterimage of unfree labor.[21] Provo too inadvertently presented afterimages of bondage. The taunting "checks" made out by the Klaasbank to Provo's nemesis, Amsterdam mayor Van Hall, bore clichéd drawings of Sinterklaas's black assistant, Zwarte Piet (or "Black Pete"): an unfortunate symptom of Dutch society's unwillingness to see the colonial implications of the blackface tradition, which remains popular in the Netherlands to this day.[22] (When Grootveld himself put on blackface during happenings, the result was rather different, upsetting coded representations of blackness rather than mimicking them.) And yet, the presence of this distorted afterimage of colonialism and slavery, these sources of much Dutch wealth, is oddly fitting on the check of this hypothetical post-Fordist funny-money bank.

Children dressed as Black Pete watching the arrival of Saint Nicholas in Amsterdam on November 13, 2011, in front of the Occupy Amsterdam camp on the Beursplein.

As Susan Buck-Morss has argued, colonial plantations were as much a part of modern industrial capitalism as European factories; they *were* factories.[23] By the end of the 1960s, people from the then Dutch colony of Surinam were increasingly migrating to a "motherland" that was undergoing rapid change in other respects as well, leading to increased unemployment among the white as well as the new black working class.[24] Black Pete, in all the forced jolliness and playfulness given to him by the white people performing his persona, went from one type of plantation to another, from one form of labor to another. Or is the new labor really a kind of *substitute* for labor, as Hito Steyerl has argued? Is it really a kind of *occupation,* a form of keeping busy?[25] The new labor is marked by the inability to distinguish between labor and leisure, between work and occupation, between working hours and free time—between performance and life.

Guy Debord's slogan *"Ne travaillez jamais,"* scrawled on a Parisian wall in the 1950s, was of course aimed at alienating wage labor. The Situationist project of the *"abolition du travail aliéné"* aimed at abolishing this labor in favor of new forms of activity that could be seen either as the negation of work (which is what Constant emphasized) or as its *transformation*—a transformation to such a point that the distinction between work and non-work would become a moot point. In our actual new labor, this has resulted in a temporal economy in which *travaillez toujours* might as well be the motto. Debord largely neglected the consequences of the restructuring of the Western economies in the 1960s and 1970s, still banking on the revolutionary potential of a proletariat that was increasingly dissolving. It was perhaps in some rather marginal gestures that Debord's most incisive interventions in the developing new labor can be found.

In 1963, Debord received a letter from the Cercle de la Librarie demanding money for copyright infringement:

Debord was accused of having taken the photo of the " *Ne travaillez jamais*" graffito published in the *Internationale Situationniste* journal from one of a series of postcards of Parisian scenes with "funny" captions. As in fact he had. However, in a brilliantly crafted response, Debord argued that since he was the author of the original graffito (something for which he claimed he could produce several witnesses), it was in fact the photographer and the publisher who had infringed *his* copyright. Rejecting the whole of intellectual property law, Debord magnanimously announced that he would not press charges, but he insisted that the publisher remove the "funny" caption from the postcard: " *Les conseils superflus* ." This advice to stop working was anything but superfluous, and the caption was offensive.[26] As he probably anticipated, Debord never heard from the publisher again.

getting the publisher to discontinue the card, but in reprinting the photo (albeit cropped, shorn of its offensive caption) and engaging in a correspondence that has now been published as part of his *Correspondence*, Debord assisted in its transformation. In reappropiating his un-oeuvre and engaging in this legal game with the publisher, Debord effectively participated in the redefinition of work, performing intellectual or immaterial labor. His act, in other words, did not result in some hypothetical complete break with capitalism, but played the game in such a way that its contradictions were pushed to the limit, to a point where performing the new labor becomes, perhaps, an *act*—one of the "new forms of action in politics and art" that Debord promised.[27]

The present situation sees some notable attempts at forging constellations from types of work that would appear to be at opposite ends of the spectrum. The

Les conseils superflus, postcard showing Guy Debord's graffito Ne travaillez jamais.

" *Ne travaillez jamais*" as ephemeral graffito was beyond recuperation, hardly an *oeuvre.* But as a postcard *,* subsequently detourned by the S.I., the piece became work, was put to work. Perhaps Debord succeeded in

reverse of precarious general performance is bargain-basement *invisible labor,* done by the indigenous working class but especially by (frequently illegal) migrant

workers, who end up as cleaners or domestic workers purely because of their (il)legal status and the invalidity of any foreign diplomas they might have. In 2010–11, a group of Dutch artists and academics called "ASK!" (Actie Schone Kunsten) collaborated with cleaners and domestic workers (often illegal immigrants) on actions that sought to raise their visibility. Is invisible, illegal domestic labor not the dark side of post-Fordist performance? But while many domestic workers have a shaky legal status that creates problems most arty types do not have to contend with, is there not a fundamental commonality in the *precarity* of these forms of work? As far as cultural internships and jobs are concerned, this precarity is brilliantly exposed and problematized by the Carrotworkers' Collective/Precarious Workers Brigade. However, the overall system of *performing conditions* necessitates the forging of connections across class boundaries.

Cleaning and caring would be the most common forms of general performance if they were not forced to be invisible and socially denigrated as rote routine. ASK! tries to make this labor visible through collective actions that effectively turn invisible labor into visible performance. At a moment when the Western and indeed global performative economy is showing serious signs of disintegration, such interventions are part of a mix of practices that turn general performance into a reflexive and interventionist praxis, that turn new labor into a different kind of (non) work. Economic general performance spawns new forms of aesthetic general performance—its mutation, its fulfillment and tipping point.

This winter, depression and exhaustion have stalked the lands like—as Edmund Blackadder might say—two giant stalking things. Perhaps this phenomenon has been especially pronounced in a country such as the Netherlands, where the new forms of action seem desperately marginal, and right-wing populism and market liberalism hold sway. Bodies and psyches rebelled about what was effectively *extra work*. Managers in the financial sector found themselves throwing up from stress; at the same time, artists and academics turned into zombies that desperately tried to juggle old and new, imposed and voluntary activities. *Travaillez toujours* was indeed the motto. If capitalism "is no longer able to semiotize and organize the social potency of cognitive productivity, because value can no longer be defined in terms of average necessary work time," if performativity can no longer be contained by "actually existing performance," this excess does not necessarily take on heroic forms. Stomach, brain, and other organs may have their own ways of acting up, of saying "I would prefer not to."

Carrotworkers Collective's People's Court.

X

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http://svenlutticken.blogspot.com

1
Nikolaı Taraboukine (Nikolai Tarabukin), *Le Dernier tableau* (1923), translated from the Russian by Michel Pétris and Andrei B. Nakov (Paris: Champ Libre, 1972), 56.

2
John Cage, score for *0'00'' (4'33''* no. 2), *Edition Peters no. 6796* (New York: Henmar Press, 1962).

3
Ibid. See also Branden W. Joseph, *Beyond the Dream Syndicate: Tony Conrad and the Arts After Cage* (New York: Zone Books, 2008), 161, 405 (note 21).

4
For Thierry de Duve's account of generic art, see *Kant After Duchamp* (Cambridge, MA and London: MIT Press, 1966).

5
Huizinga's study *Homo Ludens* (first Dutch edition 1938) was an important point of reference for the early Situationist International, although this importance faded in the early 1960s as the Debord-dominated SI became a more explicitly Marxist revolutionary project. For Constant's New Babylon, Huizinga's analysis of the importance of "the play-element of culture" remained a cornerstone.

6
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8
See Constant, "Het principe van de desoriëntatie," in *New Babylon* (The Hague: Haags Gemeentemuseum, 1974), 76-86.

9
See Constant, "New Babylon," *Provo* no. 4 (October 28, 1965): 6,8.

10
Provo no. 4: 18-19.

11
An impressive attempt at transcription can be found in the publication *Dit hap-hap-happens in Amsterdam* (Amsterdam: Arbeiderspers, 1966), unpaginated.

