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Editorial

Released on October 8, the second issue of the *Occupied Wall Street Journal* included an editorial note entitled "No list of demands," responding to the perceived absence of strong messaging offered by the movement. The note specified that:

> The exhausted political machines and their PR slicks are already seeking leaders to elevate, messages to claim, talking points to move on. They, more than anyone, will attempt to seize and shape this moment. They are racing to reach the front of the line.
>
> But how can they run out in front of something that is in front of them? They cannot.
>
> For Wall Street and Washington, the demand is not on them to give us something that isn't theirs to give. It's ours. It's on us. We aren't going anywhere. We just got here.[1]

It is a sophisticated defense of a movement deliberately weak in language and growing strong in numbers.[2] While the movement has made declarations, the statement suggests that nothing will be demanded of those who have perpetuated and legitimized a system that has repeatedly worked to consolidate a society's wealth in the hands of 1% of the population.[3] In place of heroic ideology, an ostensible silence evades recuperation and maintains an opening through which collective sentiment can take the time to formulate its own terms without having to acknowledge the current regime as a necessary precedent.

Here it becomes clear that, in place of making demands, the project of the demonstrations will be to gradually reconstitute society itself through its sheer numbers—a claim to both the right and the capacity to project a new world in broad, open-ended terms.

In this issue, Jan Verwoert finds in the work of Stano Filko a means of articulating totality by claiming the world as his medium and mode of address; Jalal Toufic posits the elusiveness of messianic time against the possibility for contemporary events; Antke Engel looks at the chronopolitics of Pauline Boudry and Renate Lorenz's work *No Future / No Past*; Sotirios Bahtsetzis considers nihilism, repetition, and notions of taste in a depoliticized and fiscalized society; Asli Serbest and Mona Mahall reveal mobilization in architecture as both an economic imperative and a mannerist response to classical ideals, and Joshua Simon concludes his three-part "Neo-Materialism" series by recognizing how the commodity speaks the language of our world.

—Julieta Aranda, Brian Kuan Wood, Anton Vidokle

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For a start, see: http://occupywallst.org/forum/first-official-release-from-occupy-wall-street/ .

1
See http://www.scribd.com/fullscreen/68041981?access_key=key-2bz013r79s3ur26g6wcg .

2
"We are the 99 percent": http://wearethe99percent.tumblr.com/Introduction .

Sotirios Bahtsetzis

The Time That Remains, Part I: On Contemporary Nihilism

> Art is the distinctive countermovement to nihilism.
>
> —Martin Heidegger[1]

In the late 1970s Aldo Rossi wrote: “Now it seems to me that everything has already been seen; when I design I repeat, and in the observation of things there is also the observation of memory.”[2] If, for Rossi, architecture that comes from the typological reorganization of forms can only produce memories, then these memories are associated with the condition of a continuous awareness of the unavailability of the present time. They cannot be romanticized or historicized and consequently cannot be further functionalized. But Rossi's memories are not nostalgic, rather they are inscribed within a new kind of temporality. To see Rossi's work as a symptom of *thanatophilia*, an adoration of death, means to not to be able to acknowledge the truly late-modernist aspect of his endeavor, which objectifies the "patina of time" and the functionalist appropriation of "beautiful ruins" in contemporary built utopias. Equally, Peter Eisenman, referring to architecture, has described the late avant-garde's intrinsic condition of dislocation and split as a condition of "presentness."[3] This "presentness" shouldn't refer to the notion of a happy, ahistorical postmodernist pastiche directed solely by instrumental commodification – a temptation that Eisenman's built architecture has often succumbed to – but should be seen instead within a new understanding of temporality: the perception of lack or deficiency of time in which we live.

It is significant that architectural theory's struggle against the loss of meaning in the late avant-garde has often focused both on the aspects of temporal exhaustion and on relentless repetition. This essay invites you to rethink the avant-garde gesture through the concept of temporality as revealed in Giorgio Agamben's meditations. Drawing both on the Pauline Epistles and Walter Benjamin's philosophy of history, in The Time That Remains: A Commentary on the Letter to the Romans (2000), Agamben proposes a new type of temporality, one that cuts through notions of linear evolution and of history as a "stubborn faith in progress."[4] This "messianic" time, that is, time in the moment of a significant rupture, is understood not as the end of time, but as the "time that contracts itself and begins to end."[5] Messianic time is "the time that time takes to come to an end" and is thus a suspension both of the chronological (or sequential, historical time) and the ordinary order of things.[6] It is a disruption of the apocalyptic anticipation of a utopian future, yet it remains inaccessible.

Agamben's position is obviously inspired by Martin Heidegger's caesura in philosophical thinking and the attack against representational thinking that was initiated by the influential German philosopher. Heidegger declares in his *Kant and the Problem of Metaphysics* that the main problematic in his seminal book, *Being and Time*, is the negotiation of neither "being" nor "time," but the negotiation of the "and" in the title, meaning the timely condition of being. Being is understood as a *way* to be – a *Zu-sein*, meaning the being that we ought to be, as a future being. However, this understanding refers to an instant, momentous future that must be constantly realized, at any time. In Heidegger's conception of time, the "now" in conventional occidental philosophy from Plato to Hegel is always considered as a "not-anymore-now" or "not-yet-now," and is reduced to the general notion of an unchangeable eternity.[7] Heidegger's critique of the concept of temporality in Western thought can also be found in his book on Nietzsche: "Eternity, not a static 'now,' nor as a sequence of 'nows' rolling of into the infinite, but as the 'now' that bends back into itself."[8]

Most significantly, the recurrent suspension of linear temporality and its chronological-historical representation produces new subjects. Interestingly enough, in his book Agamben endorses Benjamin's claim that the idea of messianic time has found its secularized counterpart in Marx's concept of a "classless society,"[9] thereby opening up the question of "revolution" that goes hand-in-hand with the notion of modernity.[10] The thesis of "remaining time" is obviously pertinent to us, because it functions as the common denominator of "ekklesia" (the messianic community of the early church), Marx's proletariat, and, in the view of Boris Groys, which I partially endorse, the avant-garde artists' community, which has claimed in modernity the role of the subject/object of history.[11] As Agamben has pointed out, the debate on modernity has mistaken "messianism for eschatology, the time of the end for the end of time."[12] This perverted view has influenced conceptions of history and linear time as part of a Christian eschatological salvation, thus perpetuating modernity's drive toward a future utopia, a state of things yet to come that infinitely postpones the end – thus creating the repetition of accumulation in view of a future redemption. This is the perverted mirror image of the messianic claim for a now-time once proposed by the avant-gardes, which has been identified by Derrida as a "messianicity without messianism" and a "messianicity, stripped of everything." Such a notion of messianicity is understood as an "opening to the future of the coming of the other as the advent of justice, but without horizon of expectation and without prophetic prefiguration."[13] It is important, however, to point out that Agamben's concept of messianic temporality does not have an ontological foundation regarding any kind of "permanent revolution" that has been so often identified as the essential attribute of modernity, but it signifies the right or opportune moment, the "kairotic" time within the sequential development of the already existing.[14]

Such an expansive temporality is in my view a dialectical mirror image of another type of repetition that addresses nihilism as the sign of time. Drawing on Heidegger's *Nietzsche* in his book, *The Man without Content* (1994), Agamben points toward the rise of nihilism, both as the prevailing condition of "the fundamental movement of the history of the West" and within the rise of the modern art system.[15] Agamben's book clearly shows that nihilism may indeed be symptomatic of the modern, narcissistic "artistic subjectivity without content."[16] The mega-artist, as a corporate business player of culture, is just such an opportunistic-nihilistic figure. And Agamben draws an exact genealogy of this figure of modern nihilism, which seems to dominate our contemporary art world.

According to Agamben, the nature of this emblematic figure is linked to the aesthetic notion of bad taste. Through the exemplary case of Madame de Sevignés, a mid-seventeenth-century French aristocrat noted for her letter-writing and her famous literary salons, *The Man without Content* proves how the "inexplicable inclination of good taste toward its opposite has become so familiar to us moderns."[17] The seductive power that bad literature had on cultivated and enlightened souls such as that of Madame de Sevignés is characteristic of a refined elite. However, Agamben claims it is precisely this paradoxical condition (vulgar objects that challenge the sensibility of the man of taste) that establishes modernity's claim for absolute and purified aesthetic judgment. And. let us not forget that Mallarmé's female alter-ego, Madame Marguerite de Ponty, acts as the editor of a fashion magazine, elegantly addressing matters of taste and dealing exclusively with issues of what we often call "low culture." Obviously Mallarmé's own double taste, which is equally expressed as a schism of personality, describes this highly modernist attitude. Beyond the claim for aesthetic absolutism, which draws on early Romanticism's foundation of "art as religion" – a notion that brings together what we value in aesthetic terms and what we perceive to be truth – Agamben emphasizes that "a phenomenon takes place for the man of taste that is similar to the one Proust describes for the intelligent man, to whom 'having become more intelligent gives the right to be less so'."[18] Ever since the neo-avant-garde assumed a position of dominance in the 1960s—a period that eventually coincides with the canonization of modernism and the entrenchment of mass culture—art doesn't necessarily have to appreciate "good" taste. However, it should be able to fully embrace its perverted double: that is, bad taste. Surrealism, Pop art, and diverse schools of painting from the Fauves up to today endorse this view.

A critical application of taste against the grain thus becomes the conceptual tool of the modernist artist. In other words, artists have internalized Madame de Sevignés' over-sophisticated attraction toward bad taste. Let us think of Dada as delivering the epiphany of such a constitutional change. That change is exposed nowadays not only as the self-reflective appropriation of low culture

Lady Gaga performing at the L.A. MOCA's 30th anniversary, on a grand piano painted by Damien Hirst.

in art, but also as the appreciation of tasteless advertising, pop songs, and banal decorative items within appropriation art. The blasé, eccentric, post-Warholian man of taste is actually an artist of deliberately bad taste, precisely because his or her officially acquired and publicly acclaimed tastefulness functions, primarily, to assert taste in a negative manner. In this case, it is the work of the artist as someone who applies his or her taste criteria in order to make art—in reality, a critic or the critic as an artist—that is charged with identifying bad taste, thus creating a canon of good taste by way of its absence. This is a canon that can never be openly presented or argued as such; it is not a normative canon but rather its hidden negative and often deliberately ambiguous counterpart. And, since the 1960s, the conceptual training offered to artists in art-world academia is synonymous with the professionalization of this coy and self-reflective attitude of self-promotion as a tastemaker within this particular set of rules concerning aesthetic judgment within negativity. For art audiences, the almost schizophrenic dichotomy of being presented with both art films and commercial, mass-produced blockbusters of bad taste—this "most painful split"—is reflective of the predicament of the contemporary man of taste who is exposed to modernism's alienating forces, even as he is nurtured by them. Marx himself was similarly exposed to these forces while he was in the process of demonstrating the vulgar and superstitious nature of modernism's fetishes.[19] The radicalism of the 1960s has attacked the effects of culture industry and the neoliberal worlds of consumption and spectacle, while the postmodern appropriation of the 1980s has embedded their terms into the jargons and protocols of recent art. If bad taste is the recurring double of good taste, then it is there in order to somehow purify art to a mere Kantian aesthetic enjoyment. Within the fragmented, playful and incoherent flux of aesthetic modernity, it is exactly the exposure to the trivialities of the commodity that secures the purity of our aesthetic norms. After the Hegelian declaration of art as a thing of the past, art exists only as aesthetic judgment, such that any work of art functions as an occasion that urges us continually to distinguish between art and non-art, and thus allows for a continuous scrutiny of the status and definitions of art. Pop art and its variants assert this condition, and aesthetic production consequently becomes the reproduction of an aesthetic canon that is simply another opportunity to exercise judgment, "a privileged occasion to exercise .... critical taste."[20] Contemporary art's various conceptualisms bear witness to this fact.

But in doing so, they also establish another understanding of both value and history. Modern art finds its true ratification in negative determinations, either in its aesthetic norm or in its cult of form and early modern traditions (such as the dogma of radicalism and its fetish for novelty). Modernism constantly demands that the maker resituate the work in a historic line while declaring such a historically situated culture to be insignificant—at least for his or her own work! Over time, the constant introduction of aesthetic-political utopias and ruptures resulted in a decoupling of art from any direct and real-world consequences, and served to turn every instance of artistic production into yet another chapter in the history of art. In this respect, the contemporary role of the artist as a historiographer is an indicator of what Agamben, drawing on Hegel, has identified as "the dialectic of honest and cowardly consciousness—which is in its essence the opposite of itself, so that the first side of the split is permanently destined to succumb to the second's frankness." And he concludes:

> but what is interesting to us here is that Hegel, wanting to personify the absolute power of perversion, chose a figure such as Rameau's nephew, as though the purest form of the man of taste, for whom art is the only form of self-certainty as well as the most painful split, would necessarily accompany the dissolution of social values and religious faith.[21]

The fetishization of taste as the absolute ontological horizon of the modern liberal bourgeois subject has enormous consequences for the psychology of contemporary artists and viewers. Such a culture of not making a choice, the culture of "everlasting discussion of cultural and philosophical-historical commonplaces" that perpetuates the cultural status quo could be easily aligned with Carl Schmitt's conservative political vocabulary as a state of "radical indecisionism."[22] For the political theorist, it is because the bourgeoisie is unable to cope with social conflict that it always defers to the rule of the proper sovereign, who, in Schmitt's definition, "is he who decides on the exception."[23] The relation between the individual and the common (or subjective and objective—the main problem in Kant's *Critique of Judgment*) is significant as it touches on the question of the transition from aesthetics to politics and vice versa. The Kantian criteria for the beautiful and the sublime in fine art come from a reference to a constantly presupposed "sensus communis," a community of taste, which as Derrida observes, Kant refrains from ever analyzing.[24] The argumentative horizon of Kantian aesthetics remains the persona of the "genius," the talent to generate aesthetic ideas. The community of taste is thus the outcome derived from the decisive figure of the man of taste—paraphrasing Schmitt: the one who decides the exception. The initial conflict between reason and nature seen by Kant is similarly resolved through the synthetic activities of the man of taste as the representative of aesthetic objectivity in general: a magnificent edifice of political decision-making! The perverted, late capitalist version of such an engagement with art—the disinterested attitude, Kant's definition of aesthetic experience—always demands its pre-validation not by the historical Other (for Kant the ahistorical, subjective-universal judgments posed by the genius), but by contemporary society's proper neosovereign rule: that

Dash Snow, Hamster Nest, 2009. Performance.

is, the globalized and institutionalized managers of taste, the individuals nurtured by a depoliticized and fiscalized society.

It is through this perversion that the contemporary "homo aestheticus" is born. The new non-Promethean artist, a mixture of Faust and the clown Falstaff, is an artist of absolute "open-mindedness, endless appropriation, and flexible Witz ."[25] He exists hand-in-hand with a narcissistic viewer of self-indulgent and smart cynicism. Both figures obviously represent the most common strategy for survival in the present. This is a fundamentally modern technique in which life is reduced to a novel claim to a mode of subjectivity distinct from that of Romanticism and totally alien to the ancient world. The homo aestheticus must continuously examine a subject matter that is mundane, and exercise—not exorcize—bad taste. Duchamp and Warhol are, for different reasons, the major precursors for this mode of being. The privileged material and content offered for artistic treatment in this case is simply the artist's own presence, a value-generating presence, or—in the vocabulary of the late-twentieth century—the artist's own "performance." The formal conceptualization of performance contained in the notion of artist as persona—understood both in aesthetic and, most importantly, in economical terms as both self-presentation and economic efficiency—inevitably insinuates art into the commercial discourse of self-promotion. Artists as different as Warhol and Beuys concur on this point. The persona of the professionalized artist of endless reinvention, the bureaucratic corporate artist who renders himself an institution, is in this way completely immune to any form of institutional critique applied to him. And this is precisely the "conspiracy of art," that Jean Baudrillard questioned: the privilege of the art world to not critique itself as established during the twentieth century by its own practitioners.[26] Interestingly enough, the only possible critique within the contemporary art world is often a subtle type of self-censorship, silently established by the rules of the market. The reason is simple: the figure of the contemporary artist offers an extremely direct means of translating personal performance to both monetary and symbolic value. Warhol's statement, "I want to be a machine," is a statement that has been internalized by the self-assertive persona of the corporate artist (itself an image of bad taste) who has shed modernism's concern with the manufactured status of the work of art in the industrial era. Instead, this statement lays bare a kind

Dan Colen and Nate Lowman, Wet Pain, 2008. Installation.

of indifferent subjectivity derived from the instrumental rationality that produces artworks, which are now understood primarily as monetary assets. In this regard, the financial credibility of an artist is pivotal in the era of "casino-capitalism," because the symbolic and even the ethical value of a work of art is triggered and sustained mainly by financial speculation. In Warhol's jargon: "Making money is art and working is art and good business is the best art ."[27] Warhol's machine statement is thus best understood as, "I want to be an ATM."[28] Nihilism is another name for society's drive to repeat itself and perpetuate its structure and ideology.[29] The tendency to historicize is the emblematic symptom of this condition. Stock markets attuned to contemporary art, the explosion of contemporary museums and their satellite branches, corporatized displays of private art collections and the growth of art fairs since the 1990s all fixate symbolically and financially on the aesthetic conditions of "now" while simultaneously historicizing them. Historicization is most significantly evident in architectural postmodernism's tendency toward stylistic eclecticism and replication. If we look at architecture in the endless metropolitan sprawls around us, we see only reiterations of the heroic age of modern architecture. Historicizing modernism means conspiring against its own existence while creating a consumable "cultural heritage" that serves only corporate clients of the "neo-International Style of the type of Sir Norman Foster."[30] (How symptomatic it is that examples of early modernist architecture, such as power plants, industrial complexes, and so forth turn into the most advantageous and accommodating containers for the public exhibition of contemporary art once they are deprived of their original function.) Yet, beyond the highlights of star architects, architecture in our everyday streets consists of boring, prefabricated, not-really-functional but functionalist, high-tech blocks of concrete, iron, and glass! These blocks make visible what is somehow concealed in our museums: that we already live with "future ruins!" The only way to survive within this condition of vulgarized architectural modernism is to

continue romanticizing these future ruins, to speak with a tone of sentimentality about the "patina of time" engraved in the concrete modernist blocks of the streets of Manhattan or any Western European city and its global replicas! This type of architecture is exactly the symptom of this forced and inauthentic historical memory. And it is precisely the repetition, the figure of the undead, that, as Agamben observes, describes the actual ontological condition of contemporary architecture and art:

> Art does not die, but, having become a self-annihilating nothing, eternally survives itself. Limitless, lacking content, doubled in its principle, it wanders in the nothingness of the "terra aesthetica," in a desert of forms and contents that continually point it beyond its own image and which it evokes and immediately abolishes in the impossible attempt to found its own certainty. Its twilight can last more than the totality of its day, because its death is precisely its inability to die, its inability to measure itself to the essential origin of the work.[31]

Is this passage not only a succinct account of contemporary art, but also an ideal description of the very essence of the ideological system of our times, that is, a description of capital? It seems that contemporary art and late capitalism derive from the same ontological conditions: accumulation, consumption, and continuous repetition, which come together to create the promising phantasmagoria of an ahistorical present.

Reena Spauling's website image.

Modern nihilism operates on a specific dimension of temporality: the absolute way to accumulate is to promote a constant renewal, a repetition that preserves only those parts of the past that serve the transient needs of the market, while simultaneously conceiving that past as a causal sequence of events mechanically leading up to an oblivious present. Historicizing a lifeless past goes hand-in-hand with prolonging the present into the future. Contemporary art, the trans-conceptual and trans-historic artistic idiom of our time, thus manages the replication and variation of an immediate past, preserving only the ruins of modernism. Historicizing then becomes the mirror image of an atemporal historical condition. However, it is important not to confuse the messianic temporality, as understood by Agamben, with the atemporal clutter of the abolished present: in other words, the theology of capital. (The abolished present refers always to an atemporal fetish: in political Islamism it is God; in tectonic fascism it is Race; in Gnosticism it is Evil; and for neoliberal capitalism it is capital. Contemporary credit rating agencies [CRA] are the only remaining theological instances of modernity that measure our credos in the form of credit: the act of belief is only possible as an act of trust understood in financial terms—fiat currency turning to *acheiropoieton* gloss?) We can twist the argument even tighter by finding the historical moment at which this kind of temporality was initiated, at the dawn of modernity: Hasn't this circle between the modern and ruin already happened? Indeed, Walter Benjamin's *Arcades Project*, which describes life in the mummified Paris of the nineteenth century, is the perfect setting for such a reading of history.[32] Benjamin's concept of history—as an angel that always looks backward while being pushed on the wind of progress—perfectly captures the condition of our own nostalgic cultures. But we should also add that the movement of the Benjaminian angel is not linear, but circular: a constant, repetitive revisiting of the same through different periods. Benjamin's concept of historicism runs parallel to his concept of a compulsion for historicizing and repetition that seems to derive from aesthetic considerations.

