e-flux journal

issue #26

06/2011

e-flux Journal is a monthly art publication featuring essays and contributions by some of the most engaged artists and thinkers working today. The journal is available online, in PDF format, and in print through a network of distributors.

Editors
Julieta Aranda
Brian Kuan Wood
Anton Vidokle

Managing & Image Editor
Mariana Silva

Copy Editor/Proofreader
Phillip Stephen Twilley

Distribution
Laura Barlow

Graphic Design
Jeff Ramsey

Layout Generator
Adam Florin

PDF Design
Mengyi Qian

PDF Generator
Keyian Vafai

For further information, contact **journal@e-flux.com**

www.e-flux.com/journal

Editors

Editorial— “Artistic Thinking”

In the February 2009 issue of *e-flux journal*, Luis Camnitzer suggested in his essay “Art and Literacy” that a core problem in education (particularly for artists) can be traced back to an early stage when one is taught to read and write, in that order.[1] On one level, it is simple common sense to suppose that one can only begin to write after learning how to read. But, at the same time, this ordering also takes for granted that consumption must necessarily come before production—only after you consume knowledge will you then be capable of producing it. It is a fundamental understanding of learning that is typical of the master-apprentice model found in craft guilds. The problem arises when the language to be learned has not yet been invented, or the practice of a craft is not controlled by a guild.

Art education, on the other hand, has deeply internalized this problem by taking the inverse for granted—that one writes first, and only later develops a language with which to read what was written. What would it mean, then, to then build an institution around this idea? Such an institution would necessarily be ahistorical, and perhaps even amnesiac. It would resemble a Tower of Babel, in which each work could be understood as its own language, projecting its own art history.

In the past few years, debates around art education have experienced a gradual, yet determined drift from an interest in open formats and the emancipatory potentials of semi-institutional structures, to discussions of how those educational institutions can be optimized, or even standardized. One can easily dismiss this shift towards pragmatism for reflecting an endemic crisis of the imagination—and it probably does, but it is also a necessarily concrete response to very real threats to art education that have come in the form of severe budget cuts and sweeping measures to bring art production in line with the broader administrative mandates of research universities.[2]

Yet the field of art is not set up to deal with these administrative challenges, for it refuses to offer a definitive answer to the question of what it is actually doing: the question “What is art?” must be left open. The more important and interesting question then concerns not the prudishness of this refusal, but the fact that the most useful answers are always provided in the negative. These are the answers that account for the fact that art education is, in fact, a fundamental paradox—almost a contradiction in terms. For how can we even begin to think about teaching something that, on a basic level, cannot be taught? How to form the audacity to make moves that have not been already sanctioned, and within spaces where they may not be acceptable? Fostering this audacity is less a structural concern—of how to deal with a given space, of how to access a history or a network of relations, of how to make work visible, and so forth—and more a question of identifying the kind of thinking that can surpass structures and institutionalization altogether. We

might call this artistic thinking.

On the one hand, following from Camnitzer, granting the artist a position that precedes language (and, by extension, history), while opening a large space for experimentation, could be seen as a tediously romantic endorsement of the artist as mad genius—unaccountable and unaware of the vocabularies that have consolidated around him or her. But would this not be another way of describing an already-existing hysteria embedded in a field where all legitimating mechanisms are subject to highly contingent and subjective impressions and projections of value and importance? While we could say that a vocabulary exists for linking these together, it still does not manage to form a coherent language of judgment, of totalizing denouncement or terms that could otherwise measure the definitive success or failure of a work of art. This could be the source of a good amount of psychosis, but it would be even more insane to suggest that a central authority *should* form a central criterion of aesthetic judgment as a template for all. And anyhow, art at its best does not provide answers and solutions; it creates problems.

—Julieta Aranda, Brian Kuan Wood, Anton Vidokle

X

Julieta Aranda is an artist and an editor of *e-flux journal.*

Brian Kuan Wood is an editor of *e-flux journal.*

Anton Vidokle is an editor of e-flux journal and chief curator of the 14th Shanghai Biennale: Cosmos Cinema.

1
See https://www.e-flux.com/journal/03/ .

2
See “Education Actualized,” Irit Rogoff’s guest-edited issue of *e-flux journal* from March 2010, for a number of in-depth analyses of these currents: https://www.e-flux.com/journal/14/ .

Hans Ulrich Obrist

In Conversation with Julian Assange, Part II

Continued from "In Conversation with Julian Assange, Part One."

My archive now contains over 2000 hours of interviews recorded in many different places, and I am constantly attempting to discover new rules of the game, new approaches to how an interview can work. For an interview with Hans-Peter Feldmann published initially in AnOther Magazine *and then in book form, I emailed him one question per day, and each of Feldmann's responses would take the form of an image. For my interview with Louise Bourgeois, I would send a question and she would email back a drawing. When Julian came to my office with Mark and Daniel for our first meeting, we discussed the idea of a different format with questions from artists, and Julian liked this a lot, suggesting that the artists send the questions as short videos so that he could see them. We set the interview for two weeks later at 10 or 11 p.m., as we discovered that we both work late at night. Traveling more than three hours from London on Sunday, February 27, I arrived at Ellingham Hall, the Georgian mansion near the Eastern coast of England that Vaughan Smith offered Julian to use as his address for bail during his UK extradition hearings. In the living room of the picturesque home he described to me as a "golden cage" we drank many cups of coffee and spoke until 3 a.m. about his life, his nomadism, his early beginnings and the invention of WikiLeaks, his time in Egypt, Kenya, Iceland, and other places, his scientific background, and the theoretical underpinnings of WikiLeaks.*

The interview is divided into two parts—in the first, published in the previous issue of e-flux journal *, I was interested in tracing his work back to its beginnings. I was not interested in his court case or private life, but in his public work as the voice of WikiLeaks, and the experiences and philosophical background that informs such a monumentally polemical project. In the second part, which follows here, Assange responds to questions posed to him by artists Goldin+Senneby, Paul Chan, Metahaven (Daniel van der Velden and Vinca Kruk), Martha Rosler, Luis Camnitzer, Superflex, Philippe Parreno, and Ai Weiwei.*

Many people have contributed to making this interview possible, and I would like to extend my sincere thanks to Julian Assange, to all the artists for their questions, to Joseph Farrell, Laura Barlow, Orit Gat, Joseph Redwood-Martinez, Mariana Silva, Anton Vidokle, Julieta Aranda, Brian Kuan Wood, Daniel McClean, Julia Peyton-Jones, Mark Stephens, and Lorraine Two.

—Hans Ulrich Obrist

[figure a1416f329eb11a9e3efce64ca7b69bb3.jpg

The “dangerous bend” symbol appeared in the books of Nicolas Bourbaki, indicating a tricky passage on a first reading or a difficult argument. This image was later re-used by computer scientists in textbooks.
]

Julian Assange: The Bourbaki were an anonymous group of French mathematicians who published a series of mathematics books over a period of about 20 years under the collective allonym Nicolas Bourbaki. They kept their individual identities anonymous, and their books are still regarded as some of the finest math books ever published in French. In 2006, I saw that WikiLeaks needed to be, if not completely anonymous, then pseudo-anonymous—ideally publishing under a collective allonym such as Bourbaki. First of all, as a young organization publishing very controversial material, we didn’t want to be more of a target than we needed to be. While I was publicly a member of the advisory board, that is different than being the editor in chief or one of the principal writers. I also wanted to remove ego as much as possible from what we were doing, to make sure people were writing and conducting their work for reasons other than ego. Also, as an organization that did not yet have a reputation, we needed a personalized voice to quickly get a reputation. If we pulled our collective efforts into a name like Jack Bourbaki, or another collective allonym, our personality would quickly gain a reputation because of the relatively high level of our output.

But within a month of our coming to the public stage there was a leak of one of our internal mailing lists by a New York architect named John Young, who had been involved in his own primitive, but aggressive publishing project. John saw from the press publicity that WikiLeaks would become significant in the field and might threaten his own project. But it was quite a revelation to have our own leak very early on. And I thought to myself, well, this is very interesting—now we get to taste our own medicine. And actually, this medicine tasted quite nice, in that what I saw was a group of very committed, idealistic people whose internal dialogue was even stronger than their external dialogue. So, there was no hypocrisy in what we were doing, precisely the opposite—we were even more principled and idealistic internally than we were externally.

[figure fullpage
58f0a68d64ca896d4ebe50a91462c969.jpg
Luis Camnitzer, *This is a mirror. You are a written sentence*, 1966–1968. Vacuum formed polystyrene mounted on synthetic board, 48 x 62.5 x 1.5 cm. Daros Latinamerica Collection, Zurich. Photo: Peter Schälchli.

]

Early on, I already had an existing reputation, and I spent that reputational capital to get volunteer labor from good people. But when the press started sniffing around, very curious as to who some of the principle people in this project were, some of my friends, rather unfortunately, said, well, it’s Julian, and he deserves all the credit. I could’ve shot them! And then I saw that, by trying to engineer a position in which I was not seen as an authority figure for the organization, we ended up with people who were not involved in the organization at all claiming to represent it. And so we started suffering from reputational opportunism, which we had to stamp out. We also grew more politically powerful with many supporters all over the world. So we no longer needed anonymity for ourselves in quite the same way—I still needed locational anonymity for security reasons, but my name being known was not so important anyhow, given that the information was already floating around for anyone who really cared to look.

HUO: This locational anonymity has caused you to move through many different places, and in interviews with you, there is a great deal of discussion about your nomadism going back much earlier. You seemed to be traveling the world with literally just your backpack and two notebooks, just living in people’s houses.

JA: Well, I’ve been traveling all over the world on my own since I was twenty-five, as soon as I had enough money to do it. But for WikiLeaks, I have been consistently on the move since the beginning of 2007. Up until the latest problem with the Pentagon, which started around June/July of last year, it wasn’t a matter of being on the run. It was more about following opportunity and ensuring that I wasn’t in one place long enough to allow for a proper surveillance operation, which involves getting inside and installing video cameras, monitoring all outgoing electronic signals, and so forth. Such operations take time and planning, so if you’re a resource-constrained activist organization facing the prospect of surveillance by some of the most advanced surveillance agencies, such as the National Security Agency and GCHQ, you only have two methods to resist it: one, changing the location of your headquarters with some frequency, and two, complete geographic isolation.

[figure 5692eca4e71447271ce76c1445f84534.jpg
Martha Rosler, *Saddam’s Palace*, 2004. Photomontage from the series “Bringing the War Home: House Beautiful, New Series”.

]

HUO: And you chose the first one?

JA: Yes. I lived in Cairo for a while, and that’s one of the reasons why these events in Egypt have been so interesting to me.

HUO: And Iceland as well, no?

JA: And Iceland, and Germany—many countries. In late 2008, Iceland’s economy collapsed as a result of the general financial crisis. The Icelandic banking sector was

10 times larger than the rest of the Icelandic economy. The largest bank was a bank called Kaupthing, and we got hold of documentation of all the loans that Kaupthing had made, together with very detailed and frank comments about each one—loans of over forty-five million euros, totaling six billion euros. We released this, and Kaupthing then threatened to put us, and any alleged source, in prison in Iceland for a year. They then prevented the main TV station, RUV, from reporting it on their nightly news with an injunction that arrived on the news desk at 6:55 for the 7 o'clock news. The newsreader deadpanned, "well, this is the nightly news, but we can't bring you all the news there is tonight, as we've received an injunction." So the program showed our website and directed people to WikiLeaks to fill the missing slot. Overnight, WikiLeaks became very important to Icelanders, because the banks and the banksters were perceived to have destroyed a very important part of Iceland's economy, and to have ruined Iceland's international reputation.