12
As with Burroughs, addiction and its exorcism play central role in Grootveld's work (his "new labor"). Tobacco was the big enemy. Recognizing the ritualistic element in smoking, Grootveld turned his happenings into absurdist quasi-rituals to exorcize the demons of control and addiction. Grootveld characterized happenings as "vacuums in time, with as many people as possible in attendance." In his collective vacuums, young people took to collectively chanting the coughing refrain "uche, uche, uche!"

13
See Eric Duivenvoorden, *Magiër van een nieuwe tijd. Het leven van Robert Jasper Grootveld* (Amsterdam and Antwerpen: De Arbeiderspers, 2009), a.o. 147-148, 255.

14
"Klaas Must Pay Some Day" was a phraseused on several pamphlets and posters, for instance on the poster *Beter oorlam dan oorlog*, no. BG D68/34 in the Porvo Archive at the International Institute for Social History in Amsterdam.

15
Ibid, 347-349.

16
Friedrich Engels, *Anti-Dühring* (1877), part 3.IV. In an earlier part of *Anti-Dühring* (3.I), Engels discusses Owen's Labor Exchange.

17
For an analysis of the transformation of "time as measure" into "time of life," see Antonio Negri, "The Constitution of Time" (1981), in *Time for Revolution* , trans. Matteo Mandarini (New York: Continuum, 2003), 21-138.

18
See https://www.e-flux.com/announcements/35331/we-are-not-poor/ .

19
Franco "Bifo" Berardi, *Precarious Rhapsody* (London: Minor Compositions, 2009), 69-71.

20
Franco "Bifo" Berardi, "The Future After the End of the Economy," *e-flux journal* no.30 (December 2011), see https://www.e-flux.com/journal/30/68135/the-future-after-the-end-of-the-economy/ .

21
Theodor W. Adorno, *Ästhetische Theorie* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1970), 470-471.

22
These two pamphlets, kept in the Provo Archive at the International Institute for Social History (box 2, folders 3 and 4, pamphlets no. 115 and 116) appear to be part of a game that aimed to have Van Hall put in a personal appearance at the Frascati Theater, where he could cash his check (originally 1000 guilders, then increased to 2000 as an extra incentive).

23
See Susan Buck-Morss, "Hegel and Haiti" in *Critical Inquiry* 26, no.4 (Summer, 2000), 821-865.

24
Migration of Surinamers to Holland had been legally facilitated in 1954 but accelerated in 1970 when Surinam's economy collapsed, and again around the middle of the decade when Surinam decame independent. In 1974, an ensemble called Henk and his Stainless Steelband had a hit with the song "Wij willen WW," which depicts Surinamers as being out to profit from Dutch unemployment benefits (a notion that the song ultimately legitimizes as payback for Dutch colonialism.

25
Hito Steyerl, "Art as Occupation: Claims for an Autonomy of Life," *e-flux journal* no.30 (December 2011), see https://www.e-flux.com/journal/30/68140/art-as-occupation-claims-for-an-autonomy-of-life/ . A different version of this text, which was delivered at the Autonomy Symposium at the Van Abbemuseum, will be published in *Open* magazine.

26
See Guy Debord's letter to the Cercle de la Librairie (June 27, 1963) in *Correspondance volume 2, septembre 1960-décembre 1964* (Paris: Fayard, 2001) 244-247.

27
"The Situationists and the New Forms of Action in Politics and Art." See the English translation by Ken Knabb at http://www.bopsecrets.org/SI/newforms.htm .

Continued from "The Sound of Breaking Glass, Part I: Spontaneity and Consciousness in Revolutionary Theory" in issue 30.

Grant Kester

The Sound of Breaking Glass, Part II: Agonism and the Taming of Dissent

> There is no possibility of escape ...
> —Graciela Carnevale, "Project for the Experimental Art Series" (1968)

> Let me go, I'm an artist.
> —Protestor being arrested during a 1968 demonstration at the Museo Nacional de Bellas Artes in Buenos Aires[1]

As I noted in the first part of this essay, revolutionary action in the Leninist tradition must be guided by an overarching political strategy (the "science" of socialism) devised by alienated members of the bourgeois intelligentsia, and subsequently "communicated ... to the more intellectually developed proletarians." For Voline, action is defined as the straightforward liberation of the redemptive energies of the working class. Debray brings us a third model of agency. For Debray, action is purely instrumental, determined only by military necessity, but nevertheless capable of inspiring fervid devotion and self-sacrifice among peasants and the urban working class. He relies here on the tradition of the revolutionary *atentát* (attack or assassination), an act of exemplary violence directed at the representatives of an authoritarian regime, and intended to embolden a larger uprising. Debray, like Lenin, fears the spontaneous energies of the working classes and insists on their necessary guidance by *foquista* cadres, who will help them grasp the nature of their own oppression and determine the steps necessary to overcome it.

It was, of course, not uncommon for Latin American artists to embrace revolutionary political rhetoric in the 1960s. In their famous *Assault Text*, delivered to the Argentine museum director Romero Brest in August 1968, Juan Pablo Renzi, Norberto Puzzolo, and Rodolfo Elizalde declare

> that the life of "Che" Guevara and the actions of the French students are greater works of art than most of the rubbish hanging in the thousands of museums throughout the world. We hope to transform each piece of reality into an artistic object that will

Argentine Artists Committee, Tucumán Arde, 1968. Art project conceived as an intervention in mass communication.

> penetrate the world's consciousness, revealing the intimate contradictions of this society of classes."[2]

Graciela Carnevale also sought to "penetrate the consciousness" and "reveal the contradictions" of class society. In this task she found it necessary to adopt the *foquista*'s callous disregard for pain and suffering. In her case, the violence of guerrilla warfare is directed not against the military forces of the Onganía dictatorship, but against its potential victims: the students, artists, and intellectuals attending the Ciclo de Arte Experimental in Rosario. This doubling or reiteration of aggression was necessary in order to force her audience members out of their "passivity" and to "provoke [them] into an awareness of the power with which violence is enacted in everyday life." According to Carnevale,

> [t]he reality of the daily violence in which we are immersed obliges me to be aggressive, to also exercise a degree of violence—just enough to be effective—in the work. To that end, I also had to do violence myself. I wanted each audience member to have the experience of being locked in, of discomfort, anxiety, and ultimately the sensations of asphyxiation and oppression that go with any act of unexpected violence.[3]

As Carnevale suggests, only the artist can grasp the interconnected totality of violence within modern society,

> from the most subtle and degrading mental coercion from the information media and their false reporting, to the most outrageous and scandalous violence exercised over the life of a student.[4]

Norberto Puzzolo, Autorretrato analógico en blanco y negro, muy pictórico y oscuramente poético, de 1983.

Rather than needlessly exacerbating the anxiety of viewers already on the edge after weeks of police brutality, Carnevale's action can be seen as therapeutic in nature. She will administer a kind of homeopathic remedy, in which the patient is treated with the diluted version of a substance that would otherwise cause illness. Hence, the "discomfort" created by physical confinement in the gallery will produce a heightened awareness of the far more damaging repression imposed by the Onganía regime. However, as I've already noted, this event occurred after protests among the intelligentsia of Buenos Aires— most recently the occupation of the University of Buenos Aires—had been cruelly suppressed. If Argentines were "passive" it wasn't due to a lack of awareness on their part, but rather to an all-too-immediate recognition of the violent consequences that would result from any act of

resistance.

Graciela Carnevale, Encierro y Escape (Entrapment and Escape), 1968. Documentation of an action at the Experimental Art Circle, Rosario. Graciela Carnevale Archive. Photo: Carlos Militello.