X

To be continued in "The Time That Remains, Part Two: How to Repeat the Avant-Garde"

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1
Martin Heidegger, Nietzsche, Volumes One and Two, trans. David Farrell Krell (New York: HarperCollins, 1991), 73.

2
Also Rossi, "Introduction," Aldo Rossi in America: 1976 to 1979, ed. Kenneth Frampton (New York: Columbia University Press, 1991), 38-39.

3
Peter Eisenman, "Presentness and the Being-Only-Once of Architecture": Written into the Void (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2007), 46.

4
Walter Benjamin, "On the Concept of History," Walter Benjamin, *Selected Writings*, Vol. 4, 1938-1940, ed. Michael Jennings (Cambridge, MA, London: Harvard University Press, 2003), 393.

5
Giorgio Agamben, *The Time That Remains: A Commentary on the Letter to the Romans* , trans. Patricia Dailey (Standford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2005), 62.

6
Agamben, ibid, 67.

7
Martin Heidegger, *On Being and Time* , trans. Joan Stambaugh (Chicago: University of Chicago Press); Giorgos Xeropaides, *O Hei degger kai to problema tes ontologias* (Athens: Kritike, 1995) 86-88.

8
Martin Heidegger, *Nietzsche*, 20.

9
Agamben, ibid, 30.

10
Recently, Gerald Raunig has written an alternative art history depicting the revolutionary transgressions and tragic failures of the "long twentieth century," from the Paris Commune of 1871 and the beginning of *modernité* to the turbulent counter-globalization protests in Genoa in 2001. See Gerald Raunig, *Art and Revolution* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2007.

11
Boris Groys, "The Weak Universalism," *e-flux journal* no.19 (October 2010). Here Groys tends to identify messianic time with a Christological concept of a new spiritualism that is actually against Agamben's own thesis. See https://www.e-flux.com/journal/15/61294/the-weak-universalism/ .

12
Agamben, ibid, 63.

13
Jacques Derrida, "Faith and Knowledge: the Two Sources and 'Religion' at the Limits of Reason Alone" in *Religion*, ed. Jacques Derrida, Gianni Vattimo, (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1998) 13-14.

14
While *chronos* in ancient Greek refers to chronological or sequential time, *kairos* signifies a time in between, a moment of indeterminate time in which something special happens.

15
Giorgio Agamben, *The Man without Content* , trans. Georgia Albert (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1999), 27; see Martin Heidegger, 'The World of Nietzsche: 'God is Dead,' *The Que stion Concerning Technology and Other Essays* , trans. William Lovitt (New York: Harper and Row, 1977), 62.

16
Agamben, *ibid*, 39.

17
Agamben, *ibid*, 19.

18
Agamben, *ibid*, 19.

19
We can also argue that, rather than simply denying commercialism and the industry of the spectacle, the 'conceptualism of bad taste' engaged—at least in the best-case scenario—with them in an attempt to avoid the alienation of working within a rotten system by actively occupying a place of negativity within the same system. To embrace the fascination that the commodity engenders doesn't necessarily mean simply to be uncritically fascinated by this absolute fetish, 'the idol of the marketplace,' but rather to mirror the previously described dualism or polarity that roots modernity's formative schism between bad and good taste: art as commodity versus art as critique of that commodity. Actually it was Karl Marx himself who claimed that commodity is something very like a work of art, contemplating on its mystical, enigmatic character and its transcendent being. Bad taste

can expose the triviality and alienating nature of commodities, only if it takes seriously its mysterious life and aura. Bad taste has an investigative, almost hermeneutical character. Marx himself is a 'man of taste,' which claims for him the right to uncover the scintillating nuances of commodity between alienating fetishism and truth. See Karl Marx, Collected Works (New York: International Publishers, 1975), I:71.

20
Agamben, *ibid*, 41.

21
Agamben refers to *Rameau's Nephew* , an imaginary philosophical conversation written by Denis Diderot, in which the figure of the protagonist functions as a man of extraordinary taste and at the same time "a despicable rascal." Agamben, *ibid*, 26.

22
Carl Schmitt, *Political Theology: Four Chapters on the Concept of Sovereignty* , trans. George Schwab (Cambridge Mass: MIT Press, 1988), 65; Stathis Gourgouris, *Dream Nation. Enlightenment, Colonization and the Institution of Modern Greece* (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 1996), 21.

23
Schmitt, *ibid*., 5, 12.

24
Jacques Derrida, *The Truth in Painting* , trans. Geoffrey Bennington and Ian McLeod (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1987), 35. Talking with Derrida, within the entirety of the surrounds of the work of art (frame, title, signature, museum, archive, reproduction, discourse, market) the most significant one, the predominant "parergon," remains the aesthetic judgment.

25
Agamben, *ibid*, 19.

26
Jean Baudrillard, *The Conspiracy of Art. Manifestos, Texts, Interviews, ed. Sylvère Lotringer* (Cambridge Mass.: MIT Press, 2005).

27
Andy Warhol, *The Philosophy of Andy Warhol (From A to B and Back Again)* ,(New York: Harvest, 1975), 92.

28
Indeed, it seems that Nietzsche's take on composer Richard Wagner can be seen as a crucial critique of art's condition today that links conceptually Wagner's profile to the one of Warhol: "In his art all that the modern world requires most urgently is mixed in the most seductive manner: the three great 'stimulantia' of the exhausted – the brutal, the artificial, and the innocent (idiotic)." Friedrich Nietzsche, "The Case of Wagner,",in Basic Writings of Nietzsche, ed. and trans. Walter Kaufmann (New York: Modern Library, 1968), 622..

29
The advent of nihilism with the man without content should be associated with what Jacques Lacan has called the fundamental tendency of the symbolic order to produce repetition, which has been terminologically fixated as modern society's "death drive." The death drive for Lacan doesn't mean the same as it does for Sigmund Freud. It means the prolongation of the already existent and monetary accumulation is its symptom.

30
See http://nastybrutalistandshort.blogspot.com/

31
Agamben, *ibid*, 56.

32
It founds its precursor in the reading of seventeenth-century Baroque as a critical moment in the eruption of modernity and its successor in the avant-garde artistic movements of the twentieth century. Christine Buci-Glucksmann, Baroque Reason: The Aesthetics of Modernity (London: Sage, 1994), 4.

Jalal Toufic

The Contemporary Is Still Forthcoming

Contemporary art? As far as I am largely *un* concerned, *none* of what is termed contemporary art, including what is exhibited and screened in various "museums of contemporary art," for example the Museum of Contemporary Art in Sydney (MCA) or the Museum of Contemporary Art in Los Angeles (MOCA), is contemporary[1] and most of it is not art! There can be no museum of contemporary art since while now we can have museums but not contemporaneity, with the coming of the messiah we are going to have contemporaneity but no museums—there is going to be no need for a museum in the redeemed world, a world where one finds only what is willed to eternally recur.

In 1666, Sabbatai Zevi, the purported Jewish messiah, apostatized and converted to Islam; while most of his followers left him, some persisted in viewing him as the awaited messiah. 1676 should have proved to be the year of a far greater crisis in messianism. What happened in 1676? Sabbatai Zevi died, but also, far more crucially for messianism, "the Danish astronomer Ole Roemer … became the first person to measure the speed of light. Until that time, scientists assumed that the speed of light was either too fast to measure or infinite. The dominant view, vigorously argued by the French philosopher Descartes, favored an infinite speed. Roemer, working at the Paris Observatory, … was compiling extensive observations of the orbit of Io, the innermost of the four big satellites of Jupiter discovered by Galileo in 1610.... The satellite is eclipsed by Jupiter once every orbit, as seen from the Earth. By timing these eclipses over many years, Roemer noticed something peculiar. The time interval between successive eclipses became steadily shorter as the Earth in its orbit moved toward Jupiter and became steadily longer as the Earth moved away from Jupiter.... He realized that the time difference must be due to the finite speed of light. That is, light from the Jupiter system has to travel farther to reach the Earth when the two planets are on opposite sides of the Sun than when they are closer together. Roemer estimated that light required twenty-two minutes to cross the diameter of the Earth's orbit. The speed of light could then be found by dividing the diameter of the Earth's orbit by the time difference. The Dutch scientist Christiaan Huygens, who first did the arithmetic, found a value for the speed of light equivalent to 131,000 miles per second. The correct value is 186,000 miles per second. The difference was due to errors in Roemer's estimate for the maximum time delay (the correct value is 16.7, not 22 minutes), and also to an imprecise knowledge of the Earth's orbital diameter."[2] I would like to think that it is not fortuitous, but fitting, that the death of the purported Jewish messiah happened in the same year in which it was discovered that light has a finite speed and in which the first real calculation of that speed was being done. Messianists went on as if this did not concern them! And yet this (as well as, later, the four dimensional spacetime of the block universe of relativity) should, as far as they were concerned, have been thought provoking and produced a crisis, as a crucified messiah

(Jesus) or one who apostatized and converted to another religion (Sabbatai Zevi) was and did for earlier messianists. They proved not to be really the contemporaries of the discovery that light has a finite speed of 131,000 miles per second (actually, 186,000 miles per second), a discovery that made it impossible for them to be the contemporaries of what they perceived and makes it impossible for us to be the contemporaries of what we perceive. Taking into consideration that the speed of light is finite, more specifically 299,792,458 meters per second in a vacuum (*c*), and that the speed of sound is finite, approximately 768 miles per hour in dry air at 20 °C, one perceives only the past. To see how the sun is presently, I have to wait for its light to reach me. In terms of what they see and hear, indeed of what they can see and hear, people are not the contemporaries of each other and, more generally, of the universe, a universe where light has a finite speed of 299,792,458 meters per second in a vacuum, thus a universe that does not allow for contemporaneity. The awaited messiah/Mahdı is going to end waiting, including the recurrent wait of the ones living then for light to reach them from objects,[3] ushering the epoch of contemporaneity[4] (that until then we cannot be contemporaries, including, indeed mainly, of the event, should not mean that we are bound to be behind the event (Baudrillard: "It was Rilke who said 'Events move in such a way that they will always inevitably be ahead of us. We shall never catch up with them'")[5]—we can be ahead of it!—including, as thinkers, through thought experiments). *The messiah is forthcoming* has several meanings: the condition of possibility for his fulfilling his function, the experience of countless recurrence, which can become possible through either time travel to very similar branches of the multiverse or virtual emulations,[6] is yet to be made possible[7] (had he, as we are told by many messianists, already come or were he, as millions of Jews and Twelver Shi'ites wish and hope would happen, to appear on Earth today, the messiah/Mahdı would have been and would be still forthcoming, since the conditions for his full presence were not then and are not yet present); moreover, once this condition has been actualized, between his appearance on Earth and his ending up willing the eternal recurrence of various events, he continues to be forthcoming both in relation to us, since, given that light travels at 299,792,458 meters per second in a vacuum (and sound at approximately 768 miles per hour), we perceive him at a delay (that's imperceptible to the naked eye), and in relation to himself, that is, he is not yet fully the messiah—the messiah arrives first as forthcoming. It may very well be that the day that the forthcoming Messiah/Mahdı as an *over* man would be made to experience over and over is the very day in which he became occulted in relation to those living then and to the world ("He [Jesus] went away a second time and prayed, 'My Father, if it is not possible for this cup to be taken away unless I drink it, may your will be done'" [Matthew 26:42]. If, as the New Testament reports, the crucifixion was not taken away from the Christ, then it must have been willed by God, that is, willed to recur eternally,[8] with the consequence that Jesus would be made to go through it countless times until *he* wills its eternal recurrence, and that while many happenings would not only disappear, but would retroactively never have existed in the willed, redeemed world, the crucifixion, if not all that led to it from the time Jesus Christ prayed to God, is going to continue to be part of the willed, redeemed world. I would rather think that in answer to his prayer, Jesus came to the realization that it is not the will of God that he be crucified ["They slew him (the Messiah, Jesus son of Mary, Allâh's messenger) not nor crucified him, but it appeared so unto them …" (Qur'ân 4:157)], and consequently that the crucifixion [of another] would most probably not be part of the willed, redeemed world),[9] or another day that's within a generation of when he was occulted ("Truly I tell you, some who are standing here will not taste death before they see the Son of Man coming in his kingdom" [Matthew 16:28]—his kingdom is the world resulting from his willing the eternal recurrence of some events of that day). Thus the messiah would have come again (in a virtual reality or in branches of the multiverse very similar to the state of the world at the time in which he said he would come back) within the period his earliest disciples were expecting him to come—in the case of the Mahdı, within the Lesser Occultation (*al-ghayba al-sughrá*), which lasted from 874 to 941. I can very well imagine the following remake of the Wachowski brothers' *The Matrix*: Neo, whose body is actually in suspended animation while his brain is connected to a computer simulation, believes he lives in Palestine in AD 1, then he is "awakened" by someone (Morpheus) and informed by him about the actual state of affairs. At one point in the Wachowski brothers' *The Matrix*, Neo exclaims: "Déjà vu!" Trinity: "What did you see?" Neo: "A black cat went past us, and then another that looked just like it." Trinity: "How much like it? Was it the same cat?" Neo: "It might have been. I'm not sure.... What is it?" Trinity: "A déjà vu is usually a glitch in the Matrix. It happens when they change something." How can one affect the world outside the simulation? In my proposed remake I envision that in some of the other very similar branches of the multiverse, Morpheus later subjects Neo to countless recurrence through trapping him in a simulation, most fittingly one of Palestine in AD 1, so that he would end up, across many virtual suicides, willing the eternal recurrence of some events, thus making actual the epochal will, which affects, like meditation does, all simulations and all worlds (with the inaugural appearance of the epochal will in a simulation, many things in the universe or entire branches of the multiverse outside the simulation may cease any existence, vanish as if *they* were simulations, and the "laws" of the universe or multiverse may be abrogated)—it is those who have designed and implemented the Matrix who would try to obstruct the experiment of subjecting Neo to countless recurrence. Dōgen: "When even for a moment you express the buddha's seal in the three actions by sitting upright in samādhi … all beings in the ten directions, and the six realms, including the three lower realms, at once obtain pure body and mind … all things

realize correct awakening .... Thus in the past, future, and present of the limitless universe this zazen carries on the buddha's teaching endlessly.... Know that even if all buddhas of the ten directions, as innumerable as the sands of the Ganges, exert their strength and with the buddhas' wisdom try to measure the merit of one person's zazen, they will not be able to fully comprehend it" ("On the Endeavor of the Way [*Bendō-Wa*]");[10] one can paraphrase Dōgen's words with respect to zazen thus in relation to the will: "When even for a moment, you will the eternal recurrence of three actions ... all beings in the ten (to be precise, eleven?) dimensions and/or the multiverse, including the three lower simulations, are affected ... all things that are still there then are ones that are willed to eternally recur. Thus in the past, future, and present of the limitless multiverse this willing carries on the will's affirmation endlessly.... Know that even if all the scientists and thinkers of the ten dimensions and/or the multiverse, more innumerable than the sands of the Ganges, exert their strength and try to measure the merit of one person's willing of the eternal recurrence of some events, they will not be able to fully comprehend it." The messiah is the overman who goes through countless recurrence and ends up, across many suicides, willing the eternal recurrence of various events, thus making actual the epochal will. Once the will has become an actuality, the speed of light becomes if not infinite then so fast that the light travel time from the most distant objects in the universe to a sentient being falls below the quantum mechanical uncertainty, and—allowing for the associated changes in the electron charge, *e*, and/or Planck's constant, *h*, that would preserve the fine-structure constant[11] and/or other changes that would permit intelligent beings to continue to exit—those living then become the contemporaries of what they perceive, for example of the willful overman as messiah/Mahdı and of the sun as it is and not as it was 499 seconds (8.32 minutes) in the past.[12] During the transition, during the birth pangs of the messianic age, they might see two suns, the sun as it was 8.32 minutes earlier and the sun as it is at that very moment. In Coppola's *Dracula*, whose events take place in the final years of the nineteenth century, i.e., when the experience of countless recurrence was not yet possible, Dracula's first words to Mina, "See me now!" are twice ironic, twice problematic, because he is doubly not in the now, since, as is made clear by the absence of an image of him in the reflective windowpane in front of which he is ostensibly standing, he is not really (fully) there,[13] and since the light reflected from him and traveling to Mina's eyes at 298,925,574 meters per second would reach her at a delay. Coppola's Dracula is an imposter, a counterfeiter of the one who can properly utter the words "See me now!";[14] indeed the latter words could very well be the ones with which the messiah announces that he is no longer forthcoming.

Can there be one or more events in the universe of relativity where every point in spacetime is mistermed an "event"? Yes, the appearance of the will and its overruling of relativity. If everything that has ever occurred cannot be redeemed, then the universe that's the end result of the attainment by the overman, then the accomplished messiah, of willing the eternal recurrence of some events cannot be the block universe of relativity. Nietzsche wrote: "Impotent against that which has been—it [the will] is an angry spectator of everything past. The will cannot will backward; that it cannot break time and time's greed—that is the will's loneliest misery. Willing liberates ... That time does not run backward, that is its wrath.... This, yes this alone is *revenge* itself: the will's unwillingness toward time and time's 'it was.' ... Has the will already become its own redeemer and joy bringer? Has it unlearned the spirit of revenge ... ? And who taught it reconciliation with time, and what is higher than any reconciliation—but how shall this happen? Who would teach it to also will backward?"[15] (with the exception of the *will* in *willing liberates*, the "will" in the rest of the citation of Nietzsche should be qualified by quotation marks, since what Nietzsche is writing about is not yet the will); and Derrida wrote, "'Forgiveness died in the death camps,' he [Vladimir Jankélévitch] says. Yes. Unless it only becomes possible from the moment that it appears impossible. Its history would begin, on the contrary, with the unforgivable,"[16] and "forgiveness forgives only the unforgivable.... That is to say that forgiveness must announce itself as impossibility itself. It can only be possible in doing the impossible."[17] One of the consequences of the willing by the overman of the eternal recurrence of various events and the ensuing inaugural appearance of the epochal will is that the latter abrogates the laws of the unwilled, unredeemed world, [18] including the "laws" of nature,[19] and that the ones still there then would no longer be living in the block universe of spacetime of relativity, in which all is preserved,[20] even what is Evil, even what is unforgivable, even what cannot be willed to recur eternally, but would be living in a universe where things are transient but subsist only because they are willed to eternally recur.[21] What is higher than any reconciliation and what is higher than any forgiveness that can accomplish the impossible of forgiving the unforgivable but not the impossible of undoing what has been done is the inexistence, once the will has appeared, of anything that cannot be willed to recur eternally.[22] At the most basic level, the forgiveness of the unforgivable that Derrida—who, like Nietzsche ("To 'will' anything ... I have never experienced this")[23] and like all of us still, lacked will—wrote about was still revengeful, as the forgiveness of anyone is until the will becomes possible and is actualized, following which anything that cannot be willed to eternally recur not only disappears but has never existed (many films are no longer going to exist in the willed universe, since they are unworthy of being willed to return eternally). The will, which wills backward as well as forward, liberates from all that cannot be willed, i.e., willed to return eternally, including what, until the will's actualization, had already occurred, and thus from revengefulness and the nihilism that's a consequence of the past's fait accompli, of the resigned conviction that

what has already been done cannot be undone. That the will wills also backward does not mean that it wills the disappearance of specific events of the past, for that would still be revengeful; rather it means that it wills affirmatively what in the past can be willed to return eternally, with as a *byproduct* that what thenceforth cannot be willed to recur eternally, including in the past, would have disappeared, indeed never have existed. Notwithstanding an article of faith of most, if not all Twelver Shi'ites, the willful overman, who is going to be deemed the Mahdı, is not going to avenge imam Husayn, prophet Muhammad's grandson (who was slaughtered alongside many members of his family and his companions in Karbâlâ'), not because he is going to accomplish the impossible of forgiving the unforgivable but because, by making possible a universe where only what can be willed to eternally recur can exist, he is going to accomplish the impossible whereby the unforgivable, what cannot be willed to recur eternally, would no longer have ever existed, with the consequence that there is then nothing to forgive—were the forgiveness of the unforgivable or Derrida's texts on his concept of such a forgiveness, which is forgiveness as such, to continue to be part of the universe when the will becomes actual, then the willful overman as the contemporary messiah is going to "forgive" this will-less forgiveness, this still revengeful forgiveness and Derrida's concept of forgiveness.