[figure e802a75f61ed263f3d742e36242ad38c.jpg
Goldin+Senneby, *Gone Offshore: Walking tour led by Blue Badge Guides Rachel Kolsky and Caroline Dale, London, March 30th, 2008.* The tour concentrates on Middlesex Street, which marks the shift from Tower Hamlets to the City of London. From this point, a guide initiates a movement towards fictitious space, narrating the legal construction of offshore jurisdictions.

]

HUO: And was that when the Iceland Modern Media Initiative began?

JA: Yes. After that I was invited to speak in Iceland. I'd had this idea of exposing the nature of offshore banking and secrecy havens—operations such as Bank Julius Baer in the Cayman Islands, and so forth. Regardless of what financial people call these offshore havens, they are actually secrecy havens made explicitly for hiding money flows. The United States military and the CIA were engaged in the same practice in Guantanamo, except there they laundered people through offshore jurisdictions to evade the commonly accepted laws of most countries. And I wondered whether I could devise a system that would turn this on its head. Instead of having a secrecy haven, we could have an openness haven.

The offshore sector works for secrecy havens like this. You have a country like the British Virgin Islands that provides certain corporate and banking structures that are very opaque, and where there are even criminal laws against revealing certain information. Then, neighboring Caribbean states and other small island economies in other parts of the world will take the most attractive parts of this legislation and implement it as well. So competition prompts a gradual ratcheting up of the level of secrecy across these various financial havens. And now the world has a new refugee—publishers. The Rick Ross Institute on Destructive Cults had to move its web service to Stockholm in order to evade lawsuits in the United States. *Malaysia Today* had to move to Singapore and the United States in order to evade government censorship in Malaysia. We originally had some of our service in the United States and they moved to Stockholm. There was legislative flight, or judicial flight, because a lot of these abuses occur within the judicial system, as part of the process. They'd be exiled.

[figure partialpage
fde04ef00c6a3040bf9446ec36583047.jpg
World map of internet usage. Courtesy of Chris Harrison, Carnegie Mellon University.

]

HUO: Involuntarily, as publishing refugees?

JA: Exactly. These publishing refugees have a demand for a certain protective legislative structure, an economic demand similar to the demand of those who want to hide their assets. Well, I couldn't find an island that was quite right for this, because you also need a few other things—you need a belief that freedom of the press is important, an island with a population and economy large and independent enough to not fall prey to the first major pressure it encounters. You need internet connections that are good for publishing and an educated enough workforce for these internet connections. I actually saw Iceland as the perfect island economy for this kind of haven. And with islands, you can often get new legislation going very quickly because the economy is small enough that you don't have a whole lot of lobbyists keeping it down. I mentioned this on the biggest Sunday political show in Iceland, and the next day everyone was talking about it. It was clear that a number of Icelanders would also support such a move. I came back and we brought in some thirteen different legislative consultants to think about different ways of pulling it all together. As I was coming from the outside, it was necessary for Icelanders to make the idea their own, or it would never succeed legislatively. It had to become endemic to Iceland. So I worked hard to do this and we got a draft proposal, in Icelandic, put to the Parliament. Then a Parliamentary order was made for the government to draft the legislation, and it passed through the Parliament unanimously.

[figure 3a2cf1dcf8ae69409225f1580ebaf612.jpg
Bartolomeo Del Bene, *Civitas Veri (City of Truth)*, 1609.

]

HUO: So perhaps now is a good time for the questions we invited the artists to send.

JA: Okay, let's start with the first one.

Luis Camnitzer: The first question concerns your high profile in the public media, while Bradley Manning, who seems to be the true hero (at least in terms of US policy documents), has a low profile. I know that WikiLeaks contributed money to Manning's defense fund and that is great, but it is also not really the issue. WikiLeaks is presumably operating on the basis of collective whistleblowing and contributions of information, and its power therefore comes from being a communal enterprise. Yet, the limelight seems to be on one person and not on the collective. Isn't the idea here that ultimately we all are, or should be, WikiLeaks? Shouldn't you reaffirm that point in your public appearances?

The other question concerns the more complex issue of leaking. I am totally in favor of, and applaud transparency, and I don't have ideological issues with it here. When the issues are clear, like the corruption of the banking system for profit, or the evils of imperialism, the more the better. However, in political terms, it is also a little like watching a poker game and yelling out whatever cards are in everybody's hands. This may also be fine, except that sometimes it requires judgment with regard to the consequences. Any good game is not about single gambits, but the whole strategy. Exposure may reveal the evil of one move, but ignore the plan that justifies it with those to follow. On this level, the beauty of transparency becomes more difficult to evaluate since what is revealed is always partial and the intent is not always evil. I wouldn't like to be the judge because I would never feel that I know the full picture. In any case, I would rather denounce the game than the gambits within the game. I therefore vote on the basis of what I know, but I don't engage unless I am persuaded that I know enough. As an aside, I also wouldn't like to read all the thoughts of an interlocutor or have that person read all of mine. How does one determine limits? Such a determination necessarily implies really difficult ethical decisions and intricate qualifications. Out of curiosity, and in a non-aggressive way I would ask: What equipped you to play this role?

JA: These are two questions that I've been asked often. The first is mischievous, though I'm sure the attempt to play my difficulties off against the difficulties of Mr. Manning not arise endemically from Luis Camnitzer. That is something that is being deliberately hyped by our opponents who care for us. We're not in a competition for suffering. Rather, Bradley Manning and I, and other people, are being swept up in a very aggressive operation by the United States to advance the interest of certain decision makers in the United States and we must stand united. His plight, of course, deserves more attention, and this organization has spent a significant amount of effort in getting more attention for his plight. Some of that attention will come naturally, as he heads towards trial. He was originally arrested in Baghdad and held in Kuwait for some six weeks before winding up in Quantico, Virginia, where he has been awaiting trial for over 250 days in maximum security and solitary confinement. As someone who has been in maximum security and solitary confinement, I identify strongly with his predicament. It is a dilemma that has now been the subject of criticism by Amnesty International, and I hope will be the subject of much, much more scrutiny.

In relation to the second question, on why it is important to give people information about what is happening behind closed doors, and where the limits lie: we say we believe in transparency, merely because this word is a rather convenient and accepted description for something more complex. I am personally not so fond of that description. Rather, I believe that if we are to build a robust civilization, we need to know what is happening, not necessarily at the very instant it happens, but we need a sophisticated and somewhat comprehensive intellectual record of everything that humanity is about. This is not a matter of simple transparency, but a matter of building up our common intellectual record. And what goes into the intellectual record should actually be everything, unless there is a very good reason for it to not be there, because everything in the world eventually, in one way or another, affects everything else. We need to see power from every angle if we are to understand and shape it. It is the right to know that draws forth the right to speak. And, taken together, we can call these two rights the right to communicate knowledge. There is no need to be too theoretical to show how all this is helpful in practice.

WikiLeaks has a four-year publishing history—one that, given our resources, is something to be immensely proud of. Our work has resulted in tremendous positive change across the world, and—as far as we are aware, and as far as any government official has alleged—it has not directly resulted in harm being done to any individual, other than losing a job, or losing an election. As for where one draws the line in terms of our publishing, well, I think this is far too simple a question. Whenever a person does something, one can recast it into moral form and ask: Is it right? Instead, perhaps, we can cast it the other way: What right does the state have to use coercive force to prevent people from communicating knowledge? If there is an initial communication of knowledge, what right does the state have to use coercive force on second-hand, third-hand, or fourth-hand, or sixth-hand communications of knowledge? Should the state be permitted to do that? I say that it should not. Perhaps, in limited circumstances, the people may grant the state the right to stop the initial communication of knowledge. As for where we draw the line, the postal system does not draw the line—the rights of people to send knowledge through the postal system is absolute. The telephone company does not draw the line. E-mail does not draw the line. The rights to communicate any knowledge through those systems are granted.

[figure 2e73cbe458f11d298d6cf284885edafb.jpg
A hacker's keyboard.

]

HUO: Are there limitations to those rights, or are they unlimited insofar as they are granted?

JA: There is no prior restraint, and there is no view that there should be any prior restraint. After knowledge has been communicated, any attempted restraint is, of course, futile. So, in practice, it is unlimited. Unlike every other news organization, we make a promise about what we will publish and what we will not, and it is very simple. That simplicity gives our sources and our readers confidence in us. We say that we will accept and publish any material that is of diplomatic, political, ethical, or historical significance, which has not been published before, and which is being suppressed—not unpopular material, but material that is being suppressed through classification, through threats of violence, or some other significant force. We promise to publish such material, after it goes through a harm-minimization review. The point of a harm-minimization review is not to prevent material from being published. Rather, it is to either delay publication or remove small parts of a publication for a strictly limited period of time, or until a harmful situation is resolved. It is clear that information should be published if there is no harm in publishing it. It is clear that our harm-minimization process has, to date, been completely successful in its goals. Therefore, we are correct in sticking to our promise to publish everything that is of diplomatic, political, ethical, or historical significance, that has not been published before, and is being suppressed. It is a good policy. It works.

Goldin+Senneby: Hello, my name is Angus Cameron, and I am the spokesman for Swedish artists Goldin+Senneby. Their question begins with a quote:

> I meet a being who makes me laugh because he is headless; he holds a steel dagger in his left hand, in his right hand a severed heart, aflame like the Sacred Heart. He is not a man. He is not a God either. He is not me but he is more than me: his stomach is the labyrinth in which he has lost himself, loses me with him, and in which I discover myself as him, in other words as a monster.
>
> —Georges Bataille, *The Sacred Conspiracy*, 1936

You have stated in previous interviews that your original aim for WikiLeaks was to be "faceless." You are by no means the first to have sought, and failed to achieve, this sort of transcendent organizational form. Various activist organizations have used secrecy and anonymity as part of their political strategies—you have mentioned the Bourbaki, but there was also Bataille's Acéphale in the 1930s and the Mexican Zapatista, to name but a few. In all cases, these groups have either ultimately dropped their anonymity or made use of a spokesperson (such as Subcomandante Marcos) whose identity is at least semi-known. What was your strategic and political thinking in becoming the face and voice of WikiLeaks—its "lightning rod," as you have put it?

JA: Right, so I had a number of reasons for keeping people not completely anonymous, and also for keeping the authority structure of WikiLeaks relatively opaque. But it ended up not being possible for practical reasons, so I have become the lightning rod for the organization. It's actually quite interesting in trying to get other people to speak for WikiLeaks. We now have Kristinn Hrafnsson, an award-winning Icelandic investigative journalist, who also speaks for the organization. Ad hominem attacks on the organization are directed at its front men. Yet through this mechanism of attracting attacks, we do keep those attacks away from people who are less able to respond to, deal with, or defend themselves against them. This also creates a sort of market that stems the likelihood of others being swept up into ad hominem attacks—simply because our publishing activities consist of putting out information that cannot be attacked by definition. It is absolutely pristine: there has never been a single allegation that we have got something wrong. We're not writing opinion pieces, though we do sometimes write factual analysis, but the bulk of our publication is raw source material that cannot be attacked as something that has our editorial influence in it. So the only way to attack it becomes, in fact, through an ad hominem attack on the message. It's a very difficult position to be in, but since I'm already in it, I may as well keep the heat on me, and spare the other members of the organization.

Martha Rosler: Hello Mr. Assange. I have a series of related questions. First, do you consider yourself to have a political position beyond what seems to be a relatively amorphous libertarianism?