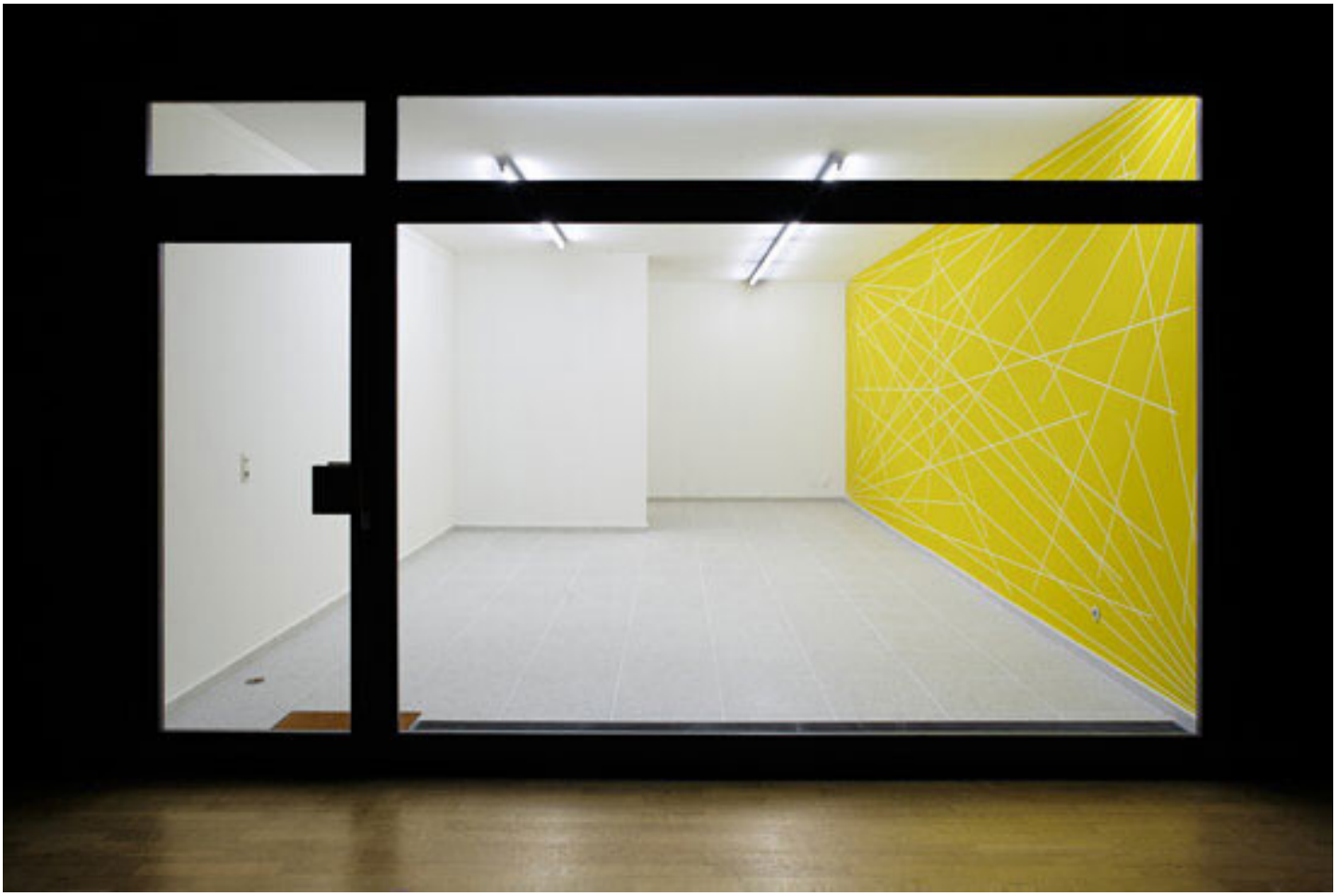
While Carnevale sought to precipitate some sort of cathartic response from the audience, they were reluctant to break the glass and free themselves (although some did attempt to remove the door hinges). It's impossible to accurately reconstruct their responses over four decades later. However, it's conceivable that their reluctance was due less to their failure to grasp the "reality of daily violence" than to the fact that they knew they were part of an art project, and were hesitant to damage the gallery and risk injuring themselves by shattering a plate glass window. At least some of them were willing to let the performance run its course and await the artist's return. In this case, the audience's reaction may tell us more about the perceived sanctity of the gallery space or norms of authorial sovereignty than it does about the political environment in Argentina at the time. The passerby who eventually freed them, on the other hand, may have simply assumed the gallery-goers were in genuine danger and acted accordingly.

Acción del Encierro reveals some of the symptomatic linkages that existed avant-garde art practice and vanguard political movements during the late 1960s, especially as they relate to questions of agency, resistance, and participation. *Foquista* action was Janus-faced. On the one hand, *foquistas* sought to inspire and radicalize the working class and peasants through their own exemplary discipline and self-sacrifice; and on the other, they ruthlessly attacked the military forces of the ruling class. Carnevale collapses these two modes of *foquista* action: the inspirational and the instrumental, the pedagogical and the martial. In the figure of Carnevale's gallery-goer, poised between passivity and freedom, awaiting the artist's intervention to raise and direct their consciousness of oppression, we discover a parallel to the *foquista*'s struggle to rouse the masses from their torpor and "imbue" them with revolutionary fervor. At the same time, as I noted in the first part of this essay, Carnevale displaces the guerrilla's characteristic aggression onto her audience, who become surrogates for the absent agents of repression. This punishing and cathartic attack is directed not at the military and political elites who led the junta, but at those Argentines who have been insufficiently vigorous in their efforts to challenge it. Carnevale herself becomes the *foquista* militant, declaring war on the consciousness of the incarcerated viewer.

The anxiety, discomfort, and fear evoked in Carnevale's "actors" are the necessary concomitants of advanced art and political enlightenment—or rather, the goals of each are blurred. Carnevale offers a coercive model of participatory art, in which "the spectators have no choice; they are obliged, violently, to participate."[5]

Encierro thus functions as a kind of behavioral experiment in which there are only two possible outcomes. Either the participants do nothing, thus confirming their passivity and complicity with power, or they break free and demonstrate their capacity for revolutionary action. In each case the artist retains her position of transcendence, while the viewers are interpellated as corporeal bodies, trapped or sequestered, placed under inexplicable constraints, and then set "free" to act and be judged. This reduction of agency to a simple act of physical resistance or accommodation (representing the liberation or containment of the participant's "natural impulses") is emblematic. Carnevale's work fails to engage the differentiated subjectivities of those people she chooses to confine. They function instead as representatives of a generic political consciousness, symbolizing the Argentine people as a whole in their opposition to, or complicity with, Onganía's dictatorship.

Carnevale's work exhibits the essentially propositional nature of much Conceptual art. In particular, conceptualism marks a shift from previous concerns with the generative nature of process or physical production (as in Abstract Expressionism, for example) toward a notion of art as the presentation or framing of an assertion (about the viewer, the nature of art, or society). The locus of creative agency lies in the construction of a spatial or formal system into which the viewer is introduced and allowed a limited range of action, predetermined by the artist. Typically, the gallery space undergoes some physical modification—the strategic removal of a wall, the locking of a door, the installation of video surveillance equipment—with the intention of revealing hidden complicities to the viewer (the economic transactions that



Sol LeWitt, Wall Drawing #261, 1975. Water color crayon on latex paint. Photo: Axel Schneider.

anchor the ostensibly disinterested display of art, the panoptic nature of modern society, and so forth).[6] Whether actual viewers ever experience these insights is of secondary importance. It's necessary simply to create a space, an apparatus, within which such insights might possibly be induced. The aesthetic quality of semblance or virtuality is thus preserved through the hypothetical nature of a conceptual practice in which propositions remain untested and largely rhetorical. As Sol Lewitt famously declared, "When an artist uses a conceptual form of art, it means that all of the planning and decisions are made beforehand and the execution is a perfunctory affair."[7] We might say, as well, that the reception of the work by discrete viewers is equally perfunctory from the artist's perspective. While Carnevale's *Acción del Encierro* involves a relatively reductive understanding of the viewer's agency, it does at least allow for some verification of her working hypothesis. Even if the viewer does nothing at all in response to the work, they nonetheless confirm the artist's *a priori* assumptions about human nature (inaction is equivalent to passivity in the face of political repression).