PS: Is this text of mine also forthcoming, though for an additional reason?

X

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1
This applies, in terms of its reception, even to the art that constructs and/or presents universes in which the signals from anything are not necessarily forthcoming, where people perceive the present, not the past.

2
"Profile: Ole Roemer and the Speed of Light," excerpt from *Cosmic Horizons: Astronomy at the Cutting Edge* , ed. Steven Soter and Neil deGrasse Tyson (New York: New Press: Distributed by W.W. Norton & Co., 2001), http://www.amnh.org/education/resources/rfl/web/essaybooks/cosmic/p_roemer.html .

3
Things bombard us at a quicker and quicker pace, but, given that light has a finite speed of 299,792,458 meters per second in a vacuum and that ostensibly no other signal can be faster than the speed of light, they continue nonetheless to be forthcoming, however minimal the delay.

4
In this respect, and with the exception of entangled subatomic particles, everything has aura before the full presence of the messiah.

5
Jean Baudrillard, *Fragments: Conversations with François L'Yvonnet* , trans. Chris Turner (London; New York: Routledge, 2004).

6
See "You Said 'Stay,' So I Stayed" in my book *Forthcoming* (Berkeley, CA: Atelos, 2000).

7
In one of his letters from prison, Antonio Gramsci writes of "the pessimism of the intellect and the optimism of the will" (*Selections from Prison Notebooks* (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1971); Gramsci attributes these words to Romain Rolland). Unfortunately we already have intellect but we do not yet have the will, which can be achieved only if we one day reach its condition of possibility, the experience of countless recurrence.

8
Can an event that is willed to recur eternally be repeated? Rather, one day some people are going, through time travel to very similar branches of the multiverse or virtual emulations, to repeat or to be subjected to repetition until they will the event, i.e., will it to recur eternally. Once the epochal will has become an actuality, God creates, every instant, events that are willed to recur eternally, never repeating any of his self-disclosures (Ibn 'Arabı: "The Real does not disclose Himself in a form twice").

9
The withdrawal of tradition, and of the messiah or Mahdı as part of tradition, seems to happen not on the worst day but subsequently.

10
Moon in a Dewdrop: Writings of Zen Master Dōgen , ed. Kazuaki Tanahashi; trans. Robert Aitken et al. (San Francisco: North Point Press, 1985), 145–147.

11
See: "Variable Speed of Light," http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Variable_speed_of_light , more specifically this quote by John Barrow: "(An) important lesson we learn from the way that pure numbers like α define the world is what it really means for worlds to be different. The pure number we call the fine structure constant and denote by α is a combination of the electron charge, *e*, the speed of light, *c*, and Planck's constant, *h*. At first we might be tempted to think that a world in which the speed of light was slower would be a different world. But this would be a mistake. If *c*, *h*, and *e* were all changed so that the values they have in metric (or any other) units were different when we looked them up in our tables of physical constants, but the value of α remained the same, this new world would be *observationally indistinguishable* from our world. The only thing that counts in the definition of worlds are the values of the dimensionless constants of Nature. If all masses were doubled in value (including the Planck mass *mP)* you cannot tell because all the pure numbers defined by the ratios of any pair of masses are unchanged." John D. Barrow, *The Constants of Nature; From Alpha to Omega – The Numbers that Encode the Deepest Secrets of the Universe* (New York: Pantheon Books, 2002).

12
In so far as they are in a state of entanglement, do subatomic particles already belong to the world of the messiah?

13
While the vampire is not found where he "is," as shown by the mirror at the location, he is "found" where he is not—he haunts.

14
A consequent filmmaker would have subsequently made a film in which the words "See me now!' would be unproblematic. Might this essay prompt Coppola to make such a sequel? I very much doubt it since this essay is most probably forthcoming, including in relation to him.

15
Friedrich Wilhelm Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra: A Book for All and None* , ed. Adrian Del Caro, Robert B. Pippin; trans. Adrian Del Caro (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 111.

16
Jacques Derrida, *On Cosmopolitanism and Forgiveness* , translated by Mark Dooley and Michael Hughes (London; New York: Routledge, 2001), 37. "Anyone who speaks a word against the Son of Man will be forgiven, but anyone who speaks against the Holy Spirit will not be forgiven, either in this age or in the age to come" (Matthew 12:32). One might interpret these words as implying that speaking a word against the Son of Man is forgivable. But that is not necessarily the case; rather, if we consider these words while keeping in mind those of Derrida on forgiveness, we can view them as indicating that speaking a word against the Son of Man is unforgivable and that by forgiving it God accomplishes the impossible. Between the first part and the second part of the aforementioned sentence in Matthew 12:32, there is going to be the pivotal event of the appearance of the will. While the God of the first part of the sentence has no will yet, the God of the second part of the sentence has will and so it makes no sense for him to forgive anyone who speaks against the Holy Spirit, because speaking against the Holy Spirit is not going to be part of the willed world, indeed is going never to have existed since it cannot be willed to return eternally.

17
Ibid., 32.

18
Jalal Toufic, February 7, 2005. Very dear Lyn (Hejinian): I hope that the rise of Iraqi Twelver Shi'ites is going to be accompanied within Twelver Shi'ism itself, and unlike in Iran and Lebanon, by an emancipation of its esoteric tendencies from the long-reigning stultifying, exoteric ones. If Iraq cannot become one day one of the secular sites of research into and development of the coming technological singularity, which is going to be able to manipulate the laws of physics, then may the nihilistic lawlessness of present day Iraq, in large part the work of Sunni rural fundamentalists, be replaced one day by the antinomianism of some genuinely (Twelver Shi'ite) messianic era, one à la (Nizârı Shi'ite) Great Resurrection of Alamut from 1164 to 1210.

19
Friedrich Nietzsche: "I beware of speaking of chemical 'laws': that savors of morality" in *The Will to Power* , trans. Walter Kaufmann and R.J. Hollingdale (New York: Random House, 1968), 630.

20
According to the theory of relativity, when we believe that things pass, we are mistaken (it may be that the sense of unreality one experiences in death is in part a consequence of the circumstance that the time one undergoes there is not that of the block universe of relativity, but, humorously, what most living people mistakenly consider their time to be: a fleeting time, the past vanishing irremediably moment by moment). How to make what does not pass do so? One way of doing this is by exhausting it (that's what we have in the Many-Worlds interpretation of quantum physics, according to which all the possibilities are actualized in different universes). Not to be fooled by their seeming passage into failing to explore and exhaust things in order to make them really pass. Yes, the great attempt of exhaustive people is, paradoxically, to make that which they are exhausting at long last pass.

21
It should go without saying that "eternity in heaven" does not mean necessarily that the one in heaven is going to be there for eternity, moving from one joy to another; it means essentially that he or she has an eternal relation to everything that happens to him

or her there, that he or she wills the eternal recurrence of everything that happens to him or her there, that he or she blesses each thing that happens there thus: "I will you to recur eternally."

22
Contrariwise, many events that are presently considered the hallucinations of schizophrenics and the insubstantial visions of mystics (at least some of these eliciting from the one undergoing them a description in terms of eternity) are going to be considered then part of the willed, redeemed world.

23
Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Anti-Christ, Ecce Homo, Twilight of the Idols, and Other Writings* , edited by Aaron Ridley and Judith Norman; translated by Judith Norman (Cambridge University Press, 2005), 97.

Jan Verwoert

World as Medium: On the Work of Stano Filko

1. Totality as Point of View, Medium, and Mode of Address

Stano Filko's work is never just *about* the world. It *is* world. Because Filko speaks world. World is his medium, his language, his means of artistic production: using the medium of world Filko produces (anti)happenings, environments, installations, objects and diagrammatic drawings of all kinds. Some look very different from others. But that is the freedom of a mind that speaks world. It can choose the means and materials that seem apt in a given situation. What matters first and foremost is that each and every work articulates a particular stance, attitude, and point of view: it *addresses* the world as a whole from the *limits* of that world, that is, from the point where a world begins and ends, where α and Ω coincide. In each work Filko projects a view of the world as a whole by formulating conditions—and formalizing terms—under which the world could be viewed as a whole. When Filko builds an immersive environment, these terms and conditions are spelled out in a *spatial* and *physical* manner. But they can equally be rendered in a purely *semiotic* form, as a paradigmatic system, when he draws up diagrams and scribbles words on a sheet of graph paper. And finally (the conditions for articulating) a world can simply be given in a *thought*, as in the pivotal *HAPPSOC 1* piece, in which Filko and Alex Mlynárčik designated all life in the city of Bratislava as a work of art for the time between May 2 and 8, 1965.

Stano Filko and Alex Mlynárčik, HAPPSOC, 1965. Invitation for the performance of the same name.

This is a provocation! And to see why, we have to grasp the radical sense of possibility with which Filko confronts us: in his work a world can be articulated through spaces, signs, and thoughts alike. From the point of view of his production, therefore, the spatiophysical, the semiotic, and the speculative (and to this we may add the spiritual, political, and sexual) are alternative *prisms*, but,

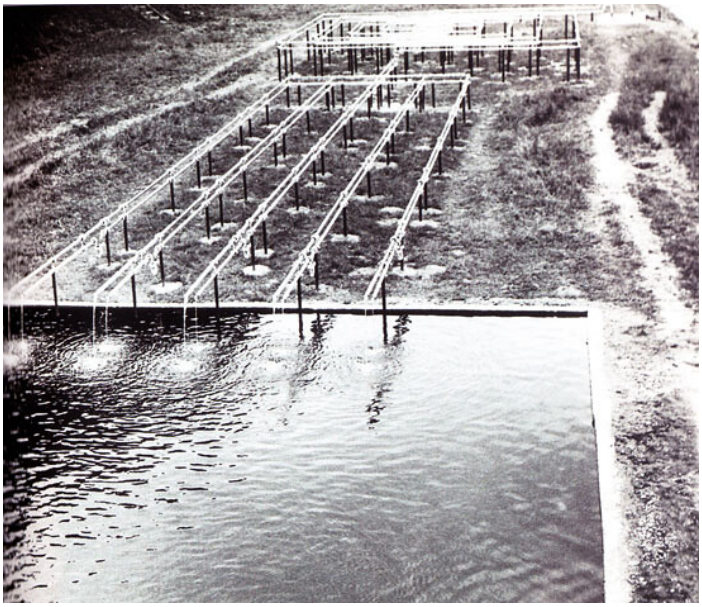
practically speaking, as prisms they are tools with similar use value. As an artist Filko can use all of them. So, when it articulates a world, a diagrammatic drawing or simple gesture in principle has the same status as a fully designed room installation. Even the smallest thing can show the big picture. These are conditions of autonomy produced within a material practice: Filko creates the freedom to define the value of any artifact or sign according to his own terms, that is, according to the terms of the world systems that he constructs.

Stano Filko, Modely vyhliadkovej veže-architektúra (Models of the Lookout Tower Architecture), 1966–67. Environment.

To speak of artistic "world systems" in a certain modernist tradition would seem to direct us back to the notion of the *Gesamtkunstwerk*. And surely, the totality of a world is the dimension that Filko lays claim to as the very premise of his thought and work. Still, given its specific history, to use the term *Gesamtkunstwerk* may actually be misleading here. For with Filko a certain form of materialism—a (mocking) spirit of analytic pragmatism—always also prevails, as a counterweight to the furor of thinking the absolute.

HAPPSOC 1, for example, was announced by a simple invitation card to the city-wide artwork, listing among other things the materials used in the work: "138036 women, 128727 men, 49991 dogs, 18009 houses, 165236 balconies, 40070 water pipes in homes, 35060 washing machines, 1 castle, 1 Danube in Bratislava, 22 theatres, 6 cemeteries, 1000801 tulips (...) etc." The grand gesture of seizing a whole city with the sublime force of one thought is thus offset by the modest form of its announcement (a small card) and the laconic enumeration of the mundane parts of the whole. The manner in which the grand and small, the sublime and mundane are made to play off of each other in the form of this piece conveys a liberating sense of irony. It shakes off the curse of the *Gesamtkunstwerk* to which its historical proponent, Richard Wagner, fell prey. Hooked on the furor of the absolute, Wagner had no chance but to inflate his work to ever more ridiculously grandiose dimensions. Filko, on the contrary, understands the semiotic—the suggestive power of even the smallest sign or list of numbers—as a means equal to that of the grand theatrical gesture. Wagner could only go big; Filko can go big *and* small, as he wants. There is a rough-and-readiness to his work throughout, precisely because it comes from a place where thinking the whole allows him to operate freely and, if need be, to also trust a fragment—e.g., a list ending on "*atd.*" (*etc.*)—to fully articulate a world.

This is why Filko's work has a lot to offer to a contemporary meditation on how art engenders forces of resistance, freedom, and criticality: he shows how artists and thinkers can tactically claim a *world (totality)* as their point of departure, medium, and mode of address—and, in doing so, create *zones of autonomy* that liberate them to act artistically, go big or go small, and freely negotiate the value of artifacts and ideas.



Stano Filko, Prečerpávanie vody (Shifting of Water), 1967. Environment.

Indeed, a key characteristic of Filko's practice is that the act of articulating totality in his work is inseparable from a motion of *zoning*: in the process of progressively unfolding the principles of his work over the years, Filko designated and developed five different zones, within which he situates individual works, projects, and bodies of ideas. Each zone is described by a color: Red, Green, Blue, White, or Black (indigo).[1] Instead of a mythology, what this system offers is a topology of zones, or rather: a cosmology of *horizons*. For each zone articulates the world in total, yet in the light of one particular *aspect* of the world. Red articulates the world in total from within

the experiential horizon—from the point of view and via the medium and mode of address—of the erotic; Green, from within the horizon of the sociopolitical; Blue, from within the horizon of the cosmic; White, from within the horizon of its possible transcendence; and Black (indigo), from within the horizon of the ego and its transformations.

To interpret this effort of zoning one's oeuvre as the idealist endeavor to erect a metaphysical system, a Hegelian megamachine, would be tempting. And indeed one could possibly portray Filko as the engineer, machinist, and pilot of such a metaengine-powered multiterrain vehicle. The point one shouldn't miss, however, is that beside and beyond idealism, there is always also another spirit at work in Filko's machinery, of a more materialist, pragmatic, analytic provenance. To unravel the experience of the world in terms of its aspects—and by means of the different discourses that seeing the world in the light of a particular aspect generates—is precisely the approach that, in his attempt to overcome metaphysics, Ludwig Wittgenstein developed in his *Philosophical Investigations*. Connecting the concept of *aspect-seeing* to that of the *language game*, he described the conditions under which we articulate the world as a set of distinct yet interlocking semiotic fields (i.e., language games), that, each in its own right and with its own use of concepts, allows us to make sense of our experiences, from a particular perspective, that is, in light of the aspect of perception around which that particular language-game is based and which it hence highlights.

In this sense, the manner in which Filko has built his oeuvre over the years could equally be seen as an ongoing endeavor to unfold a set of language games, each of which presents an experiential zone, a semiotic field, or an artistic plateau, which articulates the totality of the world in the light of *one* of its aspects. In this perspective, the whole of Filko's oeuvre would then appear less like a single machine, and more like a topology of distinct yet interconnected zones spread out before us. To open up these two perspectives on the oeuvre is not meant to create the false alternative of an either/or choice. The point is to say that what makes Filko's approach rich and provocative is precisely the fact that he *marries* the force of engineering megamachines to a critical wisdom of unfolding worlds of experiential zones / semiotic fields / artistic plateaux. The horizon of the world articulated in its totality is thus always equally that of a system and that of an aspect: a big picture drawn via—and broken up into—a set of multicolored zones.

2. A Rival to Ideology

Why would it be so crucial to highlight and reinvestigate the artistic tactic of claiming totality? Because in art history, as it is written today, the claim to totality is largely being framed as a megalomaniacal metaphysical delusion, that, in New York in the 1960s, was overcome by the turn toward a secularized aesthetics of bare facticity in Minimalism, Pop, and Conceptual art. An influential art historical school (of US provenance, represented by writers like Rosalind Krauss, Benjamin Buchloh, and Hal Foster) in fact treats the question of totality as *the* crucial watershed in postwar art: artists who still claim totality as their point of view, medium, and mode of address (Joseph Beuys being the showcase example) are portrayed as desperately holding on to the obsolete *old world* metaphysical notion of the artist as godlike creator. Conversely, those artists who renounce the theater of metaphysics and instead choose to take an analytic approach to specific materials (Robert Morris et al.) are embraced as heralds of a progressive *new world* mindset: as down-to-earth pragmatists. By now it would seem obvious that positing this watershed scenario—of a break with old-world beliefs and the building of a new world on material labor and pragmatic wisdom—quite literally is to inscribe the foundational myth of the United States into art history, as its tipping point (as if the rise of one nation dreaming its dream—of a cut with the past and discovery of real truth in hard facts—had meant a leap forward for all, and set the standards for future progressive thought at large).

In this respect, an appreciative reading of Filko's practice can open a pathway to understanding that the legacy of the 1960s does not necessarily lie in the imposition of an exclusive either/or choice against/for metaphysics/pragmatism. Filko's work, on the contrary, challenges us to grasp how the *specific use of mundane materials and signs* coexists with *techniques of claiming totality* within one practice, and how that practice acquires its critical edge (and power to sustain itself in the face of political oppression) by consummating the marriage of metaphysics and pragmatism.

A theorist who recognizes tactical claims to totality as an artistic point of view, medium, and mode of address is Boris Groys.[2] He situates this tactic within an overall scenario of ideological rivalry. In a totalitarian regime in general—and the construct of the Soviet Union masterminded by Stalin, in particular—the state ideologue will always be the first to lay claim to totality (as a point of view, medium, and mode of address) and justify his leadership with the assertion that he alone can articulate the state in its totality (i.e., what the state is, how it must be shaped, and how its people and needs must be addressed). To defend this exclusive right to articulate totality, the ideological state apparatus will seek to suppress all *rival claims* to that speaking position: hence the persecution and forceful indoctrination of artists and intellectuals. The tactic that dissident artists and intellectuals adopted to counter the power of the state apparatus, Groys argues, was to subsume the forces of subsumption by *mimicking* them. Putting on the mask of the supersupporter, the dissident would copy the voice of

Stano Filko, Let na mesiac a spätt, otvorená inštalácia (Flight to the Moon and Back, Open Installation), 1970.

the state apparatus, and, with the official voice articulate totality, yet in such an *overly emphatic* manner that the painful difference between the ideals invoked and the social realities created by the regime would be rendered obvious. In one sense the mimicry therefore produces a *parody* of the voice of ideology. In another sense, however—and this is where the complexity of Groys's dialectical thought comes into its own—the overly emphatic enactment of the aspiration to totality also *recoups* the forces of idealist projection at the heart of the ideological operation and *frees them up*: in the form of an artistic speculation (which may sound like the state speaking but) which in fact is too exuberant, too radical, too libidinal—in all regards goes much too far—to still be contained by any orderly ideological program.

And indeed this thought opens up a possible port of entry to the work of Filko: the dialectics of subsuming the forces of subsumption, by means of parody *and* radicalization, can be seen at work in many of his pieces (particularly of the GREEN series articulating the world in light of its sociopolitical aspects). Take the installation *Modely vyhliadkovej veže-architektúra* (Models of the Lookout Tower Architecture, 1966–67), for instance: installed on the wall are three big black-and-white photographs with aerial views of the new modernist housing megastructures that had just been erected outside old Bratislava on the West side of the Danube. The photographs form a panorama, in front of which three sculptural metal objects are displayed standing on four mirrored floor panels. The objects are welded together from different machine parts, including sprocket wheels, cranks, and what looks conspicuously like the gas tank of a motorbike. Presented as upright structures (and painted in monochrome colors: one blue, one orange red, one silver), they resemble models of a monumental tower building, such as a

television tower, or of a spaceship ready to launch. In front of the photographs they seem like probable architectural additions to the new cityscape. On top of the mirror panels they appear to be hovering in infinite space. In mimicking the logic of the cityscape, Filko's machine model towers mock the way that the total power of state-controlled urban planning over the city turns architecture into an industrial machinery for housing production. At the same time, however, they also take this industrial logic further, far beyond itself, by suggesting that if we can build total machine cities like this, we should also be free to build rocket towers like that, and fly them to the moon!