JA: Well, I do have a political position, and my political position is that all political philosophies are bankrupt, because they're not created with a full understanding of how human institutions actually behave. A better question would be: Do I have a political temperament? And I do have a political temperament, which is a combination of libertarianism and the importance of understanding. And what emerges from this temperament is holding power to account through action driven by understanding. So, if you have a libertarian temperament, then you're temperamentally opposed to authoritarian power. And if you have a temperament that is inclined to understanding, then you want to know what power is about. These two things combined drive forth a position, an intellectual and political position that is about understanding power to such a degree that power is not able to express its most abusive aspects. And I guess my other political positions are not political positions per se, but positions of

understanding that most of the world is splitting into just two big power systems. The first is the free markets, which can be very big and powerful when you get to financial markets but can also be distorted by some economic interactions. The other is patronage, and patronage networks—these are really what accounts for, splits, promotes or encourages, and distributes all forms of non-market power. This is not a traditional political position as much as it is a view of the world. Similarly, I've independently arrived at a view that is a more modern political concept, which concerns shadow states, which you can see more clearly in newer states in Eastern Europe, such as Bulgaria, where there's a pantomime at the surface about being a modern EU democracy—not that there really are that many, since the more modern EU democracies also engage in this pantomime. It is simply clearer in states like Bulgaria. Underneath, there is a patronage network that actually controls who gets justice and the distribution of power and wealth within a country. I see that tendency growing in the United States also. In the United States now, there are two rival systems that control the distribution of power. There is the modern form of what we used to call the military-industrial complex or the intelligence complex, and there is Wall Street. These two rival groups are vying to be the central dispensers of power in the United States. I think they are actually loosely coupled to Hillary on the shadow state side, and Obama on the Wall Street side. Actually, it's quite interesting in the cases against us in the United States to see this rivalry being expressed in the various actions against us.

Martha Rosler: Are you, for example, a social democrat? Do you have any philosophy of the state and of governance that you would care to share?

JA: Oh, that's one. We've spoken about this, but perhaps she's giving me license to go into it a bit more. I'll go more into that example in the United States. When I was in Russia in the 1990s, I used to watch NTV in Moscow. NTV was the freest TV I have ever seen. I don't know if you're familiar with *Spitting Image*. It was a British public satire that was very politically aggressive, but NTV and other Russian channels had far more guts. And that was because at that time, Russia had something like 10 independent points of power. It had the army. It had the remnants of the KGB and the external KGB, which ended up becoming the SVR. It had Yeltsin, and his daughter, and that mob. It had some broader mish-mash of bureaucracy that was left over from the Soviet Union. And it had seven oligarchs. That meant, in terms of media control, the state plus the oligarchs with own their own independent media. As a result, you could actually put out almost anything you wanted under the patronage or protection of one of these groups. And when Putin came in, he tamed the oligarchs. Some were arrested, some had their assets seized, and some were exiled. The result was that they fell in under Putin's centralized patronage pyramid. The ownership of the TV stations also reined popular democracy under Putin's pyramid. And now, in order to get anything of scale done in Russia, you have to have a sponsor in the pyramid somewhere.

I see in the United States that there is now a rivalry between the modern form of the military industrial complex and Wall Street for this central pyramid. And the military industrial complex has been broadening and expanding its share of that patronage system aggressively. There are now around 900,000 people in United States that have top-secret security clearances. Ten years ago, the National Security Agency dealt with about sixteen private contractors. The National Security Agency is the biggest spy agency in the United States, and its combined budget is more than that of the FBI and CIA combined, or at least it was around eight years ago when I had the last statistic. Now, it has over 1,000 contractors. Similarly, US involvement in Iraq created around 10,000 different private contractors. So the patronage is now moving into the private sector. It's less contained than it was. Its tentacles are spreading into all walks of our society and the number of people who are connected through family and business relationships, to that structure, continues to increase. My guess is that something like 30 to 40 percent of the US population is now either directly connected to that structure, or one step removed, through family and business relationships. In the past two years, US tax revenue has decreased nearly 25 percent, while the same time the amount of tax revenue flowing through to that sector in the first year of Obama was around 6% to 7%—the amount of money being soaked up by this sector is increasing. So that shows you that as a patronage network it is increasing in its power, because it's starting to eat up more of the pie, compared to other groups. That's a real problem for the United States. There's a vast shadow state of private companies hooked into the secrecy system, into national security system, and an ever-expanding number of new government bureaucracies as well. It's very worrying that in the United States, that area is heading towards a Putinization. What Putin and the siloviki did to Russia, that system is doing to United States. And it's not just the US, but a broader Western patronage network.

[figure fullpage
178ebf480e5e904e7129d1ee4bae3a61.jpg
Goldin+Senneby, *After Microsoft*, 2007. Photo from installation. Image depicts the Sonoma Valley in California a few years after the Microsoft desktop image was launched was made unusable by a a phylloxera bug infestation.

]

HUO: Do you think the Western world as a whole is being Putinized?

JA: The Western world is slowly being Putinized. It has progressed the most in the United States. But there is a rivalry with the banking sector, and it's not clear who is

going to win. It's not even clear, as time goes by, that these will even be two separate, rival systems. Rather, the privatization of the national security sector means that, as time goes by, the connections between Wall Street and the national security sector are starting to disappear, because you have shared ownership of, say, Lockheed Martin or Boeing. And then you have cross investments and portfolios and credit default swaps, and so forth, on the functions of these intelligence contractors and military contractors. So, they are actually starting to merge at critical points. But, looking at the behavior of the White House, it's clear that still within the White House—and in influences upon the White House—that there are still some distinctive differences between these two groups. Obama's backers are from Wall Street. They are from his banking sector, his big money. And he does not actually have a handle on the intelligence and military patronage network. So it's like he's sitting on some cake mix, which is this military intelligence patronage network. As it grows stronger, he just has to sort of rise up with it as it moves in a particular direction. He has to move with it, because he doesn't have a handle on it. He doesn't have any spoon he can stick into it to move it around, because his family doesn't have anything to do with this system. They're not meshed with the system, so he can't control it, whereas Hillary has significant connections within that system. And we can look at something like when it was announced that Knopf had signed an 800,000 dollars deal for my book to be published in the US, and I stated that I would use a portion of this money to keep WikiLeaks afloat. Peter T. King, the Chairman of the Homeland Security Committee—a powerful position in United States Congress—wrote to Timothy C. Geithner, the US Treasury Secretary, and personally asked him to add Julian Assange and WikiLeaks as an organization to the US Specially Designated Nationals List, which is the US embargo list. So in the way that Cuba is embargoed from all economic interaction with any US citizen under penalty of criminal action, I, personally, would be embargoed from any economic interaction with any US citizen, and so would WikiLeaks. Timothy C. Geithner then smacked this request back within 48 hours and denied it. It's very unusual. Geithner is right from the elite of the Wall Street patronage network. And as US Treasury Secretary, he's remained there. In terms of a diplomatic signal, that was very interesting. As a purely technocratic response, Geithner could have sat on it for two, three weeks, to then reject or accept it for technical reasons. To knock it back so quickly is to say, no, we're deliberately sending a signal that we don't want that to happen. And it's very easy to understand, because the national security, government, and private sector in the United States flourishes from its lack of accountability, from its secrecy. That's how it's able to gradually increase its power. But WikiLeaks is holding that power to account. To generate or to encourage the adoption of a position where publishing or revealing information about the national security sector is illegal—or will result in being added to the US Specially Designated Nationals List—is to foster the power and expansion of that national security patronage network at the economic and power expense of the Wall Street network.

[figure bd400cad2390589fbdeeecc0d9135395.jpg
Luis Camnitzer, *Window*, 2001–2002/2010. Books and concrete, 70 x 60 cm. Daros Latinamerica Collection, Zurich.

]

Martha Rosler: Do you feel there is any place at all for diplomatic secrecy, for perhaps a limited period, or do you think there should be no secretive negotiations among states and other political actors on the world stage?

JA: This is an interesting question, because when the US revolutionary government first came into power, it did publish all its diplomatic negotiations within a month of their having taken place. So, in fact, ideally, all diplomatic communications would be open. But, in real politics that simply will not happen. That is too ideal a state. I think the new diplomatic standard should be to make all these things as open as possible. There's a sacrifice that we're not making, which is to suppose that if people can't conceal things through secrecy, they can conceal them through complexity instead. And you can see that in the appalling politically correct bureaucratic language how this dynamic is used in some institutions that are held to routine public accountability, where there is no secrecy. Instead, they distort their language and conceal things through complexity or weasel words. But if you had to make a stand, it's not clear to me which would be the better outcome. The perils of secret communications are so appalling that I suspect we would be better off suffering from political correctness and from increased complexity. But as it's sort of a short-term thing, given the realpolitik, it makes sense to keep things secret from time to time. It's a question of who should be keeping the secrets. Of course, it's the organization itself that is mandated to keep secrets. It's not the entire bulk of the world population, or even one nation's population, that is mandated to not spread communication and knowledge to others.

Martha Rosler: Are the US bank details going to be made public anytime soon?

JA: I won't say when they will be made public. It's best not to speak about times.

Martha Rosler: Are you going to continue to work with journalists? And if so, why not bloggers, such as Glenn Greenwald?

JA: We work with journalists, bloggers, and NGOs, and that has always been the case and what we've made the case. As we're getting more resources, we're able to expand the number of people we can work with. It's really a matter of logistical overhead, in that in a large media organization, you can enter into a negotiation with it and

then use all its resources to get something through, whereas dealing with a hundred freelancers or bloggers requires pretty much the same costs, but times a hundred.

HUO: How many people are working for you now?

JA: At the moment we have about twenty.

[figure 014251422f6faa716794cf632a3cd4ce.jpg SUPERFLEX, *FREE SOL LEWITT*, 2010. Installation view at the Van Abbemuseum. Photo: Peter Cox.

]

Martha Rosler: Is journalism a public good, and if so, should it be non-commercial?

JA: This is a very interesting question. It concerns the way intellectual information that is cloneable loses its scarcity value almost instantly, and economic interactions are all about scarcity. Intellectual works are inherently different from other economic works, which have built-in scarcity value. For example, this cup in front of us is expensive to duplicate, though it may have been inexpensive to produce. Its value can never be removed to make another cup like it, whereas with a news story or a work of fiction, the cost of producing another digital copy is essentially zero. There is a completely different kind of economy associated with cloneable material, material that can't have any forced scarcity. For example, $E=mc^2$ continues to be important in all sorts of ways, yet it has a scarcity of zero. There is an infinite supply of $E=mc^2$, so it should probably be a public good, and in some cases we recognize this. With scientific papers, we understand that once something in science has been discovered to be important, it spreads very quickly. And it is impossible to profit from its scarcity value, or to even keep it scarce. It very quickly becomes an infinite good, and there's an infinite supply of it. As a result, successful societies have set up mechanisms to fund scientists who produce those very important infinite goods. Perhaps the same could be true for journalism, but the most important journalism is journalism that holds government to account, and holds powerful organizations to account. And there is no significant tradition anywhere in the world of state-funded, aggressive, investigative journalism—this has always been funded by readers or advertisers, which is easy to understand. It is by holding these powerful people to account that the funding gets cut off. So it is not clear how funding such a group would be practical. Maybe one could specify in a constitution that some taxes must go toward this, but then there would need to be a way to administer how this tax, if even collected, is dispensed. That becomes a political function, suffering from all the problems political functions have.

Martha Rosler: You have compared your original conception of WikiLeaks to the mathematics collective with the fictional identity Nicolas Bourbaki, but then decided to allow yourself to become the public face of WikiLeaks. Because of the allegations of sexual misconduct, however, hostile forces (governments and journalists) have attempted to divert the conversation and target the accomplishments of WikiLeaks. Do you regret becoming the face of WikiLeaks? Was your decision to do so a source of friction and dissent among the WikiLeaks volunteers/members?