While Carnevale's work shares certain generic features with a broader range of Conceptualist practices, it is also informed by the specific conditions of Latin American art during the 1960s and 70s. In particular, her direct engagement with the authoritarian Onganía regime was in marked contrast to the more detached, quasi-philosophical concerns often encountered in Conceptual art in the United States and Europe. American Conceptualists such as Douglas Huebler, Joseph Kosuth, and Lawrence Weiner were preoccupied with relatively abstract epistemological questions (e.g., the semiotic contingency of aesthetic or linguistic meaning).[8] As historian Mari Carmen Ramirez notes, the "criticality" of Euro-American conceptualism was most often produced through forms of self-reflexivity focused on the discursive and institutional construction of art. In much Latin American conceptual work, this criticality was directed at the political and social structures of authoritarian regimes and the mechanisms of neo-colonial domination. Ramirez states, "the fundamental propositions of Conceptual art became elements of a strategy for exposing the limits of art and life under conditions of marginalization and, in some cases, repression."[9] Writing in 1970, Brazilian artist Cildo Meireles identifies a transition from "art" to "culture" in Latin America:

Duration Piece #31
Boston

On December 31, 1973 a young woman was photographed at the exact instant in time determined to be exactly 1/8th of a second before midnight. Inasmuch as the aperture of the camera was set at « 4 », (1/4th of a second) the image on the film became « complete » 1/8th of a second past midnight : put another way, after the first 1/8th of a second of 1974 had elapsed.

As the subject of the photograph faced towards the south the left side of her body was oriented toward the west ; as time « moves » from east to west, the photograph represents the young woman during an instant when approximately half of her body existed within the old year, 1973, while the other half had entered the new year, 1974 : indeed, consistent with the spirit of the season she wears the costume of the *New Year Baby*.

One photograph joins this statement as the form of this piece.

January, 1974

Duration Piece n° 31
Boston

Le 31 décembre 1973 une jeune femme a été photographiée 1/8ème de seconde exactement avant minuit. Attendu que l'obturateur de l'appareil était réglé à 1/4 de seconde, l'image était complètement exposée 1/8ème de seconde après minuit : c'est à dire juste après l'écoulement du premier 1/8ème de seconde de l'année 1974.

Le personnage photographié étant tourné vers le Sud, la partie gauche de son corps était orientée à l'Ouest ; le temps « se déplaçant » de l'est vers l'Ouest, la photographie représente la jeune femme à un instant où, approximativement, la moitié de son corps se trouve dans l'année révolue, 1973, tandis que l'autre moitié est entrée dans la nouvelle année 1974 ; conformément à l'esprit de la saison elle porte le costume du petit Jésus.

Photo et déclaration, constituent la *forme* de cette oeuvre.

Janvier 1974

Douglas Huebler, Duration Piece #31, 1974.

> If Marcel Duchamp intervened at the level of Art ... what is done today, on the contrary, tends to be closer to Culture than to Art, and that is necessarily a political interference. That is to say, if aesthetics grounds Art, politics grounds Culture.[10]

This shift from art to culture is often figured as a loss or abandonment, as art surrenders its privileged immanence to the brutal instrumentality of vanguard politics. "Unlike the political vanguard," Romero Brest writes in 1967, the artistic avant-garde "does not have an aim to achieve."[11] More recently, critic Jaime Vindel, in his essay "Tretyakov in Argentina," warns that Argentine artists during the 1960s "took the risk of abandoning the dissensual specificity of their 'ways of doing' in order to merge into a continuum that would end up subordinating their activities to the teleology of revolutionary politics." The implicit valorization of "dissensus" (with respect to what? to what end?) is symptomatic. In making this point Vindel draws on Susan Buck-Morss's analysis of the tensions between avant-garde art and vanguard politics in revolutionary Russia. Buck-Morss observes:

> In acquiescing to the vanguard's cosmological conception of revolutionary time, the avant-garde abandoned the *lived* temporality of interruption, estrangement, arrest—that is, they abandoned the *phenomenological experience of avant-garde practice.*[12]

However, as we've already seen, the questions of agency and instrumentality that are raised at the intersection of the aesthetic and the political cannot be so easily resolved into a simple opposition between autonomy and subordination, spontaneity and premeditation. Certainly, avant-garde art carries its own not-so-secret teleological desires (the reformation of society through the incremental transformation of individual subjectivities), which are evident in Carenvale's mechanistic picture of human agency and resistance.

Interruption and estrangement may well arise from the viewer's experience of simultaneity, but they are no less goal-driven in their orientation. Within the singular phenomenological matrix of the avant-garde, who, precisely, is having their consciouness interrupted? And who claims the right to preside over this interruption? For both the *foquista* and the artist, the viewer, the peasant, or the laborer arrives unformed and in need of renewal or conversion (whether through inspiration or provocation). Each assumes a proprietary or custodial relationship to the consciousness of the Other. Buck-Morss's defense of lived temporality over the heedless indifference of teleological thinking to the here-and-now is well taken.

However, lived temporality unfolds in many ways outside those defined in terms of interruption, estrangement, and arrest. And the relationship between artist and viewer can be produced through many different forms of interaction and engagement, aside from a supervisory provocation.

Agonism and Antagonism

> Interpellated as equals in their capacity as consumers, ever more numerous groups are impelled to reject the real inequalities which continue to exist. This "democratic consumer culture" has undoubtedly stimulated the emergence of new struggles which have played an important part in the rejection of old forms of subordination ...
> —Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe, *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy* (2001)[13]

As I've suggested, the synchronicity between the artist and the revolutionary, between aesthetic and political protocols, is a central feature of cultural modernity. It entails, however, a significant set of displacements. The actions of the revolutionary are directed toward two different constituencies and are defined by distinct forms of affect. First, the revolutionary seeks to reveal the "true" nature of domination to the working class via fairly traditional forms of evidentiary or "realist" documentation (e.g., the use of "exposure literature" by the Bolsheviks). Here the revolutionary assumes a conventional pedagogical role relative to the proletariat. At the same time, the revolutionary seeks to provoke and attack the bourgeoisie and the capitalist state, both as an example of properly military discipline (to be emulated by the working class) and in order to solicit a violent reprisal from the institutions of bourgeois power, which will serve to mobilize and cohere the working class in response (or, at the very least, to win the support of sympathetic factions within the bourgeoisie).[14] In doing so, the revolutionary potentially increases the suffering of the working class (as they become targets for possible retaliation), but with the goal of securing their ultimate liberation. The revolutionary doesn't attack the working class directly, but rather hopes to incite the state to do so in order to precipitate a revolutionary "event." The revolutionary's violence is reserved for the bourgeoisie, who will first be provoked, and then destroyed.

As Carnevale's work demonstrates, avant-garde artistic production often collapses these two modes of address: the education and consciousness-raising of the proletariat and the provocation and punishment of the bourgeoisie. The result is a form of artistic practice in which provocation itself is assigned a pedagogical role, and an increasingly generic implied viewer (the bourgeois who refuses to acknowledge the suffering in which he is

Argentine Artists Committee, Tucumán Arde, 1968.

complicit), whose presumed ignorance is the necessary precondition for this same pedagogical function. Carnevale's work has gained renewed attention in recent years as part of a more general re-affirmation of aesthetic conventions that define avant-garde art as a form of aggressive disruption intended to increase the viewer's awareness of his or her own culpability in dominant forms of power. Thus critic Claire Bishop, one of the leading exponents of this tendency, insists on the transformative potential of "awkwardness and discomfort" in the viewer's experience of contemporary art and praises those artists who are willing to place their subjects in "excruciating" situations characterized by "grueling duration."[15] Rather than promoting a reviled "social harmony," advanced art, according to Bishop, must promote a cathartic "relational antagonism" capable of "exposing that which is repressed."[16] One of the most well known exemplars of this approach is Spanish artist Santiago Sierra, who presents viewers with various tableaux of exploitation and subordination (workers paid to hold up walls for extended periods, addicts tattooed in exchange for a fix, and so forth). As curator Cuauhtémoc Medina contends, "Sierra's work is designed to produce constant shock" as he "blows the whistle on the fraud that prevails in the history of emancipation."[17]