Comparable ambivalences characterize the environment *Prečerpávanie vody* (Shifting of Water, 1967). The piece is an elevated structure of water pipes that conduct water pumped from the Danube into a square pool adjacent to the river. The structure itself, however, is of near labyrinthine complexity: from the river the pipes wrap around each other in five consecutive loops, increasing in size before connecting to a phalanx of five parallel rows of double pipes ending over the pool. Again, the work can be read as a parody of absurdly overcomplicated technological systems that privilege the reflection on the totality of their own systematic workings before any apparent use-value. Yet, it is equally a beautiful example of an ecological system created by technical means, or, conversely, a cybernetic circuit, computing differentiation processes by means of water. With these two perspectives perpetually shifting, mockery and constructive speculation emerge as equally strong forces at work in the piece.

After 1968 the overall tone of Filko's work changes. The rivalry with the state apparatus has lost some, but not all, of its exuberance. Filko still invokes space travel as a radical possibility of the apparatus put to a different use. Consider, for instance, *Let na mesiac a späť, otvorená inštalácia* (Flight to the Moon and Back, Open Installation, 1970): A flat blue wooden box, with its lid ajar and the word *COSMOS* painted in black letters on its inside, is propped up against a wall next to three perforated sheets of metal suspended from the ceiling like solar panels on a spacelab. There is defiance in this gesture of leaving the door to the cosmos—that is, the exit to another world of freedom—ajar, after the state apparatus, aided by Soviet tanks, violently suppressed the attempts to realize a political alternative in this world two years before. This insistence on picturing a different totality still out there in the cosmos comes to be formulated in a growing body of works that Filko will subsume under the category "BLUE" in the overall system he develops for his work.

In parallel he begins to develop the works of the WHITE series: dedicated to meditations on absolute transcendence (or the transcendence of the absolute), these works also advance a technique of complete erasure. In Filko's collaboration with Miloš Laky and Ján Zavarský, entitled *Biely priestor v bielom priestore* (White Space in a White Space, 1974), for instance, the piece is an installation composed of different elements, mostly white pieces of fabric laid out on the floor where sculpture might stand or installed on the wall where paintings might hang (an exhibition of designated absences). One key piece in the overall ensemble was a large-scale scroll which, instead of writing, has a layer of bright white fabric on its inside. Some documentation photos show it partially unrolled on the floor. In the context of the installation, however, it was fully spread out across adjacent gallery walls. Biblical in its connotations, the use of a scroll would seem to suggest that some form of holy scripture is being presented; and indeed this is what it may be, only that this scripture contains no gospel, but rather testifies to the truth of (its own) total erasure, invoking a state of complete whiteout. This could imply a state of bliss, yet equally one of painful annihilation.

Likewise ambivalent in principle, two later pieces from the WHITE series would seem to gravitate more toward the latter. *Transcendentation* (1978–79) is a black-and-white photographic reproduction of a pietà altarpiece by Rogier van der Weyden, in which Filko erased the figure of Christ's mortal body by fully covering it with white paint. An eponymously titled photograph from the same year shows visitors to a gallery critically studying the works on display. Here the head of the most prominent viewer is blotted out by a white rectangle (with a circular shape at its center). This method is also applied in a series of overpainted photographs commemorating Filko's fortieth birthday (*Fylko 40 vyročie...,* 1977–78). In an apartment setting, different people are shown reclining on a sofa, having a drink, or preparing food in the kitchen, yet heads, entire bodies, or details in the apartment are obscured by white paint or cut out, leaving black holes. This could be seen to suggest that the individuals pictured were experiencing a moment of transcendence: their heads and bodies were taken to higher places in altered states. Yet, in another sense, it could also be understood as articulating a painful experience of erasure. If we understand the decade after the quelling of the Prague Spring to be marked by increased political repression, these works can be read as voicing this devastating experience: that of state power annulling the claim of the artist intellectual to represent what people feel and think. A set of two overpainted photos from the GREEN series—*untitled* (undated)—would seem to support this reading. Each shows a Soviet tank in the center of Prague, covered in pink paint: erasing the origin of erasure in an act of conceptual retaliation.

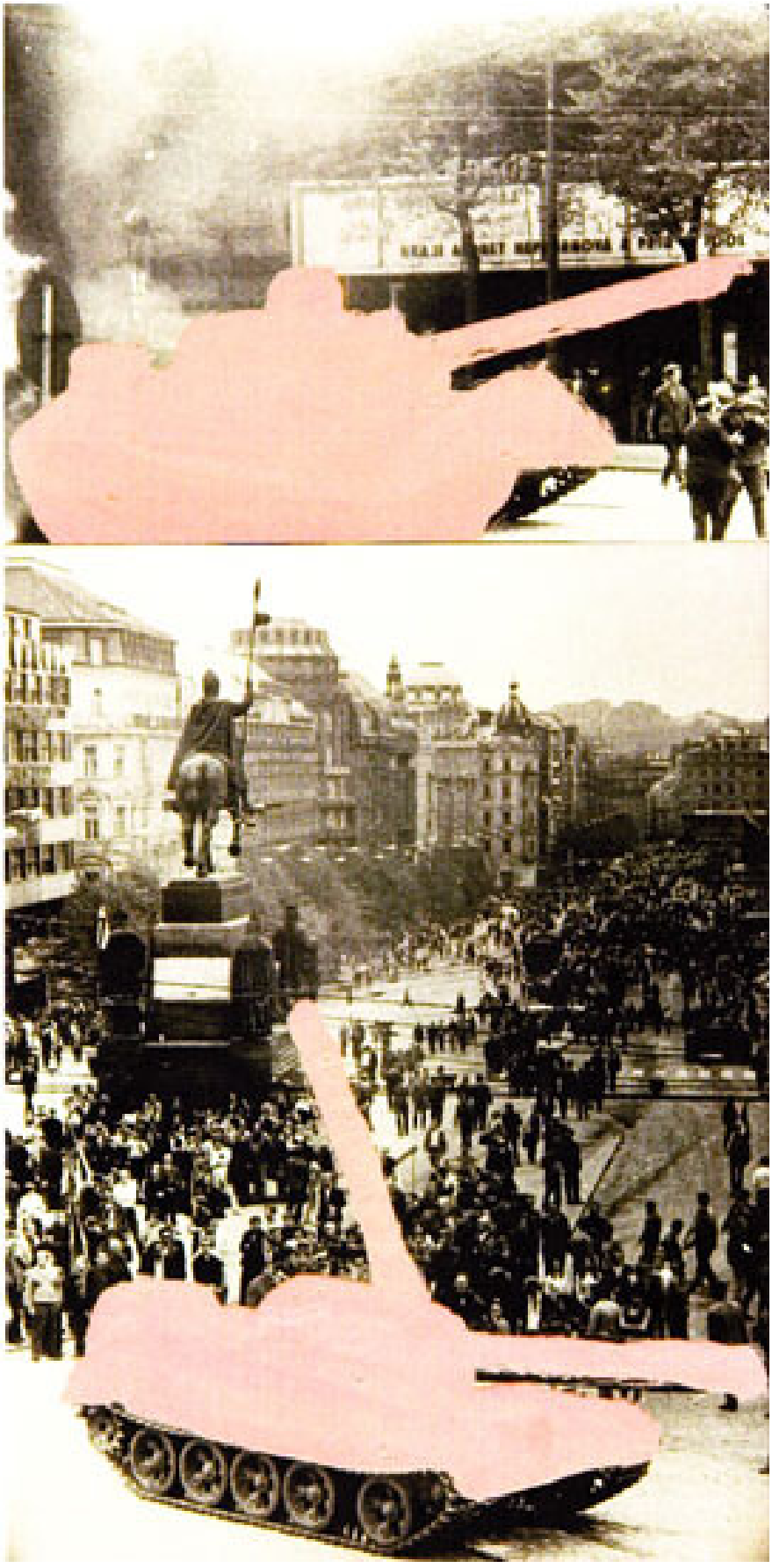
The crucial point, then, is that while meditating on the act of erasure, Filko's works of this time clearly imply no admission of defeat. On the contrary, there is a pronounced boldness even to the act of appropriating a pietà, as well as personal and historical photographs, and obliterating the central figures. It is the artist who performs, and thereby authorizes, the act of annihilation! So, even and especially in the moment of erasure, Filko performatively reclaims the position of totality for his work:

Stano Filko, Transcendentation, 1978–79.

if it's going to be a whiteout for artists, then the power to articulate that very whiteout is what confirms the survival of art. Dialectically speaking, the full embrace of the force of *negation* sublates the works into a *position* of transcendence: a stance of supreme (spiritual and political) defiance. And a position indeed the artists take; so much so that on the occasion of a further collaborative exhibition "Onthology Vertikál" (Onthology vertical) in 1974/75, Filko, Laky, and Zavarský characterize their use of white not at all in terms of *negativity*, but wholly positively as the proactive formulation of (a) pure *sensitivity*. In the catalogue to the exhibition they assert that "The 'pure sensitivity' in its absolute being is the unique possibility to display our pure activity of 'pure sensitivity.'" So while, when read against the backdrop of the historical political conditions, a dialectical reading of Filko's practice would on the one hand seem absolutely warranted, the work, on the other hand, always also defiantly asserts the demand to be considered on its very own terms!

3. Out of the Red / Into the Black

To say that art has the power to engage the ideological forces of the state apparatus in dialectical close combat is a way of insisting on the possibility of art eventually emerging as the winner. And as history shows, this happens. Yet, regardless of who prevails, the intimacy of the engagement always also means that the painful historical experience of being subjected (and subjecting oneself) to these forces of oppression is equally inscribed into the work. In this sense, situating art as ideology's dialectical rival emphasizes that, in the eyes of history, art does indeed have its own power and dignity. The problem, however, of reading work through the prism of historical dialectics *alone*, is that one thereby tends to, as it were, *chain* art to its nemesis: as if what art can be and do were solely determined by its relation to the powers that be—as if art wouldn't *also* generate its momentum by tapping other sources of empowerment! In Filko's own terms, it is as if one were to read his entire oeuvre through the GREEN prism—in light of life's sociopolitical aspects—and



Stano Filko, Untitled, undated photograph.

disregard the experiential horizon and language games opened up from within the RED, BLUE, WHITE, and BLACK zones.

In this respect, it should be noted that a pivotal work in the GREEN framework, *HAPPSOC 1*, already points beyond the field of the political: firstly, in that it (with a good dose of irony) lists items—e.g., washing machines, faucets, and tulips—so mundane that they, strictly speaking, slip through the grasp of ideology; and secondly, in that the artists consciously choose the days *between* two ideologically charged dates for their piece: it is the time between International Workers' Day on May 1 and May 8, the commemoration of the end of World War II, that the artists have selected for declaring the city an artwork—seven days that should be just what they are, with no superimposed symbolic meanings. So by turning this week into a total work of art, ironically, *HAPPSOC 1,* returns the city to itself.

Affirming the mundane from the point of view (and via the medium and mode of address) of totality articulated implies a crucial twist. It demonstrates that the embrace of the mundane does not necessarily have to go hand in hand with a renunciation of metaphysical claims to totality. Contrary to the canonical understanding of Pop as a strictly materialist affirmation of the material world, *HAPPSOC 1* foregrounds the residual metaphysical *universalism* that underpins Pop's declarations of love to the everyday, and thereby points to something fundamental: "A-B-C, 1-2-3, baby, you and me!" "She loves you, yeah yeah yeah!" "Ne me quitte pas!" All these lines give you great pop songs because, by virtue of being universal, they articulate a metaphysics of the everyday in the form of a basic speech act that effectively sums up the totality of an entire language game in a nutshell. (Screenprinting cans of Campbell's Tomato Soup on big canvases arguably taps the same pop-metaphysics.) And it would seem that Filko masters precisely these mechanics when he celebrates life as it's lived in different shades of totality.

The environments of the RED series are another case in point. *Environment Univerzál / Environment Universal* (1966–67), for instance, manifests the fascination of the erotic encounter in a manner that is as direct in its material language as it is universal in its formulation. The environment is housed in a cubic structure (5 x 5 x 3 meters) built from green metal tubes. In the place of walls, semitransparent blinds produce an enclosure with an intimate atmosphere. On each blind the stylized silhouette of a woman dancing is printed. The floor consists of mirrored panels creating a visual echo—a virtual double—of the environment's interior and all that enter. In the space there are two illuminated globes and an all-black chessboard with red and yellow pieces on a stand. (Song lyrics to capture the atmosphere could range from "Let's spend the night together!" to the anthemic "She's got it!" from Shocking Blue's "Venus"). The environment is a world of seduction in a cube, concise in its form yet highly evocative in its use of materials and motifs. Admittedly, the assignment of the sexual mystique to the female figure here remains in line with a certain patriarchal tradition (which Surrealism's cult of the sphinx-like "Nadia"-type equally reinforced rather than dismantled). On the other hand, however, the monochrome chessboard adds a subtle conceptual twist: the erasure of the binary color code of the squares on the board would seem to suggest that, even if this were an age-old game, the rules and differences could still be reinvented.

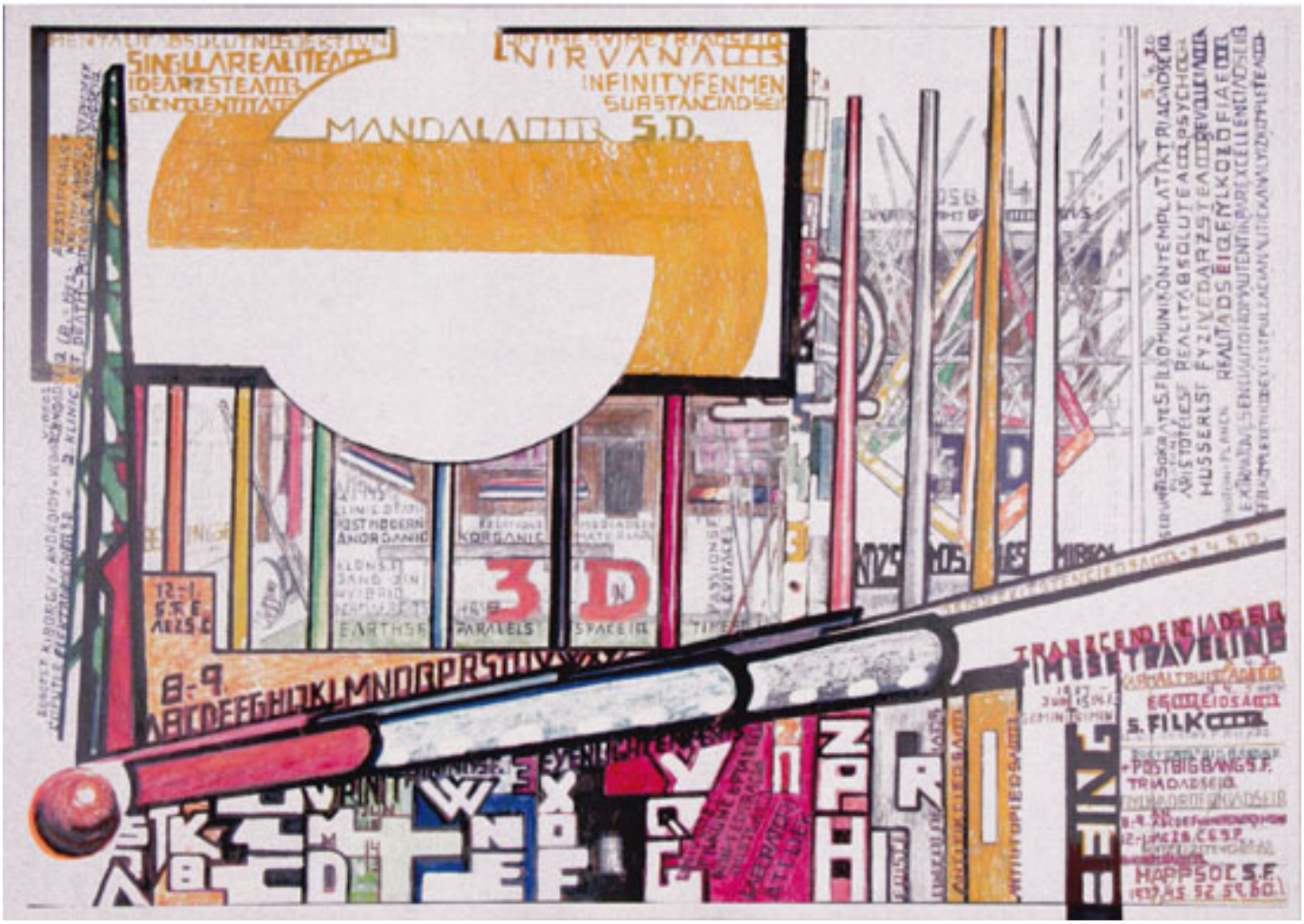
In order to describe what the environment does, and how it does so, it is then not enough to say that it merely 'represented' its subject. In articulating a world from the perspective of desire, the work creates desire. The *Environment Univerzál* is a socioerotic space, an architectonic libido-generator (resonating with, if not predating, many of Verner Panton's interior designs). In this sense, the piece produces subjectivity: it subjects the visitors to an immersive experience that puts them in a particular mental and emotional state. From a sensualist point of view—that is, if we understand subjectivity as a state of sensing oneself sense oneself—this condition could be called a *state of subjectivity*, a state of *perceiving one's way of being in the world within a particular experiential horizon*: here, it is the horizon of the erotic. Yet, it is not only the visitors but, first of all, the environment itself, that is put in this state. In order to attune visitors to a particular condition of perception, the space is already tuned to this key. By articulating the world in particular light or key, Filko's works embody states of subjectivity, in and for themselves: each work is its own subject, a materialized state of perception.

In this sense one could say that, in each of his bodies of works, Filko focuses on creating the conditions for experiencing a different state of subjectivity: a mode of perceiving the world in light of one of its aspects, a mode of perception that is existentially connected to a particular manner of *being in and toward the world* (being in love, being in society, being open to the cosmos...)—in short, one possible mode of subjectivity. The body of Filko's work that in turn foregrounds this one fundamental aspect—the production of subjectivity—as such, in and for itself, is the BLACK/INDIGO series. In this series, diagrammatic drawings and language pieces prevail, and we touch on the semiotic operating system of Filko's practice. The joy and fascination of engaging with this body of works, however, comes from the dynamic, generative nature of this system. It seems to exist in a state of perpetual emergence. The writing doesn't stop. And it is *in* its writing that the system exists, not outside of it. The composition of the grammar of Filko's artistic articulations is in itself an artistic articulation.

A powerful example for this practice of writing the conditions of writing is a piece from 1959 called *BYŤ - SÚCNO - BYŤ - ČLOVĚK - BOL - JE - BUDE / BEING -*

Stano Filko, Environment Univerzál (Environment Universal), 1966-1967.

Stano Filko, Projekt myslenia - mentality (Project of Thinking - Mentality), c. 2000.



Stano Filko, MANDLAOOOQ 5.D, drawing on paper, 2005.

EXISTENCE - BEING - MAN - WAS - IS - WILL BE. On thirty typewritten pages, Filko listed key philosophical terms in three parallel columns, in three languages (English on the left, Slovak in the center, and German on the right), such as, for instance: "time - čas - Zeit / space - priestor - Raum / energy - energia - Energie / spirit - duch - Geist ..." In some passages the text reads like a dictionary; in others it coalesces into something akin to a poem (left column only): "all / virtues / connecting / bridge / among / ... between / the physics / and / the metaphysics." On one hand, Filko here seems to perform a metaphysical struggle of breaking the universe—and the history of thought—down into a list of its ingredients. On the other hand, however, a certain pragmatic aspect is equally perceptible, for, once you know the ingredients, the cooking can begin; so the thirty-page opus is as much a cosmological word-map as it is a medium for self-education and the preparation of a trilingual conceptual toolbox for future use.

This composition of semiotic fields—of language-worlds, if you will—in text pieces continues to be an integral part of Filko's practice over the years. The BLACK body of work keeps growing. And the inscription of the self into these language-worlds becomes more pronounced. Crucially, however, Filko treats his own name (and existence) with the same methodological rigor as any other concept he organizes in the diagrammatic arrangements of words. As much as the world of language is built around its maker, the maker itself becomes a part and product of its making. *Projekt myslenia - mentality / Project of Thinking - Mentality* (c. 2000), for instance, is a text piece in which several clusters of words are arranged in and around a hexagon (inside of which, in turn, a circle is drawn). In each cluster, dates from Filko's life appear together with arthistorical terms and metaphysical concepts, neologisms in part, taken from Filko's growing vocabulary of cosmological mapping. Highlighted through uppercase and boldface text are the following declarations of self-multiplication: "STANO **FILKO** 1937–77, I. KLON = **FYLKO** 1978–87" and "2. KLON = **PHYLKO** 1988–1997, 3. KLON = **PHYS** 1998–2037." What makes these lines so provocative is that, in their consequent irony, they are dead serious. When dedicated to reformulating horizons

of experience—and hence conditions of subjecthood—a lifelong art practice can indeed, most factually, be understood as a material practice of cloning one's self.