JA: No, there was no friction or dissent. It was a forced move—there was no choice but to gradually reveal that I was the founder of WikiLeaks. There is something quite interesting, though, that factored into the handling. Earlier on, I was very annoyed by the interest among journalists and the public in the person representing this organization. It was my view that they should just stop writing about us. But actually, we've always had this problem of the press writing much more about us than about the material that we release. Now they finally write more about material we release than they do about us. With this, I came to understand that the public is right to want to see individual human beings taking responsibility for the actions of an organization, because if the organization fails in some manner, there is someone to blame for its failures. Our memories are good at coupling actions with individuals, and more complex systems with particular individuals that are responsible for those systems. Those cognitive simplifiers are actually necessary for people to remember and understand and predict the behavior of an organization.

Martha Rosler: Are you willing and able to assist Bradley Manning, or is that better left to others?

JA: We have to be quite careful in how we assist Manning, or other accused sources, in that too much assistance or concrete and citable forms of assistance could be used to infer a connection between the source and us—not in any strictly factual manner, but rather before a jury, or in the court of public opinion. That is something that has needed very delicate handling, and something for which all alleged sources will continue to need delicate handling—on the one hand, in order to support them, but, on the other hand, to avoid making their situation any worse by supporting them. Of course, it would make us look very good to offer local support in different ways, but we would not be doing a favor for these people who are in very difficult situations by being seen as too closely associated with them.

Martha Rosler: Is there an effective way to support you if the US succeeds in extraditing you? Have you set up a cadre to substitute for you if you are incarcerated?

JA: The last time I was incarcerated, WikiLeaks continued publishing. The organization is robust to that extent. As for supporting me if I am extradited, I would say that it would be way too late. If people want to support us, they need to do it before I am extradited, or before any of our other people are arrested. It's not as if I'm the only one

with difficulties. The United States government has detained volunteers and others who have filled in for us at speaking arrangements, or people who are merely trying to raise money for Bradley Manning. These individuals were released, but they have been detained on multiple occasions and have had equipment seized. The FBI has been trying to bribe individuals. There's an attempt to round people up around Boston. There's an attempt to find people who may have been acting as intermediaries between sources in the United States and WikiLeaks. But if I'm extradited to the United States, or if one of our other people is arrested in the United States, they will be placed in maximum security for many years while some trial progresses, and their safety in that situation will not be guaranteed. Even if they're technically innocent under the law, which probably anyone within WikiLeaks is—as I know that our activities are protected under the First Amendment—the verdict is still not guaranteed, due to of the degree of national security sector influence in the judicial process. Such a trial would almost certainly take place in Alexandria, Virginia. That's where they have deliberately set up the grand jury. There's a reason why the grand jury is in that location: Alexandria, Virginia has the highest density of military contractors in United States. Their families are all around there, and there is a jury selection rule that states that you cannot disqualify a jury member based on the employment of their spouse. The US government chooses to have all its high-profile national security cases there for precisely that reason.

[figure c945f9f6e63abec4a37e8b6da0547db8.jpg Philippe Parreno, *Speech Bubbles (black)*, 2007. Mylar balloons, helium. Courtesy of the artist and Friedrich Petzel Gallery, New York. Photo: Milgrammer.

]

Superflex: Do you not fear that WikiLeaks, because of the very powerful reaction to it by organized structures/systems, will prevent similar types of organizations from emerging in the future, since the same model will be financially, technically, and politically strangled early on? WikiLeaks can do its work now because it has created a global network of supporters, but I fear that other organizations will be destroyed before they manage to reach a larger level of importance or public awareness.

JA: I think the attacks on us by Visa, PayPal, MasterCard, Bank of America, PostFinance, Moneybookers, and other US companies—predominantly banks and financial intermediaries—is the most interesting revelation that has come out of what we've been doing. Like the Pentagon Papers case, the reaction and overreaction of the state and other groups involved in it will be seen to be one of the most important outcomes of the revelation itself. What we see is that the United States, in its reaction to us, behaved no differently than the Soviet Union in the 1960s towards Solzhenitsyn, and in the 1970s towards Sakharov, just in a more modern way. Previous censorship actions in the West have been more subtle, more nuanced, and harder to see, but here we have a case of absolutely naked, flagrant, extrajudicial state censorship working through the private sector. I have said before that censorship is always an opportunity. The signal that censorship sends off reveals the fear of reform, and therefore the possibility of reform. In this case, what we see is a clear signal that those structures are not merely hypocritical, but rather that they are threatened in a way that they have not been previously. From this, we can see, on one hand, extraordinary hypocrisy from the entire White House with regard to the importance of the freedom of speech, and, on the other hand, a betrayal of those statements—an awful betrayal of the values of the US Revolution. In spite of this, when such a quantity of quality information is released, we have the opportunity to rattle this structure enough that we have a chance of achieving some significant reforms. Some of those, perhaps, are just being felt, while others will take a while, because of the cascade of cause and effect.

[figure e7a761b21ff4e57e145c7ad69391f2f7.jpg Martha Rosler, *Red Stripe Kitchen*, 1967–72. From the series "Bringing the War Home, House Beautiful."
]

How are we actually dealing with that? We are increasing our sophistication in gaining ways of working around this. We have worked our way around PayPal, Visa, and MasterCard. Bank-to-bank transfers are working now for everything except bank transfers going through Bank of America. If we win, which I think we will, we will continue as an organization, and it will actually be encouraging. Those discouraging financial attacks will be encouraging to other organizations in the sense that we got through them. Regardless of whether we win or lose, they provide encouragement for people to set up alternative financial conveyance structures, and that is a really positive outcome, because the fiscal censorship that was used against us, as a sort of digital McCarthyism, is something that does affect other organizations. It's rare for it to affect publishing organizations, which is why this case is so remarkable. It's also rare for it to be used so flagrantly. It's a fiscal, boycott used against a number of other forms of organizations, such as activist organizations, guerilla organizations, revolutionary organizations from many different parts of the world, or organizations that are simply not large enough and or do not have enough bureaucratic resources to deal with all the incredible paperwork demanded by some of the financial intermediaries. I actually think that's quite a hopeful outcome.

[figure 5eb8e3f4f085498d5115ecd24d65c08c.jpg When asked during the interview to write a mathematical formula for WikiLeaks, Julian Assange wrote simply "Publish or Perish."

]

HUO: And it could lead to new structures—new alternative economies and new forms of exchange!

JA: Yes, exactly. New forms of exchange, new forms of currency, new alternative means of economic interaction other than going through banks. And I've seen that. It has actually accelerated the development of a number of different projects that aim to provide a new form of exchange.

[figure splitpage
facf882383db989c0ebcd5a00249dfad.jpg
SUPERFLEX, *COPYSHOP*, 2005-7. The COPYSHOP project was a store where products, which challenge intellectual property, such as modified originals, improved copies, political anti-brands, were sold. It intended to discuss the control of value in the same place where it is produced and distributed: the market.

]

Superflex: What do you think about copyright and intellectual property or the system of rights, as we in Superflex like to call it, and what about the struggle for free culture? What is your opinion on this?

JA: With respect to copyright, I mentioned earlier that intellectual goods that can be copied are inherently different from every other type of good. That is, they do not fall into existing economic theories—they require separate economic theories and a separate type of economy. The example used by Richard Stallman is one I quite like: if you have the ability to make free loaves of bread, you bake your first loaf of bread, and this requires some investment, but every additional loaf of bread you bake is for free. These loaves of bread are so amazing that all you have to do is give one of them to someone else and they can make their own loaves of bread for free, at zero cost. It is actually criminal, then, to not give this to people, because these loaves of bread can go around and feed everyone. Of course, this is an extreme analogy, but for some forms of intellectual goods, it applies. And we can see that it's actually quite wrong to call them goods—they are something else, and we're trying to shoehorn an existing understanding of physical matter and economics into something that just does not behave in the same way. WikiLeaks, in practice, receives many copyright threats. According to the more strict definitions of copyright, every single thing we publish breaches copyright. In the more grounded interpretations of copyright, such as those that exist in the United States Constitution, nothing we publish is a breach of copyright because copyright was originally designed—at least following its original political argument and justification—to potentiate a greater economy. It was not there to protect the internal documents of a company from being exposed to the public. And it certainly was not there to protect government documents in cases where the Crown claims copyright over all government documents. The use of copyright to suppress revelations of the abuse of power by companies or governments is, in itself, an abuse of these basic notions that authors, rather than opportunists, should be making the majority of money from the production of books, and those basic notions are what led to the development of copyrights in the first place.

[figure partialpage
f557a312fd72510cd5647f88af911f68.jpg
Ai Weiwei, *June 1994*, 1994. Black and white photograph, 121 x 155 cm.

]

Ai Weiwei: As a perfect example of how individuals can act against collective power, such as the state, what do you think about the future of this trend? How can individuals use their power to question state power?

JA: There are many technical and practical responses to this question. But this is just not a matter of things that may be useful or practical to do. I think a certain philosophical attitude is needed. And it is this attitude that then pulls together the practical considerations that must be part of a realization of that attitude. So, we encourage the people and our supporters to understand that courage is contagious. It's a practical reality that, for example, most revolutions start in public squares. Why is that? It's not like there are more people in a public square. You still have the same number of people in the population, whether they are in their homes, in the street, or in the public square. But in a public square, if there are a few courageous people, everyone else in the public square can see the courage of those individuals and it starts to spread.

HUO: Like in Egypt last month?

JA: Just as in Egypt. And the more it spreads, the more it spreads, and at some point there's a runaway cascade, and people realize that they are the ones with the numbers. This is why Tiananmen Square is so heavily policed in China, because it's a congregation point where courage can spread like a contagion. I think first it's necessary to have an understanding that one is either a participant in history or a victim of it, and that there is no other option. It is actually not possible to remove oneself from history, because of the nature of economic interaction, and the nature of intellectual interaction. Hence, it is not possible to break oneself off. Once you have this understanding that you can either be a victim of history or a participant, I say that because no one wants to be a victim, one must therefore be a participant, and in being a participant, the most important thing to understand is that your behavior affects other people's behavior, and your courage will inspire actions. On the other hand, a lack of courage will suppress them. There's another view I have about how to frame how one proceeds. Many people say, oh, Julian, you're being very courageous with what you're doing, and therefore you

must be fearless. I say, no, I feel fear just like any other person. In fact, people who don't feel fear are dangerous to themselves and to others. Fear is a very good and important instinct to have. Courage is not the absence of fear. On the contrary, courage is the intellectual mastery of fear. Courage is all about understanding—understanding what the terrain is, and understanding your own abilities and limits in order to thereby plot a safe and effective path through the terrain. It is not about foolishly and fearlessly engaging an opponent. It's about understanding first, and then carefully and decisively engaging the opponent.

Metahaven: First, is WikiLeaks a movement rather than an organization?

JA: The values that I have espoused and hold dear, and have put into the DNA of WikiLeaks, which have then been expressed by WikiLeaks as an organism, as a functional organization, have inspired a movement. There's an interaction between the organization and this movement, which is fluid, but it is also a distinct, operational group. Independent sub-operations have now sprung up everywhere, and these sub-operations interact with us. So I suppose that this could actually be like most movements, where there is an inner core and there is widespread support among people, and then there is more organized local support.

Metahaven: WikiLeaks has a great deal of support in the third world. Why is that?