The writings of philosophers Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe have played an important role in these debates. Bishop cites Mouffe extensively in her influential essay "Antagonism and Relational Aesthetics," published in the journal *October*. Laclau and Mouffe first gained attention in the mid-1980s for their attempt to develop what we might think of as a postmodern concept of political resistance. Poststructuralist theory, ranging from Jacques Lacan's critique of ego psychology to Michel Foucault's research on the necessary interdependence of resistance and power, did much to discredit existing notions of agency and identity (both collective and individual). However, while poststructuralist theory was quite good at exposing the various forms of complicity that accompany conventional models of volitional action and collective identity, it was less helpful in providing alternatives. Laclau and Mouffe sought to develop a political theory that was consistent with the emerging insights of poststructuralist theory, while also allowing for coherent and effective forms of resistance. Their reconstructive effort began with

Anarchist bombing of Wall Street.

a critical reappraisal of the Marxist tradition. Laclau and Mouffe hoped to preserve some components of that tradition (in particular, Antonio Gramsci's concept of "hegemonic" political formations) while discarding the embarrassing Hegelian baggage (for Laclau and Mouffe, the proletariat is just another transcendent subject in need of deconstruction).

In their idiosyncratic merging of Marxism and poststructuralism, Laclau and Mouffe came to view the de-centering of the subject prescribed by continental theory not as a barrier to the development of organized political resistance, but rather as a key moment in the long march toward democratic pluralism.[18] Drawing on the work of Lacan, they sought to challenge the primacy of class as a privileged signifier in the Marxist tradition, arguing that all forms of identity must be seen as provisional or contingent. Social or political conflict isn't, ultimately, the product of historically specific modes of economic domination, but rather, is hard-wired into our epistemological orientation to the world, as we vainly seek to recover a mythic sense of plenitude and ontological wholeness. Unable to accept our fragmented and dependent condition, we insist on seeing others as threats to a fictive subjective integrity. Fortunately, this debilitating and destructive tendency can be corrected. We need only learn to recognize and embrace our intrinsically divided nature or, as Lenin might say, be brought to the proper level of consciousness. This insight, this awakening, will allow us to maintain our capacity for political agency without succumbing to the often violent defensiveness associated with conventional identities based on fixed notions of class, community, nationality, or ethnicity. The goal of revolution is no longer the liberation of a single oppressed class, ethnicity, or gender, but a global reconfiguration of our relationship to difference in all its

guises and forms, leading to a society based on a non-instrumentalizing "agonistic pluralism."

the aim of democratic institutions is not to establish a rational consensus in the public sphere, but to defuse the potential of hostility that exists in human societies

Birmingham Alabama Protests, 1963. Copyright: Charles Moore/Blackstar/Eyevine.

Conflicts between self and other won't disappear in this brave new world, nor should they. In fact, they are the very stuff of radical democracy, and a constituent of human subjectivity itself. We simply need to acquire a more reflective relationship to conflict (becoming "adversaries" rather than "enemies," as Mouffe writes). They advocate not the elimination of "conflict" (either through enforced consensus or the random splay of postmodern indeterminacy) but rather, its "taming."[19] A destructive antagonism must be domesticated and turned into a healthy agonism, because otherwise our natural propensity for violence and instrumentalization will lead us inevitably toward fascism. The echoes of Schiller are evident: before we can engage in political action we require a process of transformative, essentially aesthetic, re-education. Thus Laclau and Mouffe argue for a re-tooling of individual human subjectivity in such a way that we can treat antagonists as peers or colleagues rather than as existential threats or potential victims. Mouffe writes:

> by providing the possibility for antagonism to be transformed into "agonism." By which I mean that, in democratic societies, while conflict neither can or should be eradicated, nor should it take the form of a struggle between enemies (antagonism), but rather between adversaries (agonism).[20]

In this suitably ironic form of participatory democracy, we contend over substantive issues and differences while preserving an awareness that all differences are contingent, and any final resolution is impossible. Thus, the adversary is "the opponent with whom we share a common allegiance to the democratic principles of 'liberty and equality for all' while disagreeing about their interpretation."[21] But how will people come to accept difference without antagonism? How will they be prepared for agonistic interaction? According to Laclau

and Mouffe this transformation will be brought about, in part, through our exposure to the works of philosophers, whose task it is to bring us into a proper consciousness of the world. As Mouffe notes:

> Political philosophy has a very important role to play in the emergence of this common sense and in the creation of these new subject positions, for it will shape the "definition of reality" that will provide the form of political experience and serve as a matrix for the construction of a certain kind of subject.[22]

Perhaps what is most striking about Laclau and Mouffe's work, aside from their relatively exalted view of the efficacy of academic philosophy, is the readiness with which they transpose a set of hermeneutic procedures derived from poststructuralist theory (primarily, the process of revealing the contingency of those forms of subjectivity or knowledge that we normally experience as natural or given) into a formal political program. If we could only imbue the broader public with the reflective consciousness of a Derrida or a Lacan, a more just and equitable society would inevitably follow. The consciousness of the master theorist becomes the normative model of political enlightenment toward which we should all aspire.

In fact, the recognition that our individual or collective identity is contingent is no guarantee that we won't still seek to harm other people (as evidenced by the violence associated with football matches in Europe, to pick one of many possible examples). As human beings, we have an impressive capacity to maintain two contradictory beliefs at the same (in this case, the awareness that a given collective sensibility is arbitrary, and the willingness to act out on the basis of this sensibility in an extreme or destructive manner). The epistemological "truth" of a given mode of collective identification is of far less importance to most people than the often intoxicating forms of affect and agency that this identity can sanction. In some cases, we might understand collective identification less as a precondition than as a pretext for these forms of agency. Moreover, what we think of as a paradigmatic bourgeois subjectivity, associated with the erosion of certain fixed hierarchies and allegiances, is defined precisely by the mobilization of our capacity for affective investment and the creative re-invention of the self. As Slavoj Zižek has noted, the fluid and mobilized notion of the self celebrated by Laclau and Mouffe is itself a key constituent of contemporary capitalism:

> I think one should at least *take note* of the fact that the much-praised postmodern "proliferation of new political subjectivities," the demise of every "essentialist" fixation, the assertion of full contingency, occur against the background of a certain silent *renunciation* and *acceptance*: the renunciation of the idea of a global change in the fundamental relations in our society ... and, consequently, the acceptance of the liberal democratic capitalist framework which *remains the same*, the unquestioned background, in all the dynamic proliferation of the multitude of new subjectivities.[23]

In their attempt to ontologize conflict, to ascribe our capacity for violence to some ingrained resistance to the devastating truth of Lacanian lack, Laclau and Mouffe end up eliding the contingency of resistance itself, its dependence on historically specific formations of power and difference (of which capitalism is one of the most significant in the modern period). Conflict, of whatever kind, becomes a problem to be solved through the acquisition of the proper theoretical insight that, once internalized, will effectively heal the individual and, eventually, society at large. Laclau and Mouffe's analysis of political resistance thus remains oddly abstract and distant from the exigencies of political practice itself.

In fact, substantive political change during the modern period has routinely involved episodes of violence, physical occupation, armed insurrection, and systemic forms of refusal (e.g., general strikes, riots, sit-ins, passive disobedience, and boycotts). It is precisely through the intersection of conventional political participation (voting, "agonistic" debate and opinion formation in the public sphere, and so forth) and these decidedly "antagonistic" forms of extra-parliamentary action, that real changes in the distribution of wealth, power, and authority have been achieved.[24] Thus, the "taming" of conflict advocated by Mouffe on behalf of an agonistic pluralism entails a misleading and incomplete view of societal transformation. In this respect, she presents an antithetical counterpoint to Régis Debray's vexed impatience with the "vice of excessive deliberation" and his single-minded reliance on armed resistance as the source of political insight. Both neglect the essentially capillary nature of change, the performative interdependence of the physical and the discursive, the collective and the individual, and the essential points of pressure and counter-pressure exerted along this continuum.