Going through the double helix of a dialectical motion, this overarching process of making the world of the self then sublates all biographical events into a conceptual totality: the fact that, due to dramatic accidents, Filko suffered two clinical deaths, in 1945 and 1952, for instance, is recorded in terms of the conceptual transformations that these events prompted in his process of thinking the world. Going through the reverse helix of the dialectics, however, means that all that becomes conceptual is equally rendered material. So the absorption of life into the thought process is offset by a radical moment of self-othering. When Filko spells out his life in the sequence FILKO, FYLKO, PHYLKO, and PHYS, he also *writes the self as other*: every single one of his clones is equally a material manifestation of an alterity, when the self, upon entering new horizons of experience, comes to physically perceive itself as a total other to itself.

Yet through—and going beyond—its own conceptual workings, the dialectical engine powering Filko's art always also generates the conditions for an experience which is not necessarily only that of reading and understanding. It is a *state of meditation* as a state of subjectivity induced by the experience of words becoming a field, a force field in its own right. In recent years, Filko has further highlighted this dimension of his language pieces by organizing them through color fields in geometrical patterns, emphasizing that they are—and indeed always have been— *mandalas* of sorts: materialized and spatialized patterns of thought that invite the gaze to linger and become immersed in the cosmos of relations mapped out on the page. In the state of meditation, the dialectical machine temporarily stops reeling, as time is concentrated in the moment and becoming turns into being. This is, then, one more powerful tension in Filko's BLACK series: the moment one experiences the force of thinking becoming itself transformed into the silent concentrated stillness of the *mandala* (from which again the conceptual pulse may emerge, as the heart of yet another conceptual clone starts beating).

By thus combining the restless motion of dialectics with a meditative immersion into particular states of being, Filko creates a powerful insight: he shows that it is actually possible to situate the conditions of artistic (personal, political, spiritual...) autonomy within the worlds of lived experience! Autonomy does not imply otherworldliness. On the contrary, in Filko's practice autonomy is found in the conscious artistic articulation of the conditions of perception: the *horizons of consciousness* and the *language-games* within which we operate—and which we can actually shape, if we put our minds to it. Shaping those horizons and games, from a historical and political point of view, can become an antagonistic practice, as the endeavor to determine your own way of enjoying the world places you in a confrontation with the powers that be (which built their own claim to hegemony on a monopolization of the social conditions of perception). And in Filko's practice this surely was the case.

Stano Filko, Ego Diachron Synchron, c. 1990-99.

The point, however, is that even and especially in this historical situation of antagonism, Filko's work never derives its power solely from that ideological struggle. There are always also other sources of energy: one is Filko's defiant insistence on building his work from his own *categorical imperatives*—his own ways of thinking totality and applying totality as a condition of experience and standard of action. Another source is his embrace of the *different aspects of being in the world*—GREEN, RED, BLUE, WHITE, and BLACK—that shatter the possibility of ideology claiming a unified, totalitarian point of view on the world, because totality is multiplied. In his formulation, there are now (at least) five totalities (or dimensions) to life, each of which opens up its own horizon of potential autonomy, in and through experience. The philosophical and art historical implications of Filko marrying these two approaches are indeed fundamental, for he shows that tactical claims to totality within an artistic practice are still viable, and that thinking in (metaphysical) terms of

totalities and in (pragmatic, analytic, semiotic) terms of aspect-seeing in language games are not mutually exclusive forms of thought, but that they can be made to complement each other and sustain a free and unruly form of art practice. Existentially, spiritually, politically, and libidinally, this means even more. Filko's art offers multiple keys to building a lifelong practice of resistance and emancipation: to claim the freedom of working according to the conditions of your own thought, action, and perception, yet to simultaneously stay attuned to the way in which these conditions multiply and become different horizons. To enter and inhabit these arenas is not a matter of making claims, but of an openness to experience.

X

"World as Medium: On the Work of Stano Filko" will appear in the retrospective publication on the work Stano Filko, ed. Vít Havránek, Boris Ondreička (Prague: tranzit.cz, Expected Publication Date: November 2012).

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1
I here remain very much indebted to Patricia Grzonka's insightful and comprehensive introduction to Filko's work and color-coding system. See Patricia Grzonka, *Stano Filko* (Prague: Arbor Vitae, 2005), 2–27.

2
See Boris Groys, *The Total Art of Stalinism: Avant-Garde, Aesthetic Dictatorship, and Beyond* , trans. Charles Rougle (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1992).

Antke Engel

Queer Temporalities and the Chronopolitics of Transtemporal Drag

Life but how to live it—for years the name embellished the wall behind my bed: the place of love and desire, of fears and tears, of fatigue and regeneration. No question mark, thus no searching for sense, or meaning, or technologies. No comma, thus no singling out of some ontological given from the practices of sustaining, endangering, or losing it. Simply the pleasure and pain of engaging in social relations: of bitterly failing while jubilating, and cheering while messing it all up. It is the name of the Norwegian punk band that entered my life by chance when I turned up for a concert at the infamous Hamburg squat Rote Flora, and it was the first thing that came to mind when I heard about Pauline Boudry and Renate Lorenz's new film project on punk archives and queer socialities.

> [S]ocial relations made on grounds of jouissance "must be a queer sort of social bond, one that is the effect of the disruption of the given time of the social contract (heteronormativity), yet creates at a secondary level a new social ordering (queer sociality)."[1]

In the following pages I will attempt figure out how "the disruption of the given time of the social contract" happens and whether it can be viewed as an effect of politics.[2] As the titles *No Future* and *No Past* (Boudry and Lorenz 2011, each 16mm, 15 min) suggest, the films concern themselves with time: Is it the time of heteronormativity, materialized in the rhythm of three-minute film reels and the intervening moments of blankness that disrupt the films' flow? I will read the two works through the lens of Andrea Thal's curatorial concept for her exhibition "Chewing the Scenery" and show that the disruption is an effect of chronopolitics, yet one that is simultaneously a visceral politics.[3] Furthermore, echoing Elizabeth Povinelli, I will argue that the queer sociality of the films—not that *displayed* by the films but that *evoked* by their setting—while evolving from "lawless" *jouissance*, suggests a certain kind of ethics, namely, an ethics of remembrance.[4] This ethics remains bound to violence—the violence of crime and normalcy—and thus confronts the punk archive with the challenge of facing heteronormativity, postcolonialism, and the impossibility of remembering that these produce.

Boredom and Indifference in Drag

The queer sociality staged in *No Future* and *No Past* —two films that are confusingly similar yet decidedly

Pauline Boudry, Renate Lorenz, No Future / No Past, 15', 2011. Double channel video (super 16mm films transfered to HD) installation. Performance: Ginger Brooks Takahashi, Fruity Franky, Werner Hirsch, Olivia Anna Livki, G. Rizo. Photo: Andrea Thal.

different—is characterized by boredom, indifference, and a simultaneous submission to and rejection of "the law." The films culminate in a seemingly unmotivated act of destruction—Darby Crash smashes his guitar—that is less aggressive than it is detached. At the beginning, one sees what appears to be a band that has reformed after many years, not of their own volition but due to mysterious circumstances. The band appears to be preparing for an unnamed gig. Nothing would happen, one reckons, if it were not for on-screen director Werner Hirsch, who prompts the characters to say their lines and gives instructions that are followed—though unenthusiastically—by the four musicians grouped together in a punk-style rehearsal space. Expectations of punk negativity—implied by the infamous phrase "no future" and by the film's cast, consisting of Ginger Brooks Takahashi (of the band MEN) as Darby Crash, Fruity Franky (of Lesbians on Ecstasy) as Poly Styrene, G. Rizo as Joey Ramone, and Olivia Anna Livki as Alice Bag—are finally met when Darby Crash has his solo performance. Or are they? The destruction of the guitar can also be read as an already canonized citation of rock culture. Similarly, the use of bodies and objects as instruments can be read as an established practice of experimental music. So, is it the gender drag that strikes the audience when Darby Crash—in reality a white guy from Los Angeles known for wearing typical punk-style outfits—appears on stage in a pink cashmere jacket, a miniskirt, patent leather high heels, and a pearl necklace?

Various codes of race, class, and gender are displayed on stage yet do not form a coherent picture; dominant English language is disrupted by Polish and French; heterosexual desire expresses itself in clichéd fantasies cut short by embarrassed laughter. Punk enters the scene through the wall design and through the repeated song "We're Desperate" by X ("We're desperate, get used to it / It's kiss or kill"), which creates a framework around the non-relatedness of the protagonists. Since the performers are not "true" to their characters, instead engendering explicit misinterpretations that embody contemporary US queer feminism, one could interpret the event as a drag show—perhaps a show by famous late-1970s punk musicians performing queer feminism? What is missing, however, are explicit references to, for example, the queer cultural activism of LTTR (Ginger Brooks Takahashi) or to Nigerian post-independence politics (G.Rizo). One might defend the punk performers in drag against political amnesia, since what they perform in 1976 (the date given by *No Past*) is set in 2011. Or is it? Turn to *No Future* and you are suddenly transported to the year 2031. The question of memory then emerges with double strength: 1976 and 2011 now appear as indistinguishable past, while 2031 and 1976 simultaneously claim to be the present.

Felted time ensnarling the audience. I would say that *yes*, you can read *No Future* and *No Past* as drag. However, it is temporal drag: one film functions as a drag performance of the other. Since the acting in *No Future* is slightly more enthusiastic than in *No Past*, with emotions finding their way into facial expressions and gestures, one might read *No Future* as a reenactment of *No Past*. Or the other way round. Paradoxically, it is only in *No Past* that Joey Ramone says, "I am not excited by utopia. Utopia has not turned out good for me." Though the more pressing question raised by Boudry and Lorenz's chronopolitics would be: Is there "no past"? And is this a promise or a threat?

Queering the Violence of Remembrance

Remembering the violence of the past, or a past defined by violence, or the violence of a past that only enters life as memory (possibly as the memory of "no past"), is a challenging task. It might be difficult to even know if there *is* a past. There might be good reasons to live the past in the form of an apocalyptic future. Punk history, like many other his_herstories, provides strategies of remembrance that actively cope with and rework experiences of violence. Yet how do his_herstories connect? Feminist and migrant movements have drawn attention to the normalcy of everyday sexist and racist violence; queer politics has pointed out the violence of normalcy; and postfascist and postcolonial history try to understand intergenerational reenactments of historical violence. In these contexts, narratives of progress and transgression have been widely discredited. Thus, I cannot resist filling in the narrative gaps of *No Future* and *No Past* and asking what is happening behind the walls that are, as the films tell us, located in Berlin. I see the Turkish migrant community, by 1976 already second-generation, facing pressure to repatriate. I see a future present in 2031: a vital Herero community that defines the social and cultural life of the city yet lacks political power, since the German

government still denies them full citizenship rights—thereby securing the heritage of the German Empire's colonial politics and consolidating the exclusion of roughly one-sixth of Berlin's population from the right to vote in 2011.

Pauline Boudry, Renate Lorenz, N.O. Body, 15', 2008. Film installation with photographs. Performer: Werner Hirsch. Photo: Andrea Thal.

Since memory is organized according to established symbolic and socio-political orders (and sometimes disrupted by trauma), one way to challenge the dominant temporalities of (heteronormative) progress and transgression is through disidentification. Disidentification is a radically different gesture than the negation implied by "no future." While Lee Edelman has argued that any politics subscribing to the notion of historical progress enforces a violent normalization, José Esteban Muñoz, in answering him, suggests the existence of a utopian thinking that itself resists grand narratives.[5] This form of thinking claims radical queer imaginaries, which undermine the normativities of the heteronormative archive without installing teleologies or phantasmatic promises.[6] Disidentification, according to Muñoz, is an aesthetic strategy that reimagines dominant signs or images through performance practices that restructure spectatorship, provoking in the audience "a mode of desiring that is uneasy."[7] Muñoz argues that the chronopolitics of disidentification are utopian: "the here and now is traversed and transgressed."[8] The repetition of colonial and heteronormative violence is disrupted, at least temporarily. The films of Boudry and Lorenz, as well as the considerations presented here, develop in a field of tension laid out by claiming the present of a negated future, which also contains the heritage of a newly assembled past. This field of tension is the space where queer desires and the reworking of heteronormative and post-colonial histories can unfold.

In a polemical gesture, Boudry and Lorenz begin *No Future* and *No Past* with a promise that is not at all promising, a promise that evolves from a mode of progressive time and teleological chronopolitics: "In those days, desires weren't allowed to become reality, so fantasy was substituted for them. Films, books, pictures, they called it 'art.' But when your desires become reality, you don't need fantasy any longer, or art."[9] If this swansong to fantasy and art were realized, it would thoroughly undermine Muñoz's mode of uneasy desiring. Luckily, the films that are introduced by this motto instead unfurl elaborate fantasy scenarios. Desires have become reality, yet fantasy is by no means obsolete, since desires are fantasmatic in their reality and most real as fantasies. Nevertheless, as the spectator, one is troubled as to what happens when the same desires appear under two different rubrics—and therefore can neither function unequivocally as apocalyptic negativity nor as punk nostalgia.

Contagious Transtemporal Desires

Temporal Drag is the title of a catalogue that Boudry and Lorenz published this year.[10] It introduces their works *N.O. Body* (2008), *Contagious* (2010), *Salomania* (2009), *Charming for the Revolution* (2009), and *Normal Work* (2007), which were part of their solo exhibition at the Centre d'Art Contemporain Genève (June 10–August 15, 2010). To understand these video and film installations as explorations of queer temporalities and forms of remembrance would be to locate their aim neither in extending the archive by collecting or creating objects, nor in archiving feelings and exhibiting the politics of emotions that go along with this. Rather, they create a network of cross-references that undermines linear time and generates an interplay of heterogeneous historical, social, cultural, and geopolitical sites, realized in biographical references that celebrate the singularity of individual lives that have been denied respect and recognition, or have even experienced abjection. It is never a singling out of an individual. Instead, we get to know "ek-static selves" (Judith Butler), relational beings, never themselves but always given over to the Other (the intimate, the proximate, the one from another time and place, or even the Other of the Other).[11]

The term "drag" in the title of the catalogue hints at a long history of travesti and sex or gender crossings, at performances and performative practices that restage gender norms and normative desires in campy, hyperbolic, and ironic ways. The catalogue also focuses on class and ethnic drag, which are, inherently, also moments of gender drag. Yet, according to Lorenz, who recently suggested the term "transtemporal drag," the most interesting thing about drag is not that it repeats norms or repeats them wrongly, but that it introduces a distance to norms and processes of subjection.[12] Transtemporal drag, crossings

Pauline Boudry, Renate Lorenz, Normal Work, 2007. Video installation with photographs. Performer: Werner Hirsch. Photo: Andrea Thal.

(temporal or otherwise), and the figure of contagion are tools that Boudry and Lorenz use for their chronopolitical explorations. They insert these tools into their work via sexual labor, simultaneously presenting and transforming the sexual labor of the protagonists and spectators. "Sexual labor" is a term invented by Boudry and Lorenz together with Brigitta Kuster. It highlights the fact that labor relations always also constitute specific historical forms of gendered and sexualized subjectivity. These labor relations require gendered and sexualized subjectivity in order to fulfill their capitalist function.[13]

Boudry and Lorenz's explorations of temporalities comprise a multidimensional process that involves an active audience, performers who do not so much work, but become the material of a heterotopic production process. Early on in the process Boudry and Lorenz find a project partner they want to work with and then research archives (official or unofficial), following unseen paths, hidden traces, and obscure details that are usually considered awkward—ready to be infected and to carry the virus to places they want to link together so that a vibrant network emerges, a network that engages time, people, objects, and fantasies. Desire and the virus are intimately related, which hints at a certain queer heritage that Boudry and Lorenz are ready to take on.

Performers, Scenario, and Audience in a Rhizomatic Network

Desires traveling in images (Elspeth Probyn) become a driving force for the research process and for creating the rhizomatic network that involves—and inhabits—the performers, the scenario, and the audience. Images as

Pauline Boudry, Renate Lorenz, Salomania, 17', 2009. HD video installation with photographs. Photo: Andrea Thal.

Pauline Boudry, Renate Lorenz, Contagious, 12', 2010. HD video installation. Performers: Arantxa Martinez, Vaginal Davis. Photo: Andrea Thal.

modes of transport include individual fantasies as well as cultural imaginaries, celebrated, conventional, marginal(ized) or forgotten public imagery as well as metaphors that permeate language with visuality and the visual with words. An active audience uses images as entry points for connecting to its own personal archive. The audience is invited to (knowingly or unknowingly) inhabit a structural position in the processes of meaning production initiated by the artistic practice. Revealing this structural position is a decisive moment in Boudry and Lorenz's films. It is not always as obvious as in *Contagious*, where the camera celebrates the entrance of the audience as if it were an Olympic team marching into a stadium. In *N.O. Body*, the audience is present in its absence; a lecturer addresses an empty nineteenth-century lecture hall, exploring her chosen research topic—herself. In *No Future* and *No Past*, however, the audience is decentered, forced to follow the course of events from a lateral position.

Feminist film theorist Teresa de Lauretis suggests that we understand the act of viewing as a shared fantasy in which relations of power and desire are played out.[14] If we take her suggestion, then the question of the structural position of the audience, and the identifications and disidentifications this position enables, are just as important as the visible bodies, movements, figurations, and constellations that take place on stage. A fantasy scenario, as Lauretis explains—taking up the psychoanalysis of Jean Laplanche and Jean Pontalis—is characterized by the fact that each participant is simultaneously subject, object, and observer of the scene. Thus, the traditional division of labor between subject and object of desire is undermined. Furthermore, as spectator—in a reflexive position of "seeing oneself seeing" and "seeing oneself being seen"—one is seduced into becoming the "subject of feminism" (Lauretis) or, perhaps, the subject of politics, the politicized desiring subject, process and product of queering the audience.

Considering the multidimensional process of "explorations into temporalities," the question of time and timing in the production process plays a crucial role, from script to setting, cast to acting, sponsoring to spending, camera set-up to lighting, and finally cast to post-production. Boudry and Lorenz work with performers who are willing to be sucked into an intense and condensed production process that engages them not simply as performers but as researchers of the topic of at hand, employing bodily practice and visceral intellect. Bourdry and Lorenz develop almost all of their projects in close cooperation with Antonia Baehr, a.k.a, Werner Hirsch, who is usually the central performer. (Exception include *Contagious*, which features Arantxa Martinez and Vaginal Davis, and *Salomania*, with Ingrid Wu Tsang and Yvonne Rainer.) Hirsch usually embodies multiple figures simultaneously or in quick succession. In *Charming for the Revolution* he plays both of the film's two characters, a dandy and a shabby unionist. Thanks to filmic montage, the two characters appear to inhabit the same space and observe each other skeptically. Each of the characters is himself a hybrid figure; the dandy turns into a cockatoo while the unionist becomes first a housewife and then a crow. Another example can be found in *Normal Work*, where Hirsch successively plays an aristocrat, a bourgeois lady, a housemaid, and a slave in blackface. The performance takes place in a Victorian setting that nonetheless includes various contemporary props, the most striking of which is a blown-up black and white photograph by Del LaGrace Volcano showing two trans men in erotic leather attire. Wallpapered behind the protagonist, the photograph provides him with sexual playmates as well as alter egos. At the same time, the photograph invites the spectator to enter the scene: one of the trans men looks directly into the camera, drawing my eye. I see myself being seen by the man in the photograph—I am an object of his desire—while simultaneously I see Hirsch performing historical figures enthralled by twenty-first century queer subculture.

Pauline Boudry, Renate Lorenz, N.O. Body, 15', 2008. Detail. Performer: Werner Hirsch. Photo: Andrea Thal.

Seduced into the scene, I do not identify with the protagonists but instead actualize the sadomasochistic relationship between Victorian housemaid Hannah Cullwick and attorney Arthur Munby.[15] In this way, as a spectator I perform the sexual labor of remembrance—not as an intellectual endeavour, but as a visceral entanglement. This entanglement is not beyond decision but *is* beyond the spectator's control; he or she is held responsible for a past that may be "no past."