JA: For the third world, we do have really, very strong support. And in languages other than English, we have stronger support than in English-speaking countries. The reason seems to be that we have done a lot of work over the past four years in many different countries. But the highest profile work we've done has been in the past six months. And that work is related to the United States, which has attacked us in an aggressive manner. In August, the Pentagon made an ultimatum that this organization and I, personally, must destroy everything that we had ever published about the Pentagon, including all upcoming publications, and cease to deal with US military whistleblowers, and if we did not agree to do that, we would be compelled to do so. When asked by a reporter at the press conference which mechanism would be used to compel us, Geoff Morrell, the Pentagon spokesperson, stated that the Department of Defense was not concerned about matters of law. The third world, the developing world, has been continually placed in a subservient role to Western nations over the past 200 years or more, and in particular has been frequently exploited and victimized by United States since World War II. So there is a natural affinity for our position from small states and other organizations that have suffered as a result of US support for dictatorships within those countries, or for other forms of abuse of those populations.

Metahaven: Our final question: Can art play a role in advancing the cause of WikiLeaks?

JA: Of course. I wouldn't be doing this interview if I didn't think that art could play a role in supporting us. At the moment, the ideological front line has been drawn, and we're now engaged in bitter trench warfare, insofar as the mainstream press is concerned. We have a large number of people on the outside, there are a large number of opponents, and this front line takes a lot of energy to move. The press has an influence on the bulk of the population, but actually there are places where there are no front lines, yet. The art world has a way of coming through in a more indirect manner, pulling on people's emotions in a way they weren't expecting. Similarly, just in terms of practical connections, the art world is able to reach powerful people through the back door, through their sons and daughters, through their wives, through their grandmothers, and through moments when they're least expecting it. In this way, I believe that if the art world is able to distill some of the important values of what we're doing, and the lessons to be learned from the opposition to what we're doing, and present it in such a way that it calls on the better values of these people, or the values that they aspire to, then this is a psychological inroad into particular sections of the culture that are connected to people who oppose us and who would support us, but who do not yet.

Paul Chan: Recently, a Slovenian philosopher wrote about you, comparing you to the Joker in Batman movies. It seems flattering, but I wonder. I wanted to first ask you whether or not you think that comparison is right, and, if not, if there are other characters in movies or in literature, or even in philosophy, that you identify with.

My second question is more general. Are there pieces of text or a book or work of literature that you read or return to, to find sources of thought or imagination as you fight with what seems to be every government on earth? I'm just curious to know where you find your imaginative resources as you go through the extradition trial and all the things that you have gone through. Lastly, thanks for what you're doing—good luck.

JA: They're two very good questions, actually. Unexpected. I have read that Zižek piece. I actually am rather fond of Zižek, but that piece was facile. I had the impression that he actually doesn't know much about the situation and was responding to market demand and writing quickly. So I was struck when I saw a video of a lecture by Zižek—not just by his curiously autistic lecturing style in which he keeps pulling at his t-shirt, but rather exactly the same impression that I had. Donald Rumsfeld said that there were known knowns, known unknowns, and unknown unknowns. When I heard Rumsfeld say this, I immediately said, well, he's missed one permutation, which is that there are unknown knowns. Zižek also spotted this, though it could be true that anyone who's had some logical math background would. This fear

of the Joker that Zižek comes up with is typically of a sort of shallow mainstream media mythmaking, some James Bond villain figure. There's so much demand for information about us, and about me, at the same time as there are also such strong forces influencing news content in particular directions—not in some sort of conspiratorial sense, with the White House bringing in key editors to tell them to write something, although that actually does happen in relation to national security reportage, and has happened to us. Rather, the general malaise of the powerful spreads down into these large mainstream media groups because they are so close to power, and it travels through editors and journalists all the way down into the general community. That, combined with demand for information about us, which we do not serve, results in people writing, reinterpreting, inventing, or trying to come up with information about us. That then starts to be whipped around, cut and pasted, edited and reedited. The end result of this information cycling is a game of telephone that reveals the internal contours of the media economy, the internal contours of journalists' minds, and the internal contours of political pressure upon the media economy. Ultimately, it creates myths. It takes small features and makes them large. It takes other large features and makes them small. When you're actually in the heat of it yourself, you become very aware of it, because you know what really happened, because you were there. To then see the level of distortion grow and grow and grow on its own without any fresh input becomes really quite an interesting process to observe.

As for inspirational texts, well, there isn't one in particular. But when I was in prison, I read *Cancer Ward* by Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn, and I've been a long-term appreciator of Solzhenitsyn and other Russian literature.

[figure 5dbde39543dac1976acbb1def32c01fe.jpg
Paul Chan, *Oh, why so serious?*, 2008. Plastic and electronics, computer keyboard.

]

HUO: Who else besides Solzhenitsyn? Tolstoy?

JA: Oh, Pasternak and Dostoyevsky, and yes, Tolstoy when I was younger, and Bulgakov, though he's a Ukrainian who wrote in Russian. *Cancer Ward* is a wonderful book. Solzhenitsyn was in a cancer ward after being released from prison and exiled in Siberia, and he draws parallels between experiences in a Soviet labor camp and a hospital ward, but also uses these as a way to get at power relationships within a Sovietized state. But having cancer in a cancer ward is even worse than being locked in the basement of Wandsworth Prison in solitary confinement. So I found it oddly cheering.

HUO: There's one last question that came in by SMS from Philippe Parreno, and it ties in with Paul Chan's question: What is the most beautiful story you've ever heard?

JA: I'm very fond of Russian children's cartoons from the 1970s and 80s. These cartoons embody the highest representation of childhood and beauty and innocence and curiosity—all together. This is terribly underappreciated in Western society in this particular period. For something that I find beautiful, this is what comes to mind instantly.

X

Hans Ulrich Obrist is a Swiss curator and art critic. In 1993, he founded the Museum Robert Walser and began to run the Migrateurs program at the Musée d'Art Moderne de la Ville de Paris where he served as a curator for contemporary art. In 1996 he co-curated Manifesta 1, the first edition of the roving European biennial of contemporary art. He presently serves as the Co-Director, Exhibitions and Programmes and Director of International Projects at the Serpentine Gallery in London.

Luis Camnitzer

Museums and Universities

Having been educated in Latin America in the fifties, I was subject to two apparently contradictory premises. On the one hand, art was thought of as a weapon for social improvement. On the other, art was seen as the territory for individual freedom. Looking back at the past half century, it seems that my generation's main task was probably to bring together both premises in one continuum. One way of doing so was to follow the process of institutional critique that had started in the university reforms in Cordoba, Argentina in 1918. The other was to think in terms of the distribution of power and the ownership of order. This second perspective in particular made it possible for us to see art as the territory where one explores alternative systems of order that enable critical questioning of the status quo, thus offering a glimpse of this sought-after continuum. Unexpectedly, I became very aware of all this during the controversy around the threat to close Brandeis University's Rose Art Museum in January 2009.

Some questions immediately come to mind: What educational role does a university museum really play? What is the loss and what are its implications for the students if such a museum is closed? These questions were followed by potentially unappealing recognitions, such as the acknowledgement that if, for budget reasons, I had to choose between cutting a medical program or an art program, I would cut the latter. The thing is, I wouldn't cut art over medicine because I believe that art is less important. I would cut it because, given the way art is placed in the educational system, the choice posed here is one pertaining crafts rather than substance. As substance, artistic thinking is more important than medical thinking, since art may inform and contribute to the latter, while the opposite is less likely. However, as crafts go, a surgeon is more important for society than a painter is. So, for a real answer about the elimination of an art museum from a university one would have to qualify the question in terms of what kind of museum we are talking about, and actually also what kind of university.

University art museums have a rather murky role in that they are closer to independent art museums than to universities. In fact, they tend to equate real life with the museum environment, since, educationally speaking, they are its corresponding labs. Rarely is the university art museum used to enhance what is taught in other disciplines in the university. Most educational programs in art museums (whether affiliated with a university or not) are conceived as appendices to exhibitions and organized in the rarefied spheres of scholarship and blockbusting, mostly with the intention of assisting the latter. The entrance of the public has a marked priority over their exit. Oddly enough, this commonplace problem for independent art museums carries on to university art museums. The educational component is defined by the way more curators are formed and by the refinement of the public's appreciation of art, not by a more complex analysis of the possible purposes of education.

Vigil at the Rose Art Museum. Photo: christianrholland.

At best, the function of a university art museum can be translated as forming better salespeople and better-informed customers, with a prime concern for the maintenance and development of its own collections, added to the forming of personnel for the collections of others.

As an example, we can consider the mission statement of a university art museum, as published on their website:

> The Rose Art Museum of Brandeis University is an educational and cultural institution dedicated to collecting, preserving and exhibiting the finest of modern and contemporary art. The programs of the Rose adhere to the overall mission of the University, embracing its values of academic excellence, social justice, and freedom of expression.[1]

More important on the educational level, though without any elaboration, the statement ends with: "It promotes learning and understanding of the evolving meanings, ideas, and forms of visual art relevant to contemporary society."

For the first part, it is not clear why a university cannot coordinate with other museums to pursue this objective instead of spending money on redundancy. Secondly, if the museum's programs were that important, closing the museum would be equivalent to closing any other department that could be financed by the sale of the collection. Accordingly, the choice to deaccession artworks from the Rose would require a better justification than a financial crisis. As it is, university art museums seem to play a bigger role in public relations than they do in education, and the diversion of funds for this purpose can be compared to the allocation of resources to maintain football and basketball teams. After all, the prestige of both athletics departments and university art museums seems to elicit more donations than any academic performance.

Following the announcement on January 26, 2009, made by Jehuda Reinharz, President of Brandeis University, that the Rose would be closing, protests by students, faculty, and the arts community erupted. These mostly concerned the lack of consultation with the community and, given the quality of the collection, the implications of dismantling such a collection of objects. Some complaints also addressed the impact the closing would have on specialized studies like art history. However, a few days later, in a February 5 letter of retraction to the Brandeis community (he confessed "I screwed up"), Reinharz made a potentially interesting point: "The Museum will remain open, but in accordance with the Board's vote, it will be more fully integrated into the University's central educational mission."[2]

Although the ways in which this integration would be realized are not explained and will probably not be elaborated, the statement seems to defy the image of a museum bent on collection and a university committed to disciplinary fragmentation. What could be defined as guidelines for a possible taxonomy of knowledge seems like an antiquated approach that explains, but does not justify, the subdivisions used for what is essentially an amorphous cultural flow. It better reflects the organization and distribution of power than that of knowledge, a problem whose origins may be historically embedded in the processes of institutionalization and the intentions that guide these subdivisions.