Mouffe believes that artists can play an important part in the civilizing mission of "agonistic pluralism." While they can't claim to offer anything like a "radical critique," according to Mouffe, this doesn't mean that their "political role has ended." Rather, once they have discarded the "modernist illusion" of their "privileged position," artists can contribute to the "hegemonic struggle by subverting the dominant hegemony and by contributing to the construction of new subjectivities."[25] In order to create these "new subjectivities," art will join with political

Soccer match fans.

philosophy to produce

> counter-hegemonic interventions whose objective is to occupy the public space in order to disrupt the smooth image that corporate capitalism is trying to spread, bringing to the fore its repressive character.[26]

"Critical artistic" practices, according to Mouffe, "foment dissensus," seeking to "unveil all that is repressed by the dominant consensus" and make "visible what the dominant consensus tends to obscure and obliterate."[27] What is strangely absent from this veritable orgy of unmasking and disruption is any meaningful account of the actual reception of the initial revelatory gesture. The complex process of representation is reduced to a kind of unmediated, theophanic epiphany.

Mouffe writes as if the "truth" of capitalism were a simple objective fact, as if the only thing preventing emancipation is an adequate knowledge of a clear and singular reality that has been deliberately suppressed.[28] Once having received this truth, the viewer will naturally and spontaneously feel compelled to take up revolutionary struggle. But the repressive nature of capitalism is hardly a secret. In fact, what is most telling about many contemporary responses to capitalism (as it launches itself against the remaining vestiges of the public sector in the United States and now Europe) is the almost masochistic enthusiasm with which the "discipline" of the market has been embraced by those most likely to suffer its negative consequences. The success of the Tea Party is a case in point. In the United States, certainly, the Republican party has found it a relatively simple matter to make many working-class people angrier about federal funding for National Public Radio or the pensions of librarians and school teachers, than they are about the unprecedented concentration of wealth among the upper class, massive bailouts for Wall Street banks, or thirty years of increasingly regressive tax policies that have robbed their children of access to a decent education. While the Occupy Wall Street movement offers some hope of developing a counter-narrative capable of challenging the perceived inevitability of neo-liberalism, its long-term efficacy has yet to be determined. Certainly, its focus on the "process" of deliberative democracy (often at the

expense of operational efficiency) and its trust in the spontaneous emergence of political insight out of consensual exchange would have been anathema to both Lenin and the Debray of the late 1960s.[29]

domains of experience. Bishop argues that certain critics and curators (myself included) have abandoned all properly aesthetic evaluative criteria and "automatically" perceive all collaborative practices "to be equally important artistic gestures of resistance." In this view, as

Erik Göngrich, Picnic City, 2001, part of the project One Day in the Room by Oda Projesi, Galata-Istanbul project space, June 10, 2001.

Given Mouffe's readiness to sacrifice the autonomy of art to the exigencies of "hegemonic struggle," it is somewhat surprising that Claire Bishop has emerged as one of her most enthusiastic art world adherents (as noted above, Bishop's "Antagonism and Relational Aesthetics" essay is heavily indebted to Laclau and Mouffe's writing.) Bishop has, in fact, been highly resistant to any challenge to the "privileged position of the artist."[30] Moreover, she has regularly expressed her fear that "aesthetic judgments have been overtaken by ethical criteria" in the evaluation of contemporary art. Her analysis assumes, of course, that ethics and aesthetics constitute entirely separate and distinct modes of critical evaluation and, presumably,

Bishop contends "[t]here can be no failed, unsuccessful, unresolved, or boring works of collaborative art because all are equally essential to the task of strengthening the social bond." She accuses curator Maria Lind of ignoring the "artistic significance" of groups such as the Turkish collective Oda Projesi "in favor of an appraisal of the artist's relationship to their collaborators." As a result, Lind's criticism is "dominated by ethical judgments" as she "downplay[s] what might be interesting in Oda Projesi's work as art."[31]

Bishop has yet to provide her readers with a working

definition of art which would allow us to determine what she herself believes is "interesting" about Oda Projesi's work. This confusion is compounded by her failure, thus far, to offer any detailed case studies of those projects that she identifies with the "ethical turn." However, I'm less concerned with the logical coherence of Bishop's claims than with the form that her argument takes, and the underlying set of assumptions on which it depends. These can reveal much about the ongoing continuity of the vanguard / avant-garde dynamic I outline above. While concepts of ethics and aesthetics are clearly central to Bishop's analysis, she provides no substantive definition of either term. We can extrapolate one possible set of definitions from her critical writing. When she condemns an "ethical turn" in contemporary art practice and criticism Bishop seems to be referring more specifically to the ways in which some artists engage questions of agency and the sovereignty of the artistic personality. Thus, if creative agency itself becomes a point of intervention, reflection, and re-orientation in a given work, if the artist complicates the division between "artist" and "viewer" in some way, or concedes any decision-making power or generative control to participants, their work can be accused of subordinating aesthetics to ethics. There can be no other explanation for artistic practice of this kind than the artist's simplistic desire to reproduce an "ethical" model of inter-subjective exchange (in the form of naıve "micro-topias" that seek only to "smooth over awkward situations"). This ethical gesture is dangerously utopian because it assumes that it's possible to eliminate all forms of violence, hierarchy, or difference in social formations. At the same time, it is politically suspect because it implies a corollary belief in the mythic "consensus" of the liberal or Habermasian public sphere, which will inevitably repress or deform the identities of individual participants.

Conversely, artists who treat their subjects in a deliberately objectifying or instrumentalizing manner (e.g., Vanessa Beecroft, Santiago Sierra) are engaging in a legitimately "aesthetic" practice precisely because their work challenges the "community of mythic unity," disabusing the viewer of the naıve belief that one can ever mitigate violence and objectification in inter-subjective exchange. By amplifying or exaggerating this violence (paying poor people to hold up a wall, endure tattooing or masturbate in the gallery), these "aesthetic" works force viewers to acknowledge their own complicity, their own deplorable capacity for violence, which they would otherwise attempt to repress or deny. The real and symbolic violence enacted by these "aesthetic" artists against their subjects is ultimately intended for their viewers, who will experience a shameful self-recognition in the act of passive witnessing. This shock will be all the more effective because it occurs in a space dedicated to forms of recreational artistic consumption and visual pleasure. Thus, Sierra's work "disrupt[s] the art audience's sense of identity," according to Bishop, and is capable of "exposing how all our interactions are, like public space, riven with social and legal exclusions."[32] Rather than striving to produce a "harmonious reconciliation" or "transcendent human empathy," Sierra will "sustain tension," and solicit "awkwardness and discomfort" in viewers.[33] These "aesthetic" projects refuse to indulge the viewer's desire for the false solace of aesthetic transcendence, where they can, for a moment, ignore or forget their inevitable investment in circuits of power, domination and privilege. It is the artist's job to prevent precisely this act of transcendence and denial by subjecting the viewer to a cathartic, and corrective, shock.

For Bishop, any project that suspends, even temporarily or provisionally, the authority of the artist as the empowered agent who supervises this cognitive disruption becomes ethical and not aesthetic. In the very act of soliciting reciprocal modes of creativity, in breaking down or challenging the adjudicatory distance between the artist and the viewer, the collaborative artist becomes complicit with the entire sordid mechanism of violence, exclusion, and repression on which all collective social forms are based.

Santiago Sierra, Group of People Facing a Wall and Person Facing into a Corner, Lisson Gallery, London, October 2002. Performance. Copyright: Santiago Sierra.