In order to explain how the ethics of remembrance emerges from this visceral involvement of the audience—this *jouissance*—I would like to examine Andrea Thal's curatorial approach in *Chewing the Scenery*. In traditional theatre language, "chewing the scenery" refers to overacting by on-stage performers. By contrast, the contributions to Thal's exhibition at the off-site Swiss pavilion of the 2011 Venice Biennial shift attention to the audience and its visceral involvement in the scenery, facilitated by the activity of chewing. Chewing is an ambiguous activity, combining aggression and pleasure, destruction (of structures) and creation (of mash).[16] Chewing is always already charged with expectations of incorporation or ejection, potential violence and/or desire. Thus, if we understand chewing as a form of perception and memorization—and a political practice—we must acknowledge its pleasurable and delightful dimensions as much as its reluctant, repellent, or nauseating ones. As a mode of approaching the scenery, chewing subverts the distinction between the individual and the social: while chewing places me within the scenery, it also places the scenery within me. But what is most interesting about *No Future* and *No Past* is that chewing reflects different temporalities that imply certain chronopolitical strategies.

The Chronopolitics of Chewing the Scenery

On the one hand, chewing the scenery is characterized by deferral: as long as one is chewing, it remains unclear whether this action will end in swallowing or spitting out; one could say that the temporality of chewing is defined by this "decision-to-come." On the other hand, chewing the scenery also invokes the temporality of repetition and endurance, a temporality most pronounced in rumination. This second temporality shifts the focus to the fact that one is already digesting the scenery while chewing it, yet

Pauline Boudry, Renate Lorenz, Salomania, 17', 2009. HD video installation. Performers: Yvonne Rainer, Wu Ingrid Tsang.

also points to regurgitation and its associated painful pleasures. In thinking about the political implications of both cases—the temporality of teleology and decision, or the temporality of repetition and loops—one might consider whether rumination is more appropriate to those who avoid facing their contribution to the violence of heteronormative, racist, and postcolonial histories, while swallowing or spitting out are more appropriate to those who have endured that violence. That said, if one wishes to acknowledge power differences and asymmetries in remembrance and historiography, it is crucial to avoid fixing them in predefined subject positions or constellations. Thus, if we understand chewing as taking place within shared scenarios, power and desire create and transform asymmetries and hierarchies rather than simply represent them.

The question then becomes: Who develops what kind of agency in designing the scenario? This brings us back to Werner Hirsch, who determines the course of events in *No Future* and *No Past*, and to the role of the audience as potential chewers of the scenery. Given the decisive role of the on-screen director in these films, what I as an audience member have to chew on is a tenacious rehearsal of the way in which the law instantiates itself. Hirsch orders Darby Crash to ask Poly Styrene about her future. He makes Poly Styrene give a political speech about her "desire to get out of here," each line of which is prompted by the director. He makes everybody spit (!).

Does this collective spitting imply a decision, a decision against swallowing? Swallowing what? Perhaps the "given time of the social contract (heteronormativity)," as Povinelli writes? Hirsch commands, "Darby Crash: Get married, have kids, settle down.—More authentic! Darby Crash and Poly Styrene kiss!—Stop!" While Hirsch, embodying the law, occupies a central position in the scene, one wonders why he directs from the back row, where he cannot get an overview of the situation. In addition, he conspicuously needs to read from the script, even losing track multiple times. Seen from the perspective of the audience, Hirsch, far from displaying authority, is just another participant in the group. Accordingly, when he orders the group to line up for a family portrait, he lines up right alongside them.

Keeping in mind the performative nature of the law, which only exists as long as and in the way it is reiterated, one could say that *No Future* and *No Past* are characterized by the temporality of repetition. This is supported by the fact that the films are presented in a loop. But here is where the confusion starts: the loop *is* and *is not* a loop. The films have the same setting, the same cast, and (nearly) the same script, but there are subtle differences between them. They thus embody the postructuralist notion that no repetition is ever exactly the same. The more often I watch the looped sequence of the two films, the less I am able to describe their similarities and differences and distinguishing between (no) future and

Pauline Boudry, Renate Lorenz, No Future / No Past, 15', 2011. Double channel video (super 16mm films transfered to HD) installation. Performers: Ginger Brooks Takahashi, Fruity Franky, Werner Hirsch, Olivia Anna Livki, G. Rizo. Photo: Andrea Thal.

(no) past becomes impossible. The time of progress and transgression breaks down. Does this happen independently from the fact that within the procedure of repetition each of the films is characterized by an internal rupture? The final scene of each film enacts the temporality of decision; rather than a deferral or a decision-to-come, there is a spitting out: Darby Crash plays a song and explores various aggressive and creative ways of engaging with his guitar. This is an intimate engagement driven by *jouissance*, beyond the distinction between pleasure and pain.

While this is a solitary, even antisocial, gesture, I would like to ask how it becomes social and whether it inspires the queer sociality promised earlier. Kathi Wiedlack provokes this question:

> To imagine a possibility for political action and a politically active social group, community or subculture, as built on a disposition of *jouissance*, is not the same as to assert that *jouissance* can be shared. Nevertheless, regarding sexual acts, or equally ecstatic experiences like dancing in a mosh pit or shouting, screaming, and ranting in a crowd, these might actually come very close to such a shared experience of *jouissance*—a pleasurable as well as violent experience that tends to undo the singularity of the individual.[17]

The audience of *No Future* and *No Past* can experience such an undoing of the singularity of the individual through a camera technique that decenters the audience so that it can neither identify with the protagonists, nor exert any control over the scene. While *No Future* and *No Past* are concerned with time and a chronopoltics that viscerally engages the audience, what is even more challenging to the spectator, and what is more relevant for understanding the queer socialities implied by the films, is a certain spatial politics initiated by the camera movement: while the protagonists act in the direction of an imaginary frontal camera, the course of events is filmed from a lateral position.[18] The axis between on-screen director Hirsch and the imaginary frontal camera, which

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exhibits his complicity with the authority of the gaze, cannot be shared by the audience. Yet, in watching from the side, the audience does not perceive Hirsch in a position more privileged than any other person in the scene. The instantiation of the law and its disruption unfolds as a process beyond the control of anyone inside or outside the scene. Furthermore, the camera is not only lateral, but also stationary. The audience must accept that some of the protagonists leave the picture occasionally, creating a further lack of visual control.

All the more important, then, that when Darby Crash's solo performance starts, the lateral camera moves, claiming the view from the front, not in order to inhabit the position of authority but to offer itself to the performance of the protagonist. It follows the destructive-creative dance of the musician smashing his guitar. The camera zooms in, twists, turns, and lingers on details in an admiring, curious, or even loving way. Whereas the lateral camera displaces and decenters the spectator, the mobile camera destabilizes her_him. The camera's whimsical movements do not exert control, but instead open up the scenario for the spectator to enter. While the protagonists look on indifferently as events unfolds, the spectator, sharing a disposition of *jouissance*, finds her_himself enjoying the pleasurable pain and painful pleasure of queer sociality beyond linear time. The two temporalities of chewing are not mutually exclusive after all. Rehashing may, at a certain point, find an end in spitting or shitting. As such, it is social, a way of designing the world through leftovers of one kind or another.

X

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1
Maria Katharina Wiedlack, *Punk Rock, Queerness, and the Death Drive* (unpublished manuscript), 1–41. Internal quote from Elizabeth Povinelli, "The Part that has No Part: Enjoyment, Law and Loss," *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies* 17(2–3) 2011, 288–308.

2
I would like to thank Kathi Wiedlack, who inspired me to write this article. In her in-progress dissertation *Punk Rock, Queerness, and the Death Drive* , she confronts Lee Edelman's *No Future* with queer punk lyrics and subcultural practices. Offering a profound rereading of Edelman's Lacanian-based antisocial thesis, she concludes that punk negativity can lead to a form of queer sociality without subscribing to fantasies of coherence, reproductive futurism or losing the pleasurable threat of *jouissance* from its desires.

3
"Chewing the Scenery" Venice Biennial 2011, Swiss Off-Site Pavillion, (June 1–October 2 2011, Teatro Fondamenta Nuove), curated by Andrea Thal, http://www.chewingthescenery.net/ .

4
See note 1.

5
Lee Edelman, *No Future: Queer Theory and the Death Drive* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2004).

6
José Esteban Muñoz, *Cruising Utopia: The Then and There of Queer Futurity* (New York: New York University Press, 2009)

7
Ibid., 75.

8
Ibid., 169.

9
This quote is borrowed from Derek Jarman's film *Jubilee* (1977).

10
The term is coined by Elizabeth Freeman in her book *Time Binds. Queer Temporalities, Queer Histories* (Durham, NC: Duke UP, 2010). Pauline Boudry, Renate Lorenz (eds.), *Temporal Drag* (Ostfildern: Hatje Cantz 2011).

11
Judith Butler, *Undoing Gender* (New York: Routledge, 2004).

12
Renate Lorenz, *Queer Art. A Freak Theory* (Bielefeld: transcript, forthcoming).

13
Pauline Boudry, Brigitta Kuster, Renate Lorenz (eds.), *Reproduktionskonten fälschen! Heterosexualität, Arbeit und Zuhause* (Berlin: b_books, 1999).

14
Teresa de Lauretis, *The Practice of Love. Lesbian Sexuality and Perverse Desire* , (Bloomington, Indiana: Indiana UP, 1994).

15
Renate Lorenz (ed.), *Normal Love. Precarious Sex, Precarious Love* (Berlin: b_books, 2007).

16
For more detailed elaborations on the following, see Antke Engel, "Chewing the Scenery–Reading the Cud" in *Chewing the Scenery*, ed. Andrea Thal, (Zürich: edition Fink, 2011), 1–6 and 29–31.

17
Wiedlack, 19.

18
This set-up alludes to Andy Warhol's film *The Life of Juanita Castro* (1965).

Continued from **"Neo-Materialism, Part Two: The Unreadymade"** in issue 23.

> Yet what is here already very plainly expressed is the idea of the future conversion of political rule over men into an administration of things ...
>
> —Friedrich Engels, *Socialism: Utopian and Scientific* (1880)

Joshua Simon

Neo-Materialism, Part Three: The Language of Commodities

Harald Thys and Jos de Gruyter, Untitled, (No. 2), 2009. Black and white photograph mounted on MDF.

In his 1898 "The Beginnings of Ownership," Thorstein Veblen explains how we have arrived at the notion of property through our understanding of its subjectivity. Veblen presents a concept that the savage's individuality covered a pretty wide fringe of facts and objects, which commonly included his shadow, his reflection, his name, his peculiar tattoo marks, his glance and breath, the print of his hand and foot, his voice, representations of his person, parings of his nails, pieces of his hair, his clothes,

Ohad Meromi and Anna Craycroft in collaboration in Meromi's Rehearsal Sculpture , 2011. Performance.

his weapons, and other "remote things which may or may not be included in the quasi-personal fringe."[1] These were part of him, not owned by him. And he was part of an early collective community that shared a communal life. It is only with looting that women were brought into his community not as beings that were extensions of the man's individuality, but as things to be owned by him. But even under ownership these women had their own subjectivity and will—they had minds of their own. This, says Veblen, is at the core of our understanding of property:

> And when the habit of looking upon and claiming the persons identified with my invidious interest, or subservient to me, as "mine" has become an accepted and integral part of man's habits of thought, it became a relatively easy matter to extend this newly achieved concept of ownership to the products of the labor performed by the persons so held in ownership.[2]

Francesco Finizio, Self-Portrait as a Remote Control, from the series Contact Club, 2004-2008.

So, the thing owned has a consciousness of *its* own, according to Veblen. It is in this sense that Marx's question in "The Fetishism of Commodities and the Secret Thereof" in *Capital*—What do commodities want?—should be taken as embedded in the tensions between labor and exchange, value and use, and individuality and subjectivity.

During the transition into the Soviet utopia of the 1920s there was an attempt to rethink the relations to objects beyond the commodity relation, to find harmony and camaraderie between people and things in a world of harmony and camaraderie between people. [3] In 1925, Boris Arvatov wrote one such research document. In his essay, Arvatov suggested replacing instrumentality and use and exchange value with fraternity and sentimental value:

> The organization of Things in the everyday life of the bourgeoisie does not go beyond the rearrangement of things, beyond the distribution of ready-made objects in space (furniture is the most characteristic model). Thus the Thing's form does not change, but remains once and forever exactly the same. Its function also remains exactly the same. The Thing's immobility, its inactivity, the absence in it of any element of instrumentality—all these create a relation to it in which its qualified productive side is perceived either from the point of view of a naked form (the criteria of aesthetics or taste: "beautiful" or "ugly" things), or from the point of view of its resistance to the influence of its surroundings (the thing's so-called durability). The Thing thus takes on the character of something that is passive by its very nature. The Thing as the fulfillment of the organism's physical capacity for labor, as a force for social labor, as an instrument and as a co-worker, does not exist in the everyday life of the bourgeoisie.[4]

Jean-Luc Godard installing the last frame for the movie Deux ou trois choses que je sais d'elle, 1967.

A similar argument was presented by Dziga Vertov in his 1922 manifesto "We," where he proposes a new set of relations between humans and objects in the form of the Kino-Eye: "We exclude for the time being man as an object of filming because of his inability to control his own movements."[5] Vertov extols the love of the peasant for his tractor and claims that in the communist world, a world beyond commodities, the camera will allow for the appearance of "seen facts" in the form of an international language, enabling the creation of an optic link between the workers and the world. Vertov offers a communist visual language of movement that would not only influence its viewers, as images do, but also help create a new social order.

Both Arvatov and Vertov describe unification and equality between people and objects in a society characterized by equality between people. Following pioneering film theorist Béla Balázs, Stanley Cavell claimed that this sort of equality between people and objects already exists in cinema, as the camera perceives man and object in ontological equality—it does not prefer one over the other.[6] A clear example can be found in romantic comedies, which focus on the relations between people in the world of commodities—be it the sirloin steak the paleontologist David Huxley (Cary Grant) buys for the leopard named Baby in Howard Hawks's 1938 film *Bringing Up Baby*, the walk-in closet and black diamond ring Carrie Bradshaw (Sarah Jessica Parker) receives from her fiancé in *Sex and the City 2* (2008), or Ben Stiller's terror-stricken roles, Jennifer Aniston's never-ending bachelorette tales, and certainly Judd Apatow's insightful bromance movies examining male camaraderie in the midst of familiar commercial products.

Under the current economic regime, our daily labor (which now exceeds traditional employment) is focused mainly on absorbing surpluses. A 2011 report by the US neo-conservative Heritage Foundation asks, in the spirit of poverty-denial: "What is Poverty in the United States Today?" and answers, "Air Conditioning, Cable TV, and an Xbox." The authors, Robert Rector and Rachel Sheffield, attempt to undermine the growing phenomenon of the "working poor"—those who are employed, yet remain poor—by accusing them of overconsumption.[7] Yet overconsumption through debt is precisely what is constantly demanded of them. One can see this tendency personified in the obese.

Unlike the wealthy, who are tuned to the culture of abundance, the obese internalize the social logic of surpluses. Sixty years after suffering from malnutrition on a massive scale following World War II, the UK now faces an obesity epidemic. Feudalism had the Black Death, imperialism had cholera, robber baron industrialism had black lung disease, and the shock of industrial warfare brought psychosis; today's economic order is personified by the conduct disorder of the obese. The case of obesity

in the UK today is such that after trying to put people under diet supervision and into educational plans, the NHS faced the collapse of its anti-diabetic and anti-obesity preventive schemes, and acknowledged that weight-loss operations would be the easiest solution. The state-funded health service in the UK has now authorized the use of gastric banding, stomach stapling, and other methods in order to better cope with the actual bodily absorption of surpluses. This has reached a point where the NHS now finances 4,000 operations a year.[8]

The figure of the hoarder has likewise become prominent in contemporary culture. Pointing to the reality TV show *Hoarders*, philosopher Jane Bennett has discussed the character of the hoarder as a person who answers the call of things. In a recent lecture titled "Powers of the Hoard," delivered at the Vera List Center at the New School in September, Bennett made the claim that, in relation to things, the hoarder can be situated on a spectrum opposite the collector. While the latter uses judgment and choice in relation to things, subordinating them to her will, personality, and possession, the hoarder subordinates herself to the will and personality of things, and is possessed by them.

To the vibrant discussion on vitalism, animism, speculative realism, object-oriented ontology, and what Bennett calls "the somatic affectivity of objects," Anselm Franke has recently contributed an elaborate multi-venue traveling exhibition titled "Animism."[9] One volume has been published on this project, reflecting on the boundary between objects and subjects through the Western and the non-Western, applying artistic and theoretical perspectives on these boundaries. It is worth noting that "Animism" comes at a moment when the class project of capital's technocratic fascisms has come to openly express its animistic characteristics. Today it seems that we cannot discuss animism without addressing its actuality in the legal framework of our social life—this is especially apparent with the three C's: commodities, capital, and corporations. In January 2010, the US Supreme Court christened the corporation a person. The court ruled in the case *Citizens United vs. Federal Election Commission* that corporate funding of independent political broadcasts in federal elections cannot be limited, as corporations are protected by the First Amendment. This protection entails that corporations are juridical persons.[10] Adding to their various rights, including the right to contract and copyright, this ruling further promotes the equality of these immortal zombies. Free speech, a right attached to "natural persons," is now shared by these personalities of legal animism.

Boris Groys wrote of installation practices that they "reveal the materiality and composition of the things of our world."[11] Translation of the language of things begins with the actualization of the commodity through display. As much as it is common to discuss the master artist as one who knows materials—someone who converses with them intimately—the function of both the master artist and the curator today is to know the material from which all materials are made—the commodity.

The new objecthood of Detroit-based artist Michael Edward Smith brings commodities into the gallery in different compositions—a mobile phone lying in a bowl of water, on which he places a black-colored, split Styrofoam ball; a toothbrush stuck in a light bulb fixture in the ceiling; two bags resting on the gallery's floor. An atmosphere of failure, self-destruction, and exhaustion is expressed by the commodities he exhibits, and with these unreadymades it is unclear whether the artist is the author of this assemblage. Through his strategy of dispossession, Smith does not seem to have more power over the objects than they have over him. If anything, the artist here offers himself as a lover—meaning an *amateur*.[12] As post-appropriation strategies, dispossession and withdrawal bring this proposition closer to constructivist understandings of our relations with objects, and shifts away from Dadaist practices.[13]

In mashing the aesthetics of inanimate subject matter with representations of persons. Brussels-based artists Harald Thys and Jos de Gruyter's videos bring portraiture into the realm of still life. In their cinematic narratives centered on frozen images, *Ten Weyngaert* (2005), *Die Fregatte* (*The Frigate*, 2008), *Der Schlamm von Branst* (2008), and *Das Loch* (2010) they have formulated a stillness that goes beyond that of the *tableau vivant*. They ask their actors to stand, sit, look, or stretch their limbs while keeping still—an intrinsic mode of display that becomes an exhibition of exhibited stillness.

While things would only have sentimental value in the communist world-beyond-commodities, in the present world Thys and de Gruyter's work confronts the reign of total alienation in which objects, things, and goods are all commodities—alien entities we can no longer understand. In contrast to Vertov's rapid visual and linguistic montage, the extreme stillness of Thys and de Gruyter's videos highlights the impossibility of communication between humans in a world of commodities. Thys discusses this interaction in terms of immobilization, highlighting the quality of stillness the characters in their films exhibit:

> You can see this occur in animals who are confronted with some bizarre opponent, another (bigger) animal, a human, or a combination of both. Humans also have this capacity. The same mechanism is applicable for the relation between objects and humans or animals. Sometimes objects can provoke the same immobilization but objects can also undergo the same consternation. They can suffer an eternal shock when they are confronted with some weird character and become silent witnesses of perverted or strange actions, or the behavior of humans and animals ... [14]

This stillness is just one aspect of their investigations into the human-commodity interface. Through its stillness and muteness, Thys and de Gruyter translate the language of things into the language of images. In his book on the films of Jacques Tati, Michel Chion discusses the differences in the way cinema treats objects and human faces, and points out that "in the English language a distinction is made between a close image of a face (close-up) and the detail of an object or a part of a body (insert). This distinction does not exist in French; both concepts merge in a single word"[15]— *gros plan*. Following the French example, Thys and de Gruyter refuse to differentiate between the two shots. Instead, the absence of dialogue in their films gives way to another language beyond that of humans: the language of things. Thys and de Gruyter populate their videos first with objects, then with humans so still and mute that they almost become objects themselves. We cannot determine who (or what) possesses a more "evolved" consciousness, and the artists insist on indifference.

Harald Thys and Jos de Gruyter, Das Loch, 2010. Video, 20'.