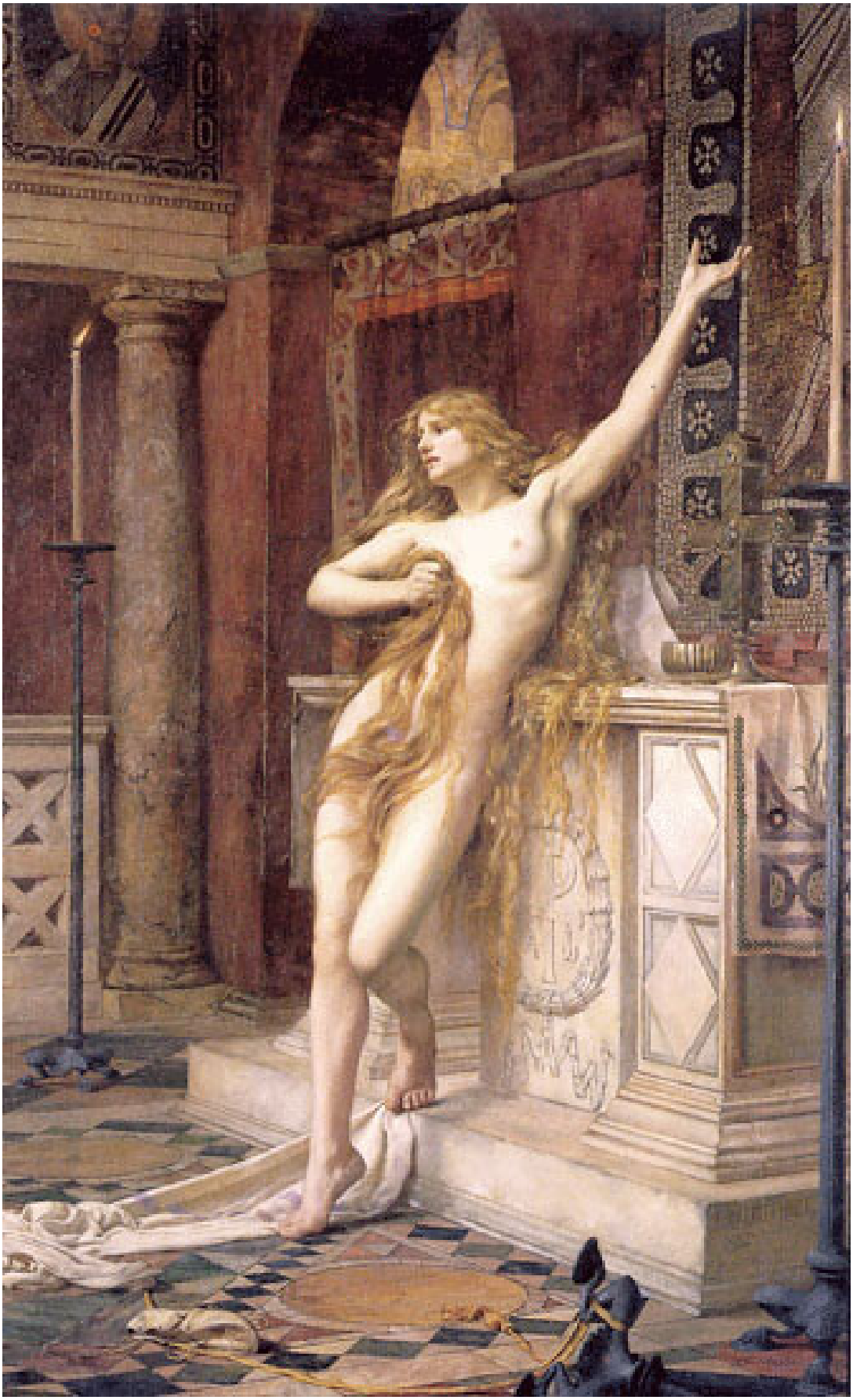
Back in 306 AD, Demetrius Phalereus approached Ptolemy I and suggested that two edifices should be constructed: a library and an institution to honor the muses. The library became the famous Library of Alexandria, dedicated to store all the written knowledge of the time. The institution to honor the muses, the *Mouseion*, was basically a university whose function was to displace Egyptian culture to make room for Greek culture.[3] After all, Ptolemy had been one of Alexander the Great's distinguished generals and was agreeable to the imperative to cement Greek imperialism: both institutions were meant to collect, organize, and disseminate available information in a particular order of power and things. As such, the institutions were intended to set and stabilize this order and exclude or minimize any alternative order that might come up.

However, fate had it that at some point this ownership of order and the criteria that guided it did not agree with other established or aspiring orders. As a consequence, both institutions were destroyed several times. In one of the many instances, seven hundred years later, the archbishop of the region accused the Library's co-director Hypatia of witchery. Shortly after, her body was meticulously dismembered and its remains burnt in front of a public satisfied with God's justice rather than that of the Greeks.

The discrepancies about the ownership of order led to bombings and arsons of similar institutions during wars, or totalitarian vandalism during political upheaval, or, more recently, simple budget cuts. Generally speaking, however, the situation of libraries and museums has improved over time. Also, the university function has separated from the museum function and taken off on its own. Nevertheless, some traits of the original intentions for both the Alexandrian library and museum continue to this day; namely, collectionism and exhibitionism. These features also became present in the private sphere as fetishism and ostentation.

The museum is still defined as a repository of works, one that, according to its consensual quality, gives cultural standing to whoever owns it. Those that don't own collections become envious, which explains why, upon their independence in the nineteenth century, former colonies in Latin America quickly created their own museums. Since the major powers had museums, every former colony felt that in order to be a dignified country they had to have them as well. Interestingly enough, due to economic constraints, these first museums were interdisciplinary and not specialized. The same exhibition hall would show national symbols, botanical and zoological specimens, stones with geological or archeological interest, and examples of local art enriched by international pieces imported by rich travelers with a philanthropic inclination. From an educational point of view, these museums were much more efficient than what we have today. They stimulated curiosity and nourished imagination. They were not competitive institutions that affirmed their importance by saying, "we have the Mona Lisa and you don't." And yet, they functioned so as to generate cultural gatekeepers and to assert standards of order. This was more important than the impossible task of closing the gap with the metropolitan centers. It is not a coincidence that in order to see masterpieces today, one still has to take a trip to a cultural center. Even when some of those works travel, they do so to places that can pay millions for insurance and where there are spaces with impeccable climate and security controls. These conditions tend to exist, redundantly, in other cultural centers.

Museum collections therefore automatically divide the public into those who have access and those who don't—a fact that can sometimes deteriorate into chauvinism. A few years ago, Philippe de Montebello, Director of the Metropolitan Museum of Art, complained about some countries' demands to return pieces they considered stolen and rightfully belonging in their national collections. On occasion of the suits leveled by Italy against the Getty Museum, de Montebello told the *New York Times*: "I am puzzled by the zeal with which the United States rushes to embrace foreign laws that can ultimately deprive its own citizens of important objects useful to the education and delectation of its own citizens."[4]



Charles William Mitchell, Hypatia of Alexandria, 1885. Oil on canvas.

Still, one cannot entirely condemn the museums' collection drive. One can, however, criticize how they do it by pointing out the difference between having and showing. This becomes particularly clear when museums live off handouts. The Guggenheim provided a classic example in 1987, when it celebrated its fiftieth birthday with a cycle of exhibitions. The Latin American section included thirty-seven works and upon seeing them, one would assume Argentina to be the most important art country in Latin America (eleven artists out of twenty-seven in the exhibition), followed by Chile and Venezuela (three artists each), Colombia and Mexico (two) and the remaining countries with one artist each. Among the latter was Cuba, represented by one Wifredo Lam piece, and Uruguay with one by Torres García. Furthermore, one discovered that the crucial period for Latin American art was in the mid-sixties (sixteen of the works were dated between 1963 and 1967). According to the collection, the most important Latin American artist (the only artist with the maximum of three pieces) was Venezuelan painter Jacobo Borges. Twenty-four pieces of the thirty-seven were donations, thirteen of which came from Latin American funds.[5]

Exhibitionism, generally mentioned as a curatorial activity, is what puts a collection in order. Collecting does not imply order—it only refers to acquisition and storage. Sometimes one category of things excludes another, but collecting is about possession and not order. Once one puts the things in order, the question of who owns the stuff becomes secondary. Even authorship may become irrelevant. What matters is that there is a clear idea behind the order, since to underline some things also means to hide others. If I show art from the US, I am excluding non-US art, so that there can be no question about the essence of US art. The curator places the collection in the context of a discourse.

It is in the construction and use of this discourse that the distinction between curator and artist become blurry. The discourse or thesis of the curator may contradict the discourse of the artist, because the curator extrapolates from the presentation of artworks in a way that is not necessarily determined by the artists' original intentions. Accordingly, the exhibition becomes a meta-creation that uses specific creations by artists to serve the curator's purpose.

Regardless of the agreement or conflict with the artist, since the exhibitionist order is explicitly created for a public, a series of responsibilities come into play. One of these is for the order to be interesting for the public it addresses. Some years ago, the Reina Sofia in Madrid presented an exhibition in which works were grouped according to color. One room had only white pieces, another room red ones, and there was even a golden one. I have to presume that the public targeted was formed by interior decorators. I only happened to see this exhibition because I visited the museum in order to see something else, but the nonsensical impact was strong enough to make me forget my reason for going to the Reina Sofia that day. There were many interesting pieces that enabled me to re-curate the show for my own purposes, and this personal reorganization has made me think of three general problems:

1. The order of the exhibition has to be interesting for the particular public it addresses. If it is not, the public may declare it stupid or banal, as in my case. To be fair, there was a catalog where the curator (who had some international stature) probably wrote an intelligent essay making a case for that arrangement. But if this were the case it would mean that the public was divided into those who buy the catalog and those who don't.

2. The order has to be adjusted to the expectations of the public it addresses, as well as the public that normally visits the space. The Reina Sofía, I believe, mostly draws people interested in art and less so people interested in interior design. This is what allows me to declare the exhibition as lacking interest. However, I would have judged it differently had the show been part of a commercial fair dedicated to furniture.

3. The curatorial order has to reveal something that wasn't evident before that order was proposed. In other words, the show has to be instructive and the curator must be an educator.

Order may be private or public. A friend of mine owns an enormous collection of classical music. His CDs fill the walls of a whole big room, floor to ceiling. What is interesting here is that they are chronologically organized by the composer's date of birth. The order is eccentric because, to his wife's despair, the owner and recipient of that order is just one person.

Then there is what we can call a public order. Here, there is a distance between the owner and the recipient. The word "order" acquires its double meaning of organization and directives for behavior. In this double interpretation, the owner of the order is the power structure. The order is codified in laws, decrees, and protocols, or is simply expressed through abuse of power.

It is here that art becomes a fundamental activity because it is one of the important tools in creating alternative orders. Using what is essentially a private order, the artist challenges the established and public order by proposing others. When the artist is good, his or her systems are unexpected and revealing. They subvert and expand existing knowledge, at least for the brief instant that passes between creation and the assimilation of the contribution.

The museum curator is somewhat trapped between the artist's private order and the public order. On one hand, the curator represents an institution, and institutions are

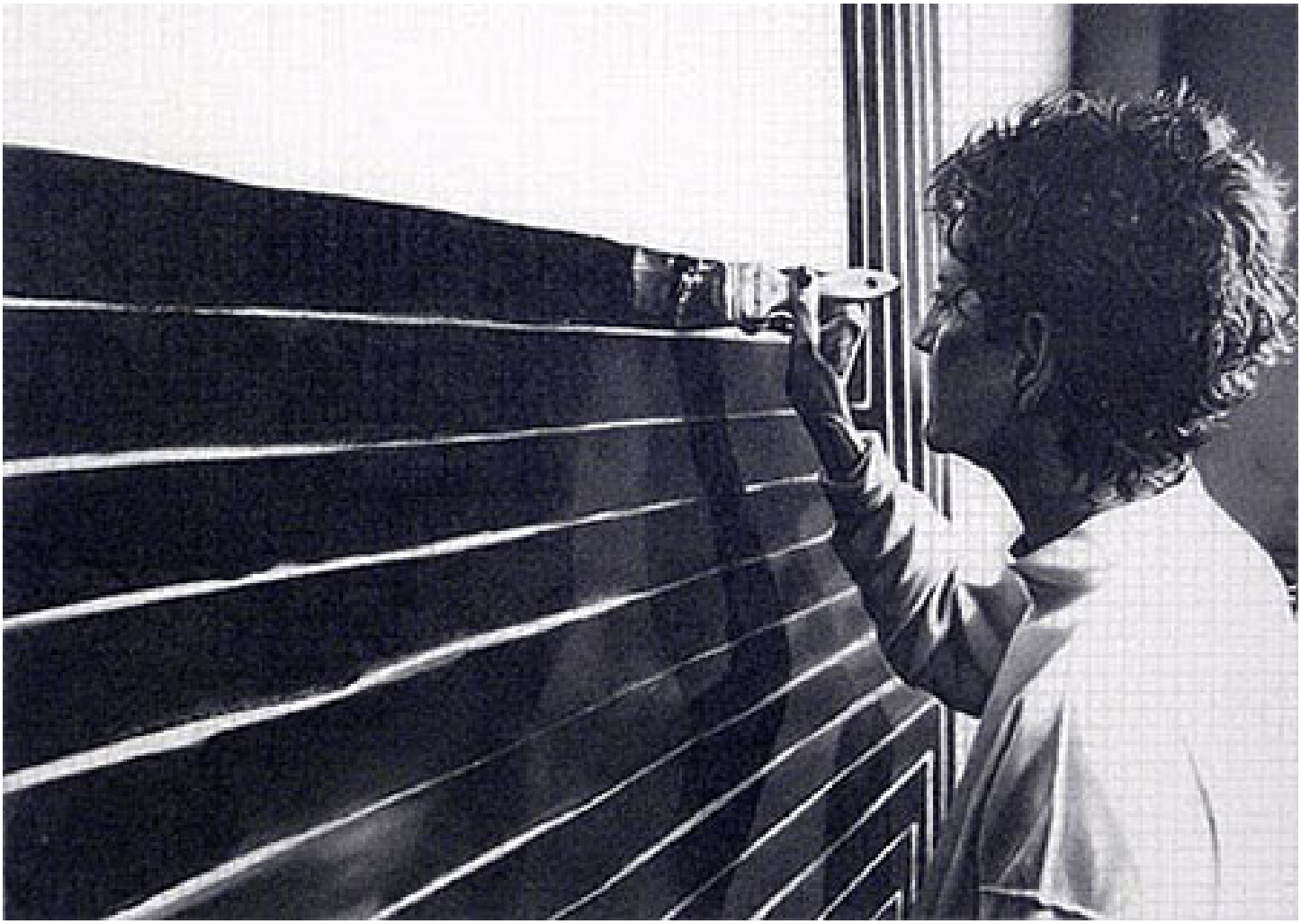
Cildo Meireles, Red Shift I: Impregnation (detail), 1967-1984, Collection Inhotim Centro de Arte Contemporânea, Minas Gerais, Brazil.