The contradictory nature of Bishop's analysis is evident in this description. While she laments the intrusion of ethics into the domain of the aesthetic, she nevertheless identifies the primary locus of "aesthetic" experience in the strategic production of shame or guilt in the viewer (in order to awaken a presumably dormant ethical sensibility). In an interview from 2009, Bishop praises Santiago Sierra's projects, such as *Workers Facing a Wall* (2002) and *Workers Facing a Corner* (2002), as "very tough pieces" that "produced a difficult knot of affect. If it was guilt, it was a superegoic, liberal guilt produced in relation to being complicit with a position of power that I didn't want to assume."[34] It's difficult to understand how any model of artistic production that assigns to the artist the task of eliciting "liberal guilt" in the viewer does not entail

an ethical function. In fact, it suggests that the very core of Bishop's "aesthetic" practice is a form of ethical supervision exercised by the artist over the consciousness of the viewer.[35] It is this adjudicatory distance, between the artist and the viewer, that Bishop is most concerned to defend, and which most clearly separates the ethical from the aesthetic, relational kitsch from advanced art, and naıve complicity from subversive criticality in her understanding of art.

Bishop returns us, finally, to Graciela Carnevale, subjecting her audience to "discomfort, anxiety … and the sensation of asphyxiation and oppression" in order to "provoke [them] into an awareness" of the "reality of daily violence." Over the past century, avant-garde artistic practice has remained remarkably consistent in its understanding of the aesthetic as a zone of punishment and remediation. The consciousness of the viewer, the Other, is a material to be "exposed," "laid bare," and made available to the artist's shaping influence. In his naıve and untutored "spontaneity," the Other can never achieve full or complete consciousness without the requisite discipline imposed by aesthetic experience (or the leadership of a vanguard intelligentsia). The artist's sovereignty, on the other hand, is absolute, and the artistic personality itself remains both exemplary and inviolable.

As I've argued elsewhere, the collaborative art practices of the past decade and a half suggest that the generation of critical, counter-normative insight can occur outside this conventional, dyadic structure in which the avant-garde artist engenders consciousness in an unenlightened viewer.[36] A more thorough exploration of these practices requires us to reconsider many of the underlying assumptions of advanced art itself, especially as these have been informed by a particular understanding of revolutionary theory. In analyzing this work it's necessary to overcome the tendency to simply project the specific social and institutional determinants of the museum or gallery space onto the widely varying sites, situations, and constituencies that are characteristic of contemporary collaborative and activist art practice. More specifically, it's necessary to overcome the long-standing tendency to frame critical analysis around the assumed characteristics of a hypothetical bourgeois subject, regardless of the specific class identity or cultural background of actual viewers and participants. It requires as well some ability to distinguish enforced consensus from the forms of shared experience necessary to act both creatively and collectively. In the process, we can develop a more nuanced account of reception and aesthetic experience in contemporary art and, perhaps, in the broader field of political resistance as well.

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1
The protest targeted the awarding of the 1968 Braque Prizes by the French ambassador to Argentina. See Horacio Verbitsky, "Art and Politics," in *Listen, Here, Now! Argentine Art of the 1960s: Writings of the Avant-Garde* , ed. Inés Katzenstein (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 2004), 296.

2
Here is Luis Camnitzer, from a conference presentation in 1969: "The second possibility is to affect cultural structures through social and political ones, applying the same creativity usually used for art. If we analyze the activities of certain guerrilla groups, especially the Tupamaros and some other urban groups, we can see that something like this is already happening. The system of reference is decidedly alien to the traditional art reference systems. However, they are functioning for expressions which, at the same time they contribute to a total structure change, also have a high density of aesthetic content. For the first time the aesthetic message is understandable, as such, without the help of the 'art context' given by the museum, the gallery, etc. ..." Luis Camnitzer, "Contemporary Colonial Art," in *Conceptual Art: A Critical Anthology* , ed. Alexander Alberro and Blake Stimson (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1999), 229-–230.

3
This and above quotes are from Graciela Carnevale, "Project for the Experimental Art Series," in *Listen, Here, Now! Argentine Art of the 1960s: Writings of the Avant-Garde,* 299.

4
Ibid., 299.

5
Ibid., 299.

6
See, for example, Dan Graham's *Time Delay Room* (1974) and Michael Asher's *Untitled* installation at Claire Copley Gallery in Los Angeles, also from 1974. Here is one contemporary critic's response to Asher's piece: "All that stuff on the walls is gone, along with every bit of privacy. Actually viewers don't intend social interaction. They come to look at art. But without knowing it, they are an integral part of the work they see. How unsettling, and uncomfortable. There are no visual entertainments to cast intent gazes upon, security in the altered proportions of the room which now seems so long and narrow. Are we in the right gallery? No. Yes. Shall we walk around a little and then saunter out the door, or shall we say the hell with it and stomp on up La Cienega shaking our heads. Oh, of course, the show isn't up yet. Oh, it is!" Kirsi Peltomäki, "Affect and Spectatorial Agency: Viewing Institutional Critique in the 1970s," *Art Journal* 66 (Winter 2007): 37–38.

7
Sol Lewitt, "Paragraphs on Conceptual Art," *Artforum* 5 (June 1967): 79–83. Republished in *Conceptual Art: A Critical Anthology* , ed. Alexander Alberro and Blake Stimson (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1999), 12.Compare this to Thomas Hirschhorn's similar formulation in a 2005 interview with Benjamin Buchloh:

8
Mari Carmen Ramírez, "Blueprint Circuits: Conceptual Art and Politics in Latin America," in *Conceptual Art: A Critical Anthology* , 554. Ramirez speaks of the effort to recover the "ethical dimension of artistic practice," paraphrasing Marchán Fiz's observation that "the distinguishing feature of the Spanish and Argentine forms of Conceptualism was extending the North American critique of the institutions and practices of art to an analysis of social and political issues." Ibid., 557 and 551.

9
Mari Carmen Ramírez, "Blueprint Circuits: Conceptual Art and Politics in Latin America," in *Conceptual Art: A Critical Anthology* , 554. Ramirez speaks of the effort to recover the "ethical dimension of artistic practice," paraphrasing Marchán Fiz's observation that "the distinguishing feature of the Spanish and Argentine forms of Conceptualism was extending the North American critique of the institutions and practices of art to an analysis of social and political issues." Ibid., 557 and 551.

10
Cildo Meireles, "Insertions in Ideological Circuits," in *Conceptual Art: A Critical Anthology* , 233. Needless to say, this formulation (aesthetics = art, culture = politics) is problematic and overlooks the necessarily "political" function of aesthetic experience, and of the very distinction between "art" and "culture."

11
J. Romero Brest, "Qué es eso de la Vanguardia Artística?" (1967), cited by Jaime Vindel in "Tretyakov in Argentina: Factography and Operativity in the Artistic Avant-Garde and the Political Vanguard of the Sixties," *Transversal* (August 2010), multilingual web journal of the European Institute for Progressive Cultural Politics (EIPCP). See http://eipcp.net/transversal/0910/vindel/en .

12
Buck-Morss argues, "It is politically important to make this philosophical distinction in regard to avant-garde time and vanguard time, even if the avant-garde artists themselves did not." Susan Buck-Morss, *Dreamworld and Catastrophe: The Passing of Mass Utopia in East and West* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2002), 62, cited by Vindel.

13
Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe, *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy* (London: Verso, 2001), 164.

14
This was the case during the student protests in France in May 1968, when the sons and daughters of the middle class were subjected to the kind of violence that had been visited on Algerian immigrants and the working class for many years, occasioning an outraged response. A parallel dynamic was at work in the decision to involve high school students in the marches on Selma in 1965. Images of attacks by Alabama state troopers on peaceful young marchers were widely circulated in the national media and led to widespread condemnation of Alabama's state government, and by extension, the institutions of Jim Crow segregation. These reactions played a key role in providing broad national support for the passage of the 1965 Voting Rights Act. See Robert Mann, *The Walls of Jericho: Lyndon Johnson, Hubert Humphrey, Richard Russell, and the Struggle for Civil Rights* (New York: Harcourt Brace and Company, 1996).