Their silence is perhaps due to the fact that neither the objects nor the humans perform the function they were originally expected to perform: the humans, by not being able to interact with each other through speech or meaningful action; the objects, by no longer being of any particular use.[16] Thys links this stillness to a lack of communication, one symptom of a larger malaise,

> the final stage in the evolution-decline of Western civilization. The physical expansion has made place for digital expansion, and leads to a slow and gigantic implosion, a massive standstill, an epidemic attack of autism."[17]

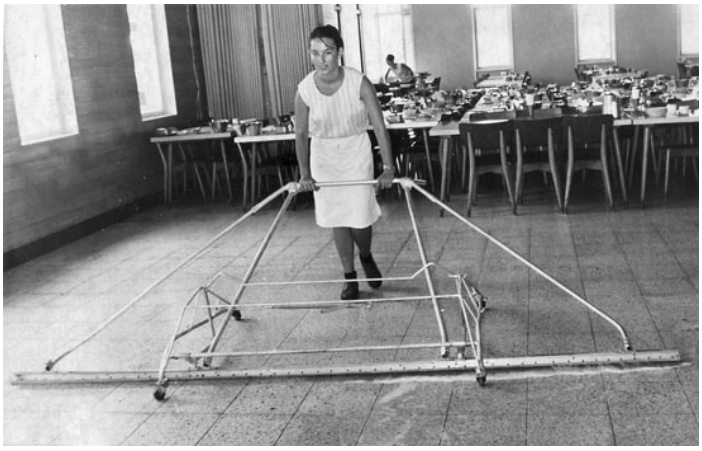
With toys, children are taught to generalize by matching color and shape (the green cube fits into the green square, the red pyramid fits into the red triangle, the yellow ball fits into the yellow circle, and so forth). But one can observe how toddlers treat things before learning to generalize. Playing with sand, for example, does not necessitate its categorization as "sand." Every fistful is different, and the child examines each as unique, as if every grain had a first name. In the language of things, everything has a first name.

In a letter from 1916, published as "On Language as Such and on the Language of Man," Walter Benjamin writes:

> Language communicates the linguistic being of things. The clearest manifestation of this being, however, is language itself. The answer to the question "What does language communicate?" is therefore "All language communicates itself." The language of this lamp, for example, does not communicate the lamp (for the mental being of the lamp, insofar as it is communicable, is by no means the lamp itself), but: the language-lamp, the lamp in communication, the lamp in expression. For in language the situation is this: the linguistic being of all things is their language.[18]

For Benjamin, the language of things is not the language that names, categorizes, and identifies things—that is the language of man.[19] The language of things is that of God, of potential, of what can be done with things. Its interest is in the extension of what things have to say—this is "the language of the practice." But we do not understand the language of the lamp, because the lamp doesn't try to communicate its language to us.[20]

Writing on Benjamin's text, Hito Steyerl suggests the practice of curating as an example of a system that could translate the language of things into aesthetic relationalities. She does not mean that curating translates the language of things by eliminating objects, or by inventing collectivities that "are fetishized instead," as she puts it, but by means of creating unexpected articulations "by presencing precarious, risky, at once bold and preposterous articulations of objects and their relations, which still could become models for future types of connection." To follow Steyerl's ideas here would mean to take both the spiritual-vitalist direction and the social-materialist one simultaneously, bringing together early and late Benjamin, the mystic and the Marxist. The commodity entails not only the subjectivity of the people who took part in designing, making, delivering, and selling it, but also of those who use, clean, dismantle, and scavenge it. The commodity is the form in which things come to be in this world. Beyond any concept of alienation in relation to labor, we can see that the commodity's material is constituted by our very social relations. This composition gives the commodity a subjectivity that is not



Woman washing floor in communal dining hall, image from the exhibition "Kibbutz: Architecture Without Precedent" (curators: Yuval Yasky and Galia Bar Or), The Israeli Pavilion at the 12th International Architecture Exhibition at the Venice Biennial, 2010.

particular to any one of us, but is rather one in which we all participate in forming.

This matter is first and foremost one of presence, not of representation. Therefore, our interest in the language of things has everything to do with our ability to change the social, historic, and material relations that are present in the commodity. Beyond its seductive surface, the political matter-of-factness of the commodity speaks our world. Actualizing it becomes our mission.

X

Joshua Simon is a curator and writer based in Tel Aviv-Jaffa. The three-part essay published on e-flux journal is a section from his upcoming book on Neo-Materialism. Simon is co-founding editor of *Maayan Magazine* and *The New&Bad Art Magazine* and he is the editor of *Maarvon (Western) – New Film Magazine*, all based in Tel Aviv-Jaffa. He is a PhD candidate at the Curatorial/Knowledge program at the Visual Cultures Department, Goldsmiths College, University of London and a 2011-2013 Vera List Center for Art and Politics Fellow at the New School. Simon is the editor of *United States of Israel-Palestine*, from the *Solution* series by Sternberg Press (2011) and co-editor of *The Revolution Song-Book: Tents Poetry* (2011). Recent curatorial projects include: “The Unreadymade” (FormContent, London, 2010-2011) and “ReCoCo – Life Under Representational Regimes”, co-curated with Siri Peyer (2011, Zurich, Vienna; and 2012, Holon, Israel). See the project’s blog .

1
Thorstein Veblen, "The Beginnings of Ownership," *The A merican Journal of Sociology* Vol. 4, No. 3 (Nov. 1898), 355-356.

2
Ibid., 365.

3
Christina Kiaer, *Imagine No Possessions: The Socialist Objects of Russian Constructivism* (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 2005), 41–89. A recent addition to Kiaer's pivotal book is *Kibbutz: Architecture Without Precedents* , which was published as part of the exhibition at the Israeli Pavilion for the 12th International Architecture exhibition at the Venice Biennial, 2010 (curated by Yuval Yasky and Galia Bar Or). In it, special mention is given to the material culture of the Kibbutz and the junkyard playground as a Socialist educational project. See also Ohad Meromi and Joshua Simon, "Repurposing The Kibbutz," in *Solution 196-213: United States of Palestine Israel* , ed. Joshua Simon (Sternberg Press, 2011), 117–121. In the second part of his "Art and Thingness," titled "Thingification," Sven Lütticken gives a series of references from Aleksander Rodchenko, Bertolt Brecht, and Theodor Adorno, all concerned with Marxian attempts at redefining the role of objecthood and thingness beyond the distortion of the commodity character. Rodchenko is quoted writing in Paris in 1925: "Our things in our hands must be equals, comrades, and not these black and mournful slaves, as they are here." And Brecht is quoted paraphrasing Hegel: "things are occurrences." See *e-flux journa l* no. 15 (April 2010), https://www.e-flux.com/journal/15/61296/art-and-thingness-part-two-thingification/ .

4
Boris Arvatov, "Everyday Life and the Culture of the Thing (Toward the Formulation of the Question)," trans. Christiba Kiaer, *October* no. 81 (Summer 1997), 124.

5
Dziga Vertov, "We: A Version of a Manifesto," in *The Film Factory: Russian and Soviet Cinema in Documents 1896–1939* , ed. Richard Taylor and Ian Christie (London and New York: Routledge, 1994), 69–72.

6
See also Stanley Cavell, *The World Viewed: Reflections on the Ontology of Film* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 1979).

7
See http://www.heritage.org/research/reports/2011/09/understanding-poverty-in-the-united-states-surprising-facts-about-americas-poor .

8
See http://www.guardian.co.uk/society/2010/aug/27/nhs-obesity-operation-ninefold-increase . This logic resembles the 1904 satire "The Sale of an Appetite" by Paul Lafargue, Marx's son-in-law and an original Marxist in his own right, in which a poor man sells his appetite to a rich man who does not want to be limited by his own capacity for appetite—a kind of a mirror story to Kafka's "A Hunger Artist." I thank Max Lomberg for introducing me to this beautiful tale.

9
For now it has shown January through May 2010 in Antwerp at Extra City Kunsthal Antwerpen and the Museum of Contemporary Art Antwerp (M HKA), and a second part opened this September in Vienna at the Generali Foundation. See also *Animism, Volume I* , ed. Anselm Franke (Sternberg Press, 2010).

10
See http://www.supremecourt.gov/opinions/09pdf/08-205.pdf and https://web.archive.org/web/20111020005249/http://storyofstuff.org/citizensunited/ . For the history of corporation personhood and its relation to the abolition of slavery, the Reconstruction Era, and the Fourteenth Amendment to the United States Constitution (1868), see https://reclaimdemocracy.org/corporate-accountability-history-corporations-us/ .

11
Boris Groys, "Art and Money," *e-flux journal* no. 24 (April 2011).

12
This brings to mind a comment Hito Steyerl made in a lecture at the post-graduate program at Hamidrasha Art School in Tel Aviv in February 2011. Steyerl proposed that the iPhone asks to be caressed in the way it is handled and operated by a tender touch-screen, because it is traumatized by the conditions of labor through which it was produced. The melancholic funereal aftermath nature of Smith's work has been highlighted recently by Chris Sharp in his "A Complete Rest," *Kaleidoscope Magazine* 10 (Spring 2011), 42–49.

13
See also Joshua Simon, "Neo-Materialism, Part Two: The Unreadymade," *e-flux journal* no. 23 (March 2011).

14
Email conversation between Thys and de Gruyter and Katia Anguelova and Andrea Wiarda, published in the booklet accompanying "Suitcase Illuminated #6: Tunnel Effect – Part 1: Jos de Gruyter and Harald Thys," curated by Katia Anguelova, Alessandra Poggianti, and Andrea Wiarda (DCM—Dipartimento Curatoriale Mobile) for Kaleidoscope HQ, Milan, May 27–June 30, 2009. See also Joshua Simon, "The Silence of The Lamps," *Afterall* 22 (Autum n/Winter 2009), 63–70.

15
See Michel Chion, *The Films of Jacques Tati* , trans. Antonio D'Alfonso (Toronto: Guernica Editions, 2003), 81.

16
Being the ultimate representational system of value in this civilization, Money, argued Marx, actually changes the object it represents. Marx demonstrated how commodity fetishism is the mechanism that conceals labor (i.e. social relations) through an objective-symbol known as money-value. In "the market," the maker, despite the fact that his or her labor is the source of the value of the commodities, thinks of them as a consumer would—as an object to be bought and traded. The voice of the commodity is the echo of the workers' silence.

17
"Suitcase Illuminated #6," *op. cit.*

18
Walter Benjamin, "On Language as Such and on the Language of Man," in *Reflections: Essays, Aphorisms, Autobiographical Writings* , trans. Edmund Jephcott, ed. Peter Demetz (New York: Schocken Books, 2007), 316.

19
See Hito Steyerl, "The Language of Things," available at https://transversal.at/transversal/0606/steyerl/en?hl= .

20
See also Hilary Jane Englert, "Occupying Works: Animated Works and Literary Property," in *The Secret Life of Things: Animals, Objects and It-Narratives in Eighteenth-Century England* , ed. Mark Blackwell (Lewisburg, PA: Bucknell UP, 2007), 218-241. I would like to thank Ofri Ilany for drawing my attention to this book, which makes the connection between the early rise of capitalist consumerism and its animistic manifestations.

Mona Mahall

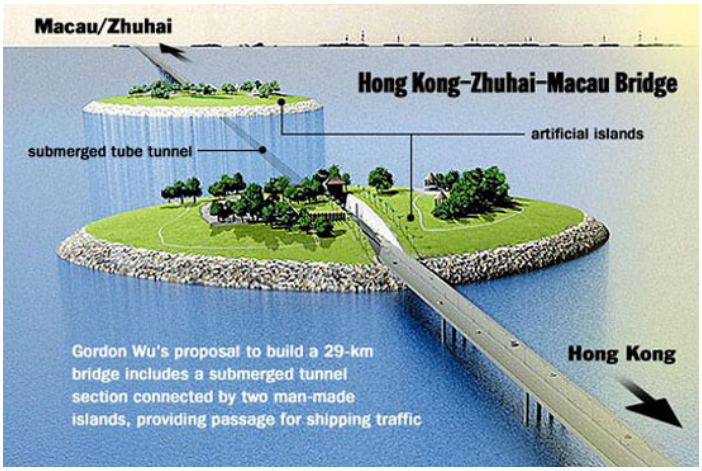
Eupalinos and the Duck: Conceptualism in Recent Architecture

Globalism in its Mobilized Form

Mobility in architecture means to mobilize—money, above all—on behalf of the immobile: to build more space in less time. This further confirms what theorists of the early twentieth century first recognized as modernity's triumph of space over time, what Michel Foucault would later call the modern obsession with space. While the nineteenth century was preoccupied with time, evolution, cycles, and halt, the twentieth century was concerned with space—so much so that time became but one possible representation of a distribution of elements in space.[1]

Shun Hing Square tower by K.Y. Cheung Design Associates, Shenzen, 1996. Already completed in the nineties, the Shun Hing Square tower is one of the tallest buildings in the world that was built at an astonishing speed of four floors in nine days.

If we interpret globalization as a type of mobilization, we take notice of this process in the rapid pace of



Hong Kong-Zhuhai-Macau Bridge, Hong Kong, 2009 - ongoing. The project under construction includes a series of bridges and tunnels that connect the west side of Hong Kong to Macau and the Guangdong province city of Zhuhai, which are situated on the west side of the Pearl River Delta.

Neon signs, Joey Armidillo's, Niles, Michigan.

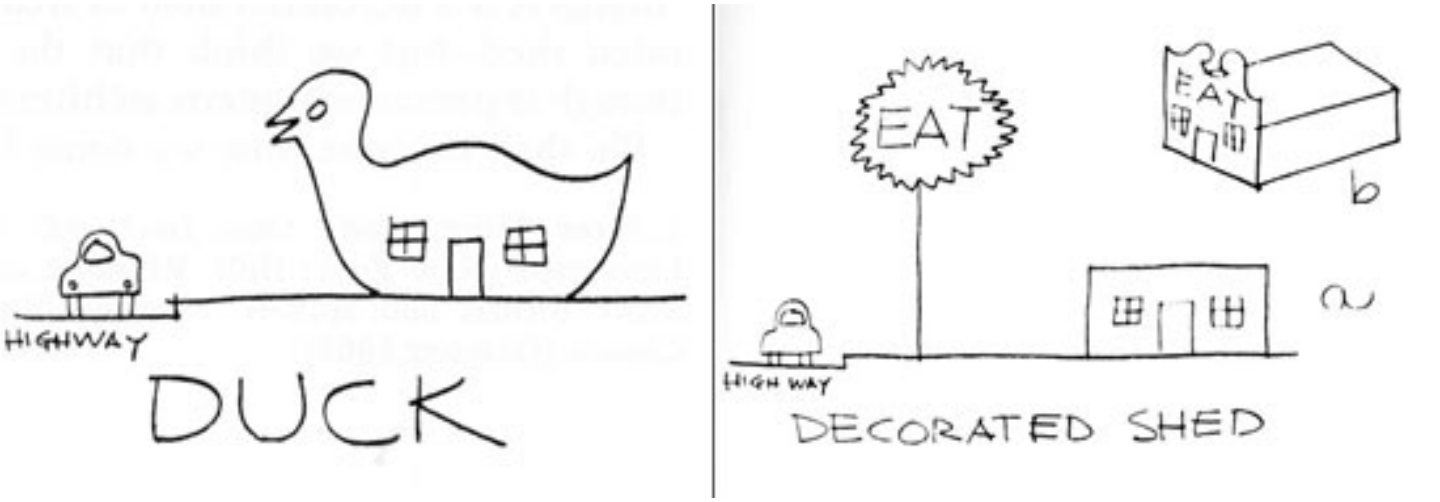
architectural expansion in Asia. According to the Council on Tall Buildings and Urban Habitat, six of the world's fifteen tallest buildings are located in China, while three are in the United States.[2] Newly published research predicts that for the next three years, China will construct a new skyscraper every five days.[3] Today, the relation between space and time is that of mobilization: the amount of space built is inversely proportional to the time it takes to build. Exceptions are rare and expensive.

Mobilization is to the immobile what the internet is to the architect (who actually sits in an immobile position in front of the screen): a global reality—or what is taken as such—that is delivered more or less free on demand, as the French writer Paul Valéry (1871–1945) anticipated in a text titled "The Conquest of Ubiquity."[4] In this essay from the 1930s he reflects on art and architecture as subject to the vast transformations of modern times: possibilities and potentials have become numerous, malleable, and accurate enough that the age-old handling of beauty is deeply affected. In allusion to modern physics, Valéry explains that in all of the arts there is a field subordinate to the laws of nature that cannot be regarded or treated as it was prior to modernity. Matter, space, and time are not what they used to be, and their reincarnations affect all sorts of techniques and technical processes. This has transformed the ways artworks are transmitted and reproduced, making them ubiquitous—not only do artworks exist in themselves, they can also be recreated wherever the appropriate apparatus is available. Mobilization takes command.

Valéry is renowned not only for his lyrics and prose, but also for his monumental notebooks, in which he transformed literary work into scientific research. The modern mind—which for Valéry means the intellect originating in the sciences—is universally interested, above all, in mathematics and physics. Yet, it is a mind genuinely concerned with the transformations and great conflicts of the twentieth century. Valéry actually recognizes the dynamics, divisions, and fragmentations of a world whose unity has been lost forever. Following in the steps of Friedrich Nietzsche, he watches reality enter the era of complexities and pluralities, or—to use his own term—the era of multiplicities. In this, the integral vision of the world turns out to be obsolete, and can only be compensated by multiple observations from multiple perspectives. Above all, Valéry is worried about mobilization in all fields of modern life, with economic exchange value becoming a universal model. In this vein, Monsieur Teste, the eponymous figure of Valéry's renowned novel, reports:

> I was seeing in my mind the market, the stock exchange, the Occidental bazaars for the exchange of phantasms. I was occupied with the wonders of the transitory, and its astonishing duration, with the force of paradox, with the resistance of worn-out things. … Everything appeared in images. Abstract struggles took the form of a sorcery of devils. Fashion and eternity collared each other. The retrograde and the advanced were contesting at what point to occur. Novelties, even new ones, were giving birth to very old consequences. What silence had elaborated was cried for sale. … In short, all possible spiritual events passed rapidly before my soul that was still half asleep. Still limp and confused, it was seized with terror, disgust, despair, and frightful curiosity, contemplating the ideal spectacle of this immense activity called intellectual.[5]

For Valéry, modernity means that all activities, thoughts, and imaginations become part of an economy based on



Robert Venturi, Denise Scott Brown, Steven Izenour: sketch from Learning from Las Vegas, 1972.

the exchange of values. As such, they participate in extreme forms of mobility, instability, and arbitrary pricing; paradox and spectacle are common features of this novel dynamic. For this economy, Valéry adopts the language of the stock market to describe the instant disposal of all values, whether mental, political, or aesthetic. Spiritual values take the biggest hit:

> I have just said "value" and I say that there is a value called "mind," just as there is an oil value, wheat value, or gold value. I have said value, because there is appreciation, judgment of importance, and because there is a discussion of price, which we are prepared to pay for this value: mind. ... All of these rising and falling values constitute the grand market of human affairs. Among them, the unfortunate value of mind does not cease to fall.[6]

It is no longer contents, essences, or significations that are of interest, but rather their movements and fluctuations. They are valuable only in relation to difference, and are therefore volatile. They are also mobilized, because they are subject to temporal, unstable, and contingent determinations that are cancelled as soon as they are fixed.

Valéry finds this frenzy of speed destructive for human thinking and feeling. He describes people moving so fast they deny themselves thought and delight. The skyscrapers of Manhattan may impress the world, but the huge buildings are only to be viewed at a speed of 120 kilometers per hour. Seen from the ground, an hour would be much too long to study them. To Valéry's nostalgic eyes, the skyscraper's scale has replaced true efficacies, the spectacle has superseded concerns of usefulness, beautiful ideals have been abandoned for the allure of the new, and the pursuit of attention has destroyed continuity. Modern spectacle has replaced the classic order.[7]

Eupalinos: Slowing Down

For Valéry, the problem is not merely the loss of the classical formal language in architecture. He is himself too modern for that kind of conservative argumentation. Rather, it is the concept of architecture as a unifying, meaningful, and binding form that to him seems in crisis.[8] Valéry brings Socrates and Phaedrus together out of Hades to discuss an imaginary recollection of architectural form—arguably a vision of a modern aesthetics halting the mobilized world through timeless beauty. *Eupalinos* is the name of this Platonic dialogue, after the ancient Greek architect who, according to Phaedrus, had the great ability to put things in order. Under his direction, formless stacks of stones were organized into the most beautiful architecture. By connecting the regular and the irregular, Eupalinos could create clear and organized forms and immersive space. Inside this quasi-total work, humans could move around and feel their presence in the world, either in silence or with a pleasant murmur.[9] Inside Eupalinos's buildings, people could even find sublimation without effort. As he told Phaedrus in conversation, Eupalinos believed that, in realizing architecture, he built himself.