part of the structure that determines public order, or are at least suspiciously close to that power. Therefore, the freedom of the curator to present alternative orders is somewhat limited. As an artist, one could make offensively pornographic art. As a curator, it is more difficult to organize an exhibition of that work. Nevertheless, one of the tendencies of curatorship is to find an order that is alternative enough to enable a personal recognition that transcends institutional praise. This is what leads to the proliferation of diva-curators.

The curator's choices are: (1) to represent his or her institution for its prestige and glory, (2) to represent his or her own prestige and glory, and (3) to represent the artists included in an exhibition and to act as a spokesperson for them. The three possibilities do not exclude each other; they generally appear intertwined, though in different doses. In the first version, the curator is mostly a bureaucrat, in the second a meta-artist where artists are used as pawns on a board where the game is being played. It is here that curatorship and making art intersect.

Inasmuch as the curator is the author of the "game" (or thesis) that is being presented, and it is an interesting contribution, it may be seen as a cultural contribution and not as an exploitation of the artist. There are also reverse cases (one could call them artists' revenge), such as during the 1980s when Group Material organized thematic exhibitions, featuring the works of colleagues, as larger works of art.

The third possibility, of the curator as a spokesperson and mediator, is probably the most important, culturally speaking. The good spokesperson integrates the other two functions, but stands firmly on a platform given by the artists' intentions rather than on that of the curator, and helps the public to access that platform. The institutional connections are kept, but as a mediator it is the artist's and the public's interests that are being defended. The curator's creative energy is maintained, but used to articulate and promote the work of the artist. Unfortunately, it often happens that artists lack clarity in what they are doing and the curator may help to clarify ideas. The artist tends to work individually, while the curator knows the general context of what other artists are producing in similar discourses. Thus, the curator may draw convincing connections and act as a megaphone. It is a didactic function that requires scruples and



Elaine Sturtevant painting a Frank Stella.

consultation with the artists.

In their increasingly specialized task of collecting and indexing, as in libraries, and collecting and exhibiting, as in museums, the original integrated notions of the Alexandria Mouseion got lost. The Mouseion's main task was one of transculturation, the substitution of local culture for a new colonizing one. Once that is not needed anymore, the main task of educational institutions becomes enculturation. To this effect, both libraries and museums became deposits of references. Universities became the places for learning that use those references and, for practicality and prestige, they sometimes house those same references. From that point of view, the closing of a university museum is probably something regrettable, but not a thing of much educational consequence, since the problems lie much deeper.

Many years ago, on my way to give a lecture on art education in a university in Bogotá, I saw the word *educastration* in graffiti on a wall. It captured the soul of the state of affairs and gave me lots of fuel for my lecture.

Twenty-five years later, the same university invited me again to talk about the same subject. On the way this second time, I glimpsed another word sprayed on a wall. It was *educreation*. It once again fueled my lecture, not with optimism, but with the awe inspired by the extreme and accurate synthesis of complex ideas. It seems quite obvious that if the guidelines were to be *educreation* and the arts were used accordingly, there would be some invulnerability to budget cuts. At least the feeling of dispensing with the luxury of decoration would be gone.

Louise Lawler, Untitled (Martin and Mike), 1992. Cibachrome, crystal, and felt paperweight. Courtesy the Artist and Metro Pictures.

X

Luis Camnitzer is a Uruguayan artist who has lived in the USA since 1964, and an emeritus professor of art at the State University of New York, College at Old Westbury. He was the Viewing Program Curator for The Drawing Center, New York, from 1999 to 2006. In 2007, he was the pedagogical curator for the 6th Bienal del Mercosur. He was pedagogical curator for the Iberê Camargo Foundation in Porto Alegre, and is presently pedagogical advisor for the Cisneros Foundation. He is the author of *New Art of Cuba* (1994/2004) and *Conceptualism in Latin American Art: Didactics of Liberation* (2007), both from University of Texas Press.

1
See http://www.brandeis.edu/rose/aboutus/mission.html . The full statement is: “The Rose Art Museum of Brandeis University is an educational and cultural institution dedicated to collecting, preserving and exhibiting the finest of modern and contemporary art. The programs of the Rose adhere to the overall mission of the University, embracing its values of academic excellence, social justice, and freedom of expression. An active participant in the academic, cultural, and social life of Brandeis, the Rose seeks to stimulate public awareness and disseminate knowledge of modern and contemporary art to enrich educational, cultural, and artistic communities regionally, nationally, and internationally. The Rose affirms the principle that knowledge of the past informs an understanding of the present and provides the critical foundation for shaping the future. It promotes learning and understanding of the evolving meanings, ideas, and forms of visual art relevant to contemporary society.”

2
See https://ejewishphilanthropy.com/brandeis-president-issues-apology/ .

3
Fernando Báez, *A Universal History of the Destruction of Books* (New York: Atlas & Co., 2008), 44–45.

4
Randy Kennedy and Hugh Eakins, “Met Chief, Unbowed, Defends Museum’s Role,” *New York Times*, February 28, 2006. See http://www.nytimes.com/2006/02/28/arts/28mont.html

5
Luis Camnitzer, “La colección latinoamericana del Museo Guggenheim,” *Arte en Colombia* 37 (September 1988): 31–32

Michael Baers

Inside the Box: Notes From Within the European Artistic Research Debate

1. Setting the Stage

December 4, 2010, Murcia, Spain. The lights had come on in the auditorium following a screening of *As the Academy Turns*, Tion Ang's telenovela-style exposé of machinations in the contemporary art academy, and it was time for the obligatory Q&A. The audience, professors of art and their PhD students, cautiously assayed questions concerning methodology and budget, but Ang, in the grips of an apparent somnambulism, hazarded vaguely mechanical answers and disavowed conscious intent, privileging instead notions of embodiment in producing artwork. It was his hands that wrote the script, his body that set up shots, blocked his actors, and so forth. This might have been a passable response for a sculptor, but for an artist working in video such a line of thought was oddly disconcerting. Occasionally, I glanced at the empty seat to my right, vacated some time earlier by one of my colleagues from the Center for Art Knowledge (CAK), a PhD-in-Practice program housed at the Akademie der Bildenden Künste in Vienna, who had left shortly before the screening ended, muttering darkly that she couldn't take any more. And indeed, having sat through thirty minutes of strangely non-reflexive portrayals of lesbian professors, conniving Asian temptresses, sympathetic older-lady secretaries, arrogant and professionally preoccupied male professors, and finally, a murderous Latino exchange student, I shared her desire to exit the premises. But at the same time, I was transfixed by the audience's puzzling indifference to the glaring questions of representation the work provoked, let alone the fact that its ostensible critique of the contemporary art academy focused on racial stereotypes while the structure of the institution itself was portrayed as the natural and naturalizing frame for the enactment of their respective passions.

I was pondering this gap when my colleague—let's call her "A"—returned, marching to the front of the lecture hall bearing a full rubbish bin. The video was rubbish, she proclaimed; the panelists too were rubbish. And with that, she deposited the bin's contents ceremoniously on the plywood tables behind which the discussants were seated and marched out, the auditorium's heavy doors swinging shut on a stunned audience.

Though the garbage was swiftly cleared away, the pall lingered over the following two days of presentations. This pall might even have been salutary, for it might have cast into sharp relief the deficits in a discourse that at times floundered in search of its discipline. Meanwhile, consensus had formed that we as a group were bent on purposefully disrupting the normative *habitus* of academic discourse. During the intermission periods between presentations, I would regularly be approached as I sipped my coffee and after a moment or two of polite conversation, my new acquaintance would say, "You're part of that *radical* Vienna group, aren't you?" After

acknowledging this affiliation, I would receive a pitying smile, and then my interlocutor would wander off to speak with someone more pragmatically attuned to the academic game.

Two days later, after the second presentation of the morning, the topic of A's trash can intervention was finally broached in public. The discussion commenced with an airing of certain deficits in the symposium's organization, but soon devolved into an exchange between partisans of a postcolonial position—who asserted A's action represented an act of aggression against difference—and the gender/queer theory faction arguing for a re-evaluation of what kind of violence had been perpetrated over the past two days and by whom. A well-known German filmmaker accused my colleague in the queer faction of using fascist terror tactics. Dissatisfied with the reaction this line of argument received, she appealed in exasperation to another equally well-known theorist of South-Asian ethnicity: "_____, say something!"

The latter's contribution to this debate was measured up to the point where he stated that he had mistaken A, whose appearance is androgynous, for a man, alluding to his own experience as victim of casual racist violence. With this, the discussion descended to a new level of rancor. As the vituperations continued, my attention was drawn to the Swedish contingent in gray suits, who sat rigidly face-forward, smiling enigmatically. Clearly, their strategy was to pretend they were attending a different symposium altogether.

Later, when I had the time to ponder it, I was unsure of what this exchange had meant. Was it symptomatic of a continuing struggle over who is the real subject of history after the intellectual health of its grand meta-narratives—the nation-state, the worker, the West *or* the East—had received the bleak prognosis meted out years ago by theoreticians like Lyotard, Baudrillard, and the like? Perhaps it wasn't that these narratives had expired so much as they had gone underground, exerting, in the words of Frederic Jameson, a "continuing but now *unconscious* effectivity as a way of 'thinking about' and acting in our current situation."[1] This "thinking about" our current situation appeared to have consequences for the debate over the artists' PhD, not only concerning how it envisioned its objectives, but also the development of its methodology and its discourse—a discourse apparently still mesmerized by the legitimating "myths" Lyotard addressed in 1979 in *The Postmodern Condition* concerning the narrative of science as a story either of commitment—"that of the liberation of humanity"—or of contemplation—"that of the speculative unity of all knowledge (qua 'philosophical system')."[2]

With these thoughts, I began to wonder: What exactly had I gotten involved in by deciding to pursue a PhD in art practice? What kind of institutional and discursive constructions was I becoming the subject of? Was the discourse and its situation within academia a positive development, or was there something more insidious at work? How might acceptance of the PhD in art practice come to alter the broader workings of the art world, and if I were to be involved, was it to be as a willing subject or marginalized dissident? And aside from the question of how I might be personally implicated or affected by my position within this emergent field, what kind of broader implications did it have for art's relationship to the discourse of science, to capital, to nationalism and the EU as a political body, and to art's conception of and relationship to itself—its own procedures, itineraries, competencies, and sense of political or cultural efficacy.

The latter is not without consequence, for the ongoing discourse created around the PhD enacts certain exclusions and risks a certain inanition in establishing a new kind of relationship to the institution/university as such, when, as Pierre Bourdieu writes: "position-taking changes, even when the position remains identical, whenever there is change in the universe of options that are simultaneously offered for producers and consumers to choose from."[3] This re-situation could, in a worst-case scenario, render "critical" art practices even more academic, less prone to engaged debate, and further divorced from the lay public than the present situation.

2. Confessions of a Reluctant Academic

Like the discourse of the artistic PhD itself, the following text is a bit of a Frankenstein monster—a creature comprised of bits and pieces culled from other disciplines and institutional configurations—and like the monster itself, the product passes as the outcome of reason and unreason, inhabiting a linguistic labyrinth ("whose words enclose me while I use them, nonetheless to transgress the closure they build"[4]) within academic institutional space, an invisible partitioning system in which it is easy to lose one's way. And as with the misadventures of Dr. Frankenstein, who in the filmed version is returned to the human community through recrimination, a confession is in order.

My decision to re-enter academia was not dictated exclusively by altruistic considerations. I had taught for the last two years at a Danish art academy, and when it became clear that my position would not be renewed, surveying the bleak economic landscape, I began to consider my options. Among these was the option to embark on the slew of applications that might secure me a position—possibly funded—in one of the new artistic PhD programs proliferating like mushrooms after a rain shower. This possibility, without being *purely* mercenary, was not without pragmatic calculations—calculations reflecting my position within the European art-world, as an artist with a precarious relationship both to the market

International Symposium As the Academy Turns at Manifesta 2010.

and, as an American citizen, to the European state funding bodies that support non-commercial practices. But as I read the online prospectuses of the various programs, I hesitated. While one could argue the impossibility of adequately representing institutional aims in a paragraph or two, this does not mean prospectuses cannot be read as being symptomatic of the transformations art is likely to undergo in entering the university context. Accordingly, one could infer a positivist slant in their formulation of what constitutes an artistic PhD—revealing an attitude proximate to other disciplines based on the incremental accumulation of knowledge.

As I continued reading, my irritation grew. Institutional language creates a horizon of expectations, and a yardstick by which to judge methodologies and outcomes, a ghostly rationalizing superego proposing bureaucratic objectives by inference (accumulation of cultural capital, promulgation of applied forms of artistic production) that so easily can diverge from or co-opt one's own intentions. Although the underlying aims remain markedly consistent, the way PhD programs describe themselves is not rhetorically uniform, but assumes specific national orientations, postulating different attitudes toward art and the parameters envisioned for its broader communicability. For instance, the Kuvataideakatemia in Helsinki presents the aims of its doctoral program in fairly benign terms, offering to provide students with "a profound understanding of their own field," further modified by uncontroversial words and phrases like "maturity," "innovative," and "high-quality artistic work." In neighboring Sweden on the other hand, Gothenburg's Valands academy avoids the ideological trap of "quality," spinning its formulation of artistic research in a more neutral, scientific language. Its department is formulated as being "partly organized as an interdisciplinary faculty research school, where theoretical and methodological issues with a particular focus on artistic research are treated." The Royal Academy in Stockholm, by contrast, eschews scientific nature, cleaving in general to humanist aspirations for personal enrichment, leavened with the tautologically positivist assertion that "the outcomes of the research project will contribute to existing discourses surrounding *artistic* (my emphasis) approaches to art-making"; a description that paradoxically retains a scientific attitude to art as an activity amenable to incremental advancement, so that artists "open up ways in which artistic knowledge can be articulated within its own

David Ryckaert, the Younger, Painters Studio, 1630. Oil on wood. The Louvre Museum, Paris.

field, and to examine its own conditions upon which creative work is made."[5]

The PhD-in-Practice program at the Akademie der Bildenden Künste Wien, however, took a more critical position. "Contemporary art," its prospectus stated, "is directly confronted with issues of localizing, accessing, and materializing reserves and forms of social knowledge ... informed by critical epistemologies as they have been developed in recent times by feminist theories, gender and queer studies, postcolonial theories, and black and subaltern studies, among others." While the exclusion of older forms of Marxist-oriented cultural critique from this list made me pause, the program still appeared closest to what I thought of as my personal artistic goals. True, the course description's second paragraph, titled "Practices and Perspectives," *did* propose an art-knowledge formulation echoing the other descriptions I had read, but his time the "new combination" of artistic and academic research were defined in terms of a "transdisciplinarity," in which "a *fundamental transformation* (my emphasis) of the art/knowledge relationship ... counters a dichotomous order of knowledge (theory/practice, science/art) and makes different dimensions of knowledge production available."

Despite my reservations, I submitted several applications and was ultimately accepted in Vienna. But the thought remained: When had this transformation in the art/knowledge relationship stated in the prospectus taken place? What was new, it seemed to me, was not interdisciplinary work, or even artistic research as such (which has long been a feature of Western art), but art's situation within the research university, reconfigured as a species of knowledge that is cumulative, socially beneficial, and subject to qualitative analysis. In the process of legitimating an area of speculative knowledge, Lyotard claimed in *The Postmodern Condition* that a discipline must first undertake a process of "expounding for itself what it knows," and second, incorporate these statements into "the metanarrative of a subject that guarantees its legitimacy."[6]

This legitimating discourse, however, is not singular but bifurcates into at least two different sorts of language games: one viewing research as a form of speculative knowledge production, and another—where the discourse at the Akademie der Bildenden Künste Wien may be located—with roots in the French Revolution, in which knowledge comprises a form of emancipation. This idea finds expression in what Kant called the imperative and what Lyotard terms "prescriptive" utterances: "not the self-legitimation of knowledge, but the self-grounding of freedom."[7]

3. The Research University as Shepherd, the Artist as (Lost) Sheep

The first doctoral program in artistic practice was founded in 1997, as part of an overall restructuring of Helsinki's Kuvataideakatemia—some two years before the Bologna Process was inaugurated. Since that time, and despite prodigious efforts expended in the service of its clarification, the term "artistic research" remains vague; an ideological sinkhole in which, by virtue of its placement within broader political and social formations, its definition can be endlessly recalibrated, neutralized, and recuperated. The writers I have recently revisited in an effort to discern what is at stake admit as much, bracketing their asseverations with admissions that the field is still "unclear," is "in the process of being formulated," or is "characterized by a continuous search for a current and convincing definition."[8] Nor is there consensus over what actually constitutes artistic research, or how to distinguish its protocols from those of other academic disciplines.[9]

Since a review of the literature on the artistic PhD could easily comprise a separate article, the following must be considered as a by-no-means comprehensive sampling of the constructions and orientations currently jostling with each other in the artistic research marketplace. Besides several book-length offerings on the subject, several journals emanate from, or are affiliated with, PhD programs. These display an editorial policy apparently as bent on dis-articulating artistic research as it is on establishing its norms. Websites such as that of the EARN network (European Artistic Research Network) provide links to several different websites including—besides the present publication— *Art Monitor*, *Art & Research*, *MAHKUzine Journal of Artistic Research*, and the soon-to-be-launched *JAR: Journal for Artistic Research*, the first peer-review periodical devoted to the topic, and an indication that efforts to creatively integrate the term "artistic research" into journal titles has reached its terminus.[10]

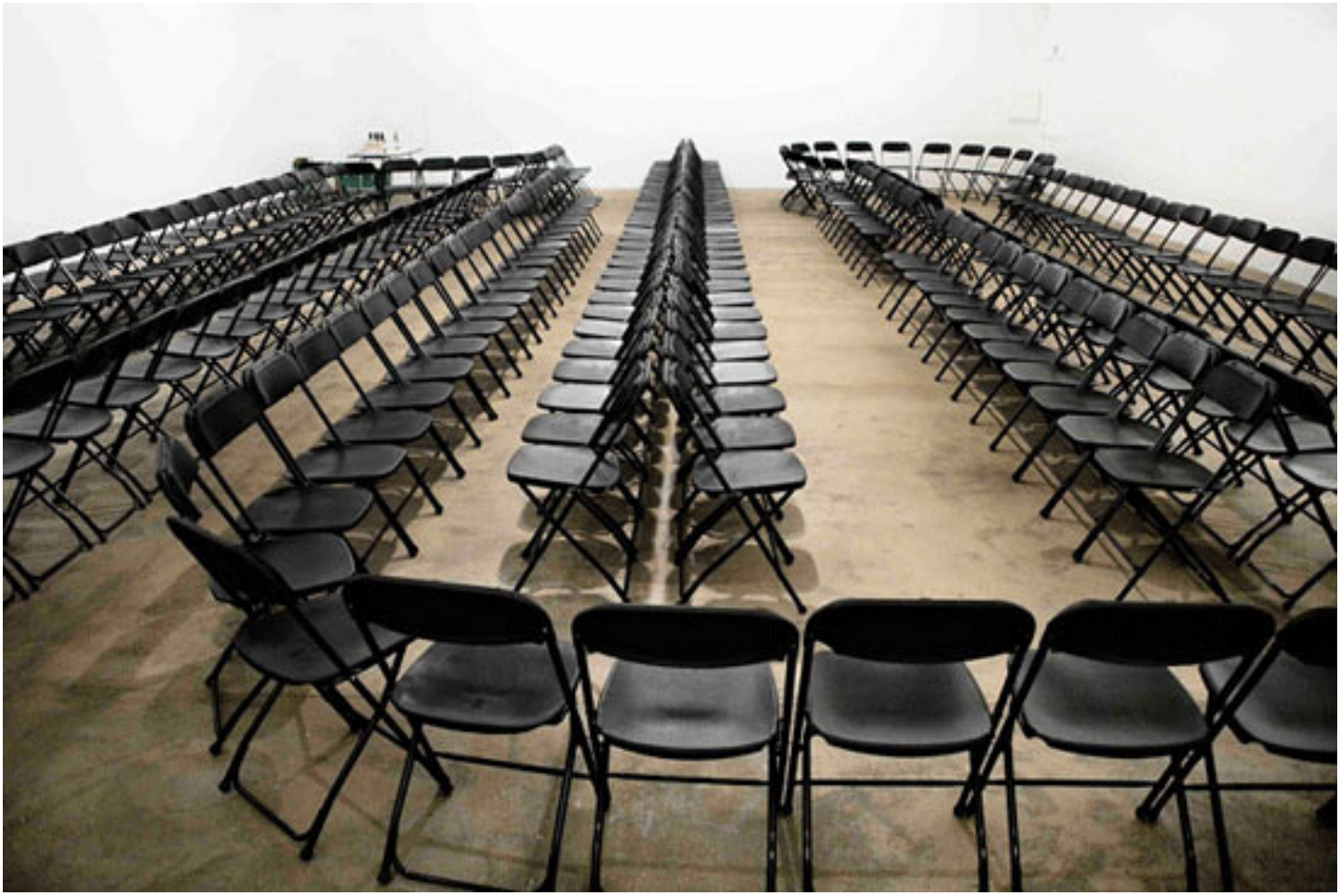
While the journals are diverse in theoretical orientation and