15
Claire Bishop, "The Social Turn: Collaboration and its Discontents," *Artforum* (February 2006): 181. With Bishop, the avant-garde commitment to "difficult" or hermeneutically resistant art (previously articulated via a discourse of abstraction) is transformed into a commitment to work that is "difficult" by virtue of it's exposure of the viewer's economic or social privilege as a participant of the art world.

16
Claire Bishop, "Antagonism and Relational Aesthetics," *October* 110 (Fall 2004): 79. It should be noted here that in this essay Bishop fails to account for the evolution of Laclau and Mouffe's thought since the mid-80s. In particular, she ignores the key distinction Mouffe introduces between "agonism" and "antagonism" beginning in the late 1990s. As I will suggest, this distinction has significant implications for Bishop's analysis.

17
Cuauhtémoc Medina, "Aduana/Customs," in *Santiago Sierra* , catalog of the Spanish Pavilion, Venice Biennial 2003, curated by Rosa Martinez (Madrid: Ministerio de Asuntos Exteriores, Dirección General de Relaciones Culturales y Científicas/Turner, 2003), 233 and 17.

18
Benjamin Bertram notes, "For Laclau and Mouffe, the de-centering of the subject is a key moment in the great modern expansion of pluralism. The death of 'Man' (which accompanies the death of the centered subject), however, does not entail the end of humanist values. In fact, Laclau and Mouffe want to envision a 'real humanism' (i.e., a historicized humanism)." Benjamin Bertram, "New Reflections on the 'Revolutionary' Politics of Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe," *boundary 2* 22 (Autumn 1995): 86.

19
Mouffe writes, "According to my conception of 'adversary,' and contrary to the liberal view, the presence of antagonism is not eliminated but 'tamed.'" Chantal Mouffe, "For an Agonistic Public Sphere," in *Democracy Unrealized: Documenta 1 Platform* , ed. Okwui Enwezor et al. (Ostfildern-Ruit, Germany: Hatje Cantz Publishers, 2002), 91. In their strenuous efforts to differentiate themselves from Habermas, Laclau and Mouffe often rely on a caricatured portrayal of an ostensibly

hegemonic "consensual" model of democracy, against which their own approach can be seen as constituting a radical critique. In practice, however, the difference between "agonistic" democracy and the free exchange of contending opinions in a Habermasian public sphere is minimal. Habermas certainly never claims that the result of debate in the public sphere is a binding and universal consensus, or that political agents can't retain a reflective understanding of the contingent basis of political identity itself. As John Brady notes, "There are, I think, very few people who would claim that contestation and agonistic political relations are not part and parcel of politics, do not belong to the very fabric of political practice. Habermas certainly has never denied this." John S. Brady, "No Contest? Assessing the Agonistic Critiques of Jürgen Habermas's Theory of the Public Sphere," *Philosophy and Social Criticism* 30 (2004): 348.

20
Mouffe, "For an Agonistic Public Sphere," 90.

21
Ibid. It's unclear how the "common allegiance to … democratic principles" advocated by Laclau and Mouffe does not also imply some form of "consensual" agreement.

22
Chantal Mouffe, *The Return of the Political* (London: Verso, 2005), 19.

23
Slavoj Zižek, "Holding the Place," in *Contingency, Hegemony, Universality: Contemporary Dialogues on the Left* , ed. Judith Butler, Ernesto Laclau, and Slavoj Zižek (London: Verso, 2000), 321.

24
As noted above, the Civil Rights movement in the American South involved both "agonistic" political action as well as forms of nonviolent protest and violent confrontation (from the Selma marches and Freedom Riders to the use of 23,000 federal troops to integrate the University of Mississippi by force, leading to two deaths and hundreds of serious injuries). The forces of reaction have, historically, not been inclined to adopt a properly "ironic" and reflexive relationship to political conflict, and it seems highly unlikely that they could be brought to do so by exposure to the right kind of political philosophy.

25
"In fact this has always been their role and it is only the modernist illusion of the privileged position of the artist that has made us believe otherwise. Once this illusion is abandoned, jointly with the revolutionary conception of politics accompanying it, we can see that critical artistic practices represent an important dimension of democratic politics." Chantal Mouffe, "Artistic Activism and Agonistic Spaces," *Art & Research: A Journal of Ideas, Contexts and Methods* 1 (Summer 2007): 5.

26
Ibid., 5.

27
Ibid., 4. Mouffe's use of agonism as a model for political discourse can be read against Renato Poggioli's thoughtful analysis of "agonistic sacrifice" (on behalf of "the people," posterity, and so forth) as a key component of the modern artistic avant-garde. Renato Poggioli, *The Theory of the Avant-Garde* , trans. Gerald Fitzgerald (Cambridge: Belknap/Harvard University Press, 1968), 61–77.

28
At the same time, Mouffe charges art with the task of "giving a voice to all those who are silenced within the framework of the existing hegemony." Thus, art is simultaneously the mechanism by which the repressed will be brought to consciousness (via the disclosure of "that which has been repressed") and the channel by which these same individuals will be "given" a voice. This confusion is symptomatic of the tensions I outlined earlier in my discussion of vanguard politics. Mouffe, "Artistic Activism and Agonistic Spaces," 4–5.

29
An instructive comparison can be made here between Occupy Wall Street (OWS), which is at this stage only very loosely organized, and the extremely disciplined command structure of the Republican Party and it's affiliated "activists" in the United States. A typical example is the REDMAP Project (REDistricting Majority Project) of the Republican State Leadership Council, which is developing a set of coordinated strategies to exploit the re-districting process in order to ensure Republican domination even in states with Democratic majorities. The far right wing in the United States has consistently exhibited a sophisticated understanding of the interrelated mechanisms of local, regional and national governance at both the symbolic and the institutional level, extending to active involvement in school board and town council elections. This "ground up" activism, combined with a well coordinated system of message control and a centralized national leadership, has led to the creation of a formidable political machine that has been able to secure remarkably widespread support among working-class and lower middle-class voters for a pro-corporatist message in the midst of the most severe economic downturn since the Great Depression. The pervasive success of this machine makes the ability of the OWS movement to mobilize a passionate, albeit unfocused, resistance to capitalism all the more remarkable.

30
Bishop disparages "the ethics of authorial renunciation," which she associates with collaborative art practices. Bishop, "The Social Turn," 181.

31
The preceding quotes are all from "The Social Turn," 180–181. Bishop complains elsewhere of criticism in which "Authorial intentionality is privileged over a discussion of the works' conceptual significance as a social and aesthetic form … Emphasis is shifted from the disruptive specificity of a given work and onto a generalized set of moral precepts." Ibid., 181. Bishop appears to confuse the fact that some artists have a more reflective or critical relationship to conventions of artistic agency with an absolute abandonment of the prerogatives of authorship *in t oto* . Most contemporary artists who work through a collaborative or collective process don't do so because of their allegiance to an abstract moral principle, but because they find that these processes result in more interesting and challenging projects, or provide forms of insight that are different from those generated by singular forms of expression.

32
"Sierra's action disrupted the art audience's sense of identity, which is founded precisely on unspoken racial and class exclusions, as well as veiling blatant commerce." Bishop, "Antagonism and Relational Aesthetics," 73.

33
Ibid., 70.

34
Julia Austin, "Trauma, Antagonism, and the Bodies of Others: A Dialogue on Delegated Performance," *Performance Paradigm* 5 (May 2009): 4. See https://www.performanceparadigm.net/index.php/journal/article/view/69/70 .

35
While Bishop applauds Sierra for evoking a sense of "liberal guilt" in the viewer, she also praises artists such as Jeremy Deller, Phil Collins, and Christian Höller for not making "the 'correct' ethical choice … instead they act on their desire without the incapacitating restrictions of guilt." Bishop, "The Social Turn: Collaboration and its Discontents," 183. The distinction here is clear. While the artist may have transcended the humanist burden of "guilt," the viewer has not.

36
See Grant Kester, *The One and the Many: Contemporary Collaborative Art in a Global Context* (Duke University Press, 2011).