Phaedrus reports that this great architect—actually a Greek engineer who built a huge tunnel in the sixth century BC—differentiated between buildings that were mute, those that talked, and those that could sing. The mute can only be despised for their arbitrary, if sometimes pleasant forms. Those buildings content to talk Eupalinos identifies with prisons, which allow their prisoners to sigh, with department stores that provide inviting halls, readily accessible stairs, and bright, roomy spaces for businessmen, and with courthouses, whose huge masses

Carsten Nicolai, Autor, 2010. Autor is a project realized on the facade of temporaere kunsthalle berlin. it is conceived as a self-organizing process to which visitors can actively contribute by individually applying stickers designed by the artist. Photo: Spiegelneuronen.

of stone, plain walls, and few entrances can accommodate the verdicts and punishments of justice in all its majesty and rigor. Finally, Eupalinos unfolds to Phaedrus the magnificent image of the huge—singing—buildings that could be admired at the harbors.[10] Their pure white wings reached out into the sea to protect the basins. Such a project, Eupalinos explains, meant to dare Neptune himself. Mountains had to be dismantled and poured into the waters that were to be enclosed; boulders had to be laid against the moving depth of the sea. Thus, the buildings created broad and still harbors of spiritual clarity that even gained in force through the contingent nature surrounding them. They were beautifully necessary and pure like musical tones. According to Eupalinos, singing buildings were harmonious in that they included the human body in their own system. They reflected human organic balance in its perfect proportions, and thereby became an instrument of life. As these balanced buildings discovered their position between body and mind, they exhibited their true relations.[11]

Of course, clever Socrates was able to translate what had been said in terms of architecture into something that, despite its ancient language, turns out to be the prototype of a modern aesthetics of immersion. While painting and sculpture, he argues, can only create surfaces and partial impressions, architecture realizes a composed, three-dimensional space. In this encompassing, stable, and lasting space of architecture, Socrates recognized the possibility of a total human work. In contrast to a restless nature that constantly dissolves, ruins, and overturns what it has produced, architecture is immobile and resists volatility. It is durable in confronting the continuous change and chaotic confusion of life, above all modern life. As the space of architecture is stable and enduring, movement becomes the spiritual movement of a mind that is able to negotiate the metaphysics of both Heraclitus and Parmenides.

For Valéry, what the human mind moves is the architectural composure of the stable harbor in contrast to the ever-moving waves of the sea. For the French poet, who was born in Sète on the Mediterranean Coast of France, it is in the timeless values and purity of unchangeable harmony that stem, as in music, from mathematical proportion—a universal system of ratio and scale that can be traced back to ancient Greek culture—that the human recognizes the resonance of his or her own nature. Here humans become aware of architecture as a meaningful work that stands against a mobilized modern life, lost in translation, as James Merrill's famous poem would have it:

> These days which, like yourself,
> Seem empty and effaced
> Have avid roots that delve
> To work deep in the waste.[12]

For Valéry, Manhattan skyscrapers were wasteful forms of economic, sociopolitical, and aesthetic mobilization in contrast with durable architecture. As products of the global economy of exchange, they are no more and no less enormous and rapid than the whole of the crisis called modernity.

The Duck: Speeding Up

Valéry's intellectual approach to and critical comment on modern architecture was validated by the prevalence of functionalism in the global building industry thirty years later. Within architecture there emerged a critical, late-modern movement that again called for an architecture confronting mobilized life. However, this movement did so not by generating architecture as immersive and durable space, but by generating architecture for mobile life (e.g., a highway sign). Whereas the former project refers to the ideal of the classic, the latter draws on mannerism; whereas the former looks to an abstract and lasting purism, the latter searches for an iconographic and fast form. Nevertheless, their observations converge in the present time: in the introduction to his 2004 book, *Architecture as Signs and Systems for a Mannerist Time*, the US architect and writer Robert Venturi writes, "In this era when change and audacity have become ends in and for themselves, epiphanies in architecture worry me as much as vision in architecture."[13]

Not too far from Valéry, Venturi locates the crisis of modern architecture in an increasingly mobilized world. Yet, it is not the form of the skyscraper that signifies this crisis, but rather the global spread in the 1960s of the

modern formal language. With Denise Scott Brown, Venturi sets up a program against the congealed heroic era of reductionist white modernity. They recognize that an important aspect of architecture has been lost or excluded since the end of the nineteenth century: its communicative function, its singing. They draw different consequences than Valéry, however: against the ideal of harmonization, they plead for complexity and contradiction in architecture and for a literal dialogue between architecture and humans, not in terms of Valérian immersion in an ideal space, but as communication between billboards, emblems, and typography installed as facades and entrances.

For these forms they import the aesthetics of the American vernacular and commercial culture in order to produce gestural messages that can be understood by all Americans. These are significant not in terms of space, but in terms of decorum, or "signage," as Venturi calls it.[14] In the style of a manifesto, he calls for an architecture of the information age, one that favors the iconographic surface over the architectural form, aims at explicit communication rather than artistic expression, and exhibits mannerist multimedia (in order to accommodate multiculturalism) as opposed to abstract purity.[15] Similar to pop art, Venturi's architecture does not assume the visitors or inhabitants to be naive users, but rather attempts to integrate them in a "participatory" architectural dialogue that refers to different realities—to the historical reality of architectural forms, and to the quotidian reality of US commercial and vernacular culture. "So here is complexity and contradiction as mannerism, or mannerism as the complexity and contradiction of today—in either case, today it's mannerism, not Modernism."[16]

As Venturi notes elsewhere, this version of mannerism has studied the electric signs of the Las Vegas strip, the valid chaos of Tokyo, and Buddhist complexity. In all of these examples, architectural culture can discover ambiguity's capacity for producing architecture that communicates, or sings (jazz). But singing is no longer associated with the eternal harmony and stable proportions of white architecture; instead, it refers to a car-driving American culture. While Valéry blamed the skyscrapers of Manhattan for being too fast in terms of communication, Venturi looks to buildings that are fast enough for contemporary communication. He introduces two types of buildings to illustrate the difference. The first—the Valérian type, we could say—is a system that integrates space, structure, and light in an all-architectural symbolic form called the "duck" (after an exemplary building of a grilled chicken restaurant), while the second building is called the "decorated shed." Favored by Venturi, the two-part system of the decorated shed splits functional space from the symbolic facade and generates a rhetorical front in contrast to a conventional behind.[17] Meaning in the decorated shed is captured in a sign on the front, the roof, or wherever it can be easily viewed. The building behind can be anything from a church to a restaurant,

Thomas Klassnik, A Conversation with Le Corbusier, 2011. "At a Séance held at the Architectural Association, London on the 4/3/2011. An attempt to contact the spirit of the deceased architect Le Corbusier to discuss a range of questions submitted by contemporary architects, critics and designers."

depending on the sign installed. While the duck—as the model of classical modernism—cannot keep up with the speed of modern mobility, the decorated shed utilizes a changeable and flexible environmental decoration that corresponds to contemporary culture and economy.

Venturi's ideal decoration acts as a backdrop, or better, like a screen. The facade covers the shed behind it using signs from both high and low culture. While such a mixed catalogue of signs forsakes Valérian pillars of completeness, proportion, and unity in favor of complexity, contradiction, and paradox, Venturi nevertheless maintains a concept of architecture as a monumental built structure. Although he calls for a less elitist and more popular architectural culture, Venturi's approach has since been regarded as more of an artistic strategy than an effective appeal for a more human architectural practice. The architecture of the past few decades has signaled a return to where we started: the Asian competition of building bigger and faster—the Valérian parallel of the stock market and cultural life, as sketched above, has regained actuality. Since the end of the Bretton Woods system and the gold standard in 1971, currencies have been free to float. With that freedom, buildings have become real-estate investment. Today, skyscrapers are designed to be viewed not at 120, but at 500 kilometers per hour from an airplane. Whether or not they sing is of little importance, because they are too distant to be heard. Furthermore, they are less products of an architectural culture of late capitalism than they are the products of a few major capitalist players. That these players do not even come to architectural play in the face of economic concerns, has been observed: architecture within architectural practice is vanishing. Design occupies only

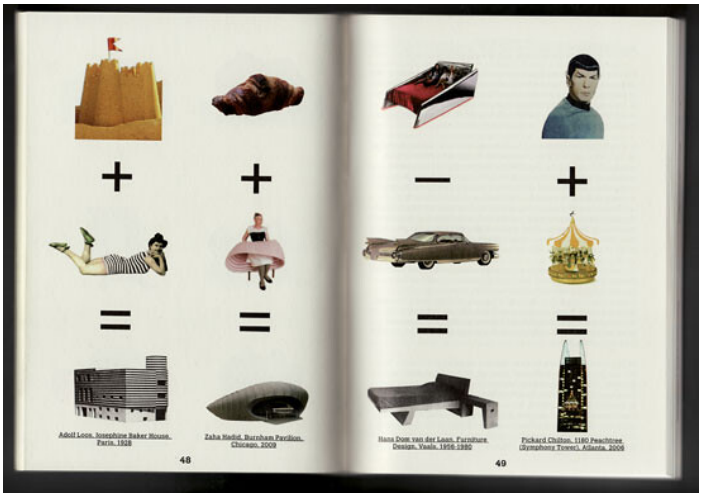
five percent of a contemporary architect's time, with the rest dedicated to calculations, meetings, presentations, and administration. When it comes to building, architects play a marginal role, while the primary roles are occupied by corporate actors, clients, and building firms, which send even early designs through value-engineering software in order to meet projected budgets and commercial interests. Jay Merrick discusses the death of architecture in the following way:

> Architects serve commercial forces that are generally uninterested in the complex cultural qualities of place, aesthetics, and history—and our planning system struggles to cope with the tensions, and the bad architecture, generated by this situation. From design to delivery, architecture is being corporatized and re-calibrated as part of sophisticated management systems. Architects are increasingly seen as service-industry operatives and it cannot be long before student architects' reading lists include tomes on the management and production structures of exemplars of global corporate efficiency such as Toyota, Walmart, and Tesco.[18]

Conceptualism Realized

We could continue to complain. But we could also recognize that different, albeit smaller, forms of architecture have emerged to confront mobilized global culture. These (re-)emergent alternative architectures at least pose the crucial question: Where can architecture be located today when it is of no interest to big building projects? These are varieties of conceptual architecture that—with reference to conceptual art and architecture of the 1960s—question the traditional notion of architecture as building-construction, as master plan, or as conventional cubature. Recent conceptual works focus on design as a process that begins with an idea, passes through experiments, and results in forms that are not buildings per se. Such works are interested in intellectual and systematic approaches that bring architectural matters—typology, context, form, and so forth—to a head. They react against mobilized culture by demanding a higher degree of activity and engagement from visitors, passersby, and inhabitants than from paying users; they ask for a degree of mental mobility.

The materials of the new conceptual architectures are most often light, ephemeral, cheap, and unpretentious.[19] In contrast to the famous architectural works of the 1960s and 70s, today's architectural conceptualism does not define itself in terms of unrealized utopian plans, visualizations, or renderings of big buildings, but instead poses essential questions concerning the foundations of architecture, seeking answers on a smaller scale: in installations, pavilions, window displays, exhibitions, and magazines—what we might call micro-architecture. Such are the influences of conceptual art in contemporary conceptual architecture. (As Lucy Lippard famously commented, "The difficulty of abstract conceptual art lies not in the idea but in finding the means of expressing that idea so that it is immediately apparent to the spectator."[20]) Above all, recent conceptual architecture includes works that are self-referential—not only do they question the discipline, they also reflect on the role of the architect-author. Conceptual architects do not seek legitimacy in supposedly objective values like function, need, or technology. As authors, they posit their subjective perspectives as vulnerable yet pivotal points in the design process.



Junk Jet no. 3, flux-us-flux-you-issue, 2009. Interested in the topic of architecture and mobility.

If we return to the question of mobilized global culture, we recognize that conceptual architecture might be capable of providing an answer. On the one hand, it seems to embrace mobility as it literally distances itself from the classical immovable, while on the other hand, in its conceptual approach it turns mobility into a novel form of locality—not so much as geographic locality, but as authorial locality. Locality here becomes a quality of production, with local viewpoints and "local values"—in contrast to the Valérian approach—cultivating an awareness of the temporal and contingent nature of every kind of work done within an increasingly mobilized culture.

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Letters to the Editors: Responses to Jon Rich's "The Blood of the Victim"

Shortly after *e-flux journal* published Jon Rich's essay **"The Blood of the Victim"** last June, Jessica Kornheisl and Natasha Llorens wrote in with responses to the piece. To offer your own response to texts published in *e-flux journal*, write to **journal@e-flux.com**.

Natasha Llorens

In "The Blood of the Victim," a text published in issue 26 of this journal, Jon Rich begins with a classic formulation of photojournalism's ethical quandary, that images of human starvation taken in order to feed the world's desire to *know*, and which the world *buys* in order to satisfy that desire, are monstrous. Because the photographer's identity is enmeshed with the systems of circulation for which he produces images—neocolonialist systems—he cannot avoid the ethical responsibility for producing death as an object, a thing observed. The image produced is intolerable to the spectator, even as we desire it, because it shows us our own unwillingness (attachment to morning coffee, for example) to make death stop.

Rich then offers us a counter-example: photographs of the Syrian revolution taken by its own victims/producers that collapse the structure of the traditional photojournalistic image, thereby enacting the image's decolonization. The photographers reveal their own mortality instead of being revealed as mortal by a spectral photographer, breaking apart the victim/hero binary. The world, however, does not want these images-as-events produced by Syrian protesters, what the world desires (and what CNN provides) are pictures about events constructed by a third party—a "branded" view of injustice and a structure the dominant paradigm depends on in order to control the histories of revolution and of victimhood respectively.

Rich argues that images taken by protesters turn the protest into an autonomous event and therefore "safeguard" the images' meaning; yet he also seems to argue that images taken in the heat of the moment by people who have a stake in the events they are portraying are more authentic, that we can trust them to hold consistent meaning better than images produced more explicitly for consumption, by the West for the West. I do not dispute that the structure of the documentary image is changing, but I wonder whether simply dissolving the boundary between the photographic subject and its object really addresses the complexity of the image's movement today. Ariella Azoullay – among others – has argued convincingly that the photograph's meaning is produced by its viewer as much if not more than it is produced by its "author," the photojournalist.[1] The division between who is photographing whom and from what distance is of less importance, according to Azoullay, than who is looking at what image, and in which frame of signification that image circulates.

An example to clarify this point: Situ Studio collaborated with the Foresenic Architecture research group to

produce an extensive report and a video triptych on the April 17, 2009 death of 25-year old Palestinian Bassem Ibrahim Abu Rahma.[2] Rahma and others were peacefully demonstrating the Israeli army's construction of the Separation Wall around the village of Bil'in, west of Ramallah, when he was hit in the chest by a high velocity gas canister.[3] Situ Studio exhaustively analyzed the footage from three hand-held cameras taken from the protester's perspective, along with other circumstantial data, in order to disprove the army's claim that soldiers had been shooting into the air and not directly at the protesters.

This project both confirms and complicates Rich's claim that the object of Syrians' photojournalism is also, and simultaneously, its subject. In one sense, the footage of Rahma's murder enacts precisely the shift in power Rich describes by placing the production of images directly in the hands of the persecuted in the moment of their persecution. What is unclear, however, is where exactly the production of the image of Rahma's death—or really any image—ends.

The autonomous event capable of forcing the army to reconsider its original statement was, in this case, achieved only after considerable post-production. The footage of Mr. Rahma's death was taken up by two institutions in London and in New York and its visual information was intensely processed before being re-articulated as a highly designed argument. Diagrams charting the perspective and ballistic reports, still images, slowed images, and carefully synced moving images are all marshaled to make a single point: the soldiers had to be firing directly at protesters, therefore the army's explanation of the events is impossible. Any straightforward understanding of who produced the final visual argument, however, and from what position (geographically, ideologically, temporally) is equally impossible.

I do not suggest that, because images are produced anew by each system of circulation they enter, we should abandon any hope of finding meaning in them. or that they should not be used as evidence. I do argue that focusing exclusively on the conditions of an image's production does not provide enough analytical flexibility to account for the eventual—and inevitable—migration of an image from one context to another.

Jessica Kornheisl

I really enjoyed Jon Rich's article, "The Blood of the Victim," published in the June issue of *e-flux journal*. We certainly are "far from equaling the Syrians in their stature or courage"; they are amazing people with the most incredible bravery and hope. But Rich contends that, because Syrians themselves are both the victims and the image-makers, the ability of the viewer to relate, as an outsider, becomes problematic, and that this is the cause for the delay in international attention to the fight. I argue, however, that it is not the role of the image-maker as victim that has caused the slow spread of information, but rather the untraditional form of publishing these images that has created this lag. These images, if anything, DO make us all Syrian.

In the last century or so, war has evolved from being fought on specific battlegrounds by career soldiers to become something that takes place anywhere, waged by any civilian conscripted into the military. In art, particularly after World War I, imagery in which the soldier, victim, or situational bystander as witness began to appear. I immediately thought of the photographs of Mendel Grossman, who secretly photographed his fellow concentration camp prisoners, and the writings of Siegfried Sassoon. Like the image-makers of the Syrian Revolution, these works of art were often late in reaching mass public attention, but their power and shocking relatability as experiences of human suffering cannot be discounted. I think we can all remember the chill that ran up our spines when we first read *Anne Frank: The Diary of a Young Girl* and imagined ourselves in pursued hiding. We were all Jewish at that moment.

With the videos and photographs taken by Syrian protestors, we are transported to the Middle East. We, like the image-makers, face tanks, bullets, and frightful soldiers. And, like the artists themselves, we are entirely unarmed; all we have before us is a piece of nonviolent technology. This situation, as Rich points out very nicely, can be "too much to bear," I know I myself am party to that sentiment. However, I think this overwhelming sensation does not deter viewers from relating but encourages and emphasizes this point. This could be us at any moment, and, in a parallel situation, most of us, like our Syrian counterparts, would never dream of acting violently. We generally do not possess heavy weaponry, nor the savagery to kill another person. We are all Syrian, because we are all creatures of this earth who desire freedom and prefer to avoid forceful confrontation.

Typically, we turn to a newspaper (in hand or online), radio, or television for our daily news. But it is the nontraditional form of image-dissemination that has created the lag in seeing pictures from the Syrian Revolution. The imagery proliferated on Facebook from the start, with no screening or censoring. Anyone involved in or aware of the fight could find pictures and videos. Many of these images also made it to signs at international protests in support of the Syrian people for any passerby to easily see the brutality of Al-Assad. But, as mentioned above, this is not the usual way for the average person to find his or her news. Looking back on emails, it was actually three to four weeks after the first Syrian protests on March 15 before US supporters of the revolution began a push to contact the media. Therefore, traditional sources simply did not know about it at first. Once the word began to spread, it can generally be assumed that it is the business of most media

to take their own pictures. This, however, was met with difficulties, as there was a ban on allowing foreign news agents into the country. Thus, the work of Syrian protestors became all the more valuable and necessary, and we can now view their images daily via our usual news sources. They are no less shocking than they were in the beginning; if anything, the regime has become even more violent. And we, as outside viewers, are in no more or less of a psychological predicament than if we had seen the images earlier, via Facebook or protest posters.

The revolution is undoubtedly being led by Syrians—visual documentation included. But this does not make us any less able to share the emotive power of what is seen. It is their ability to place us in the same role, to share the lens through which they are witnessing their lives, that we are all Syrians too. We cannot shy away from taking part, and it is up to international viewers to lead international action. Facebook continues to be the best source for news in this battle, with information on how we viewers can act. Write to your President or Prime Minister, boycott businesses supporting the regime; in short, use the simple technology you have in your hands, just as our Syrian brothers and sisters with their smartphones, to participate in the fight. Peaceful means are, as we can see from the regime's extreme reactions, far more frightening and powerful than any gun or bomb.

3
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Situ Studio is a design firm based in Brooklyn NY that combines textual research with material investigation https://situ.nyc/. Foresnic Architecture is a research group at Goldsmith's University in London headed by Eyal Weizman that examines architecture's potential role as evidence in human rights violations. The full report from Situ Studio is available online here, https://situ.nyc/research/projects/bilin-report , and their video trypych here, https://vimeo.com/29396850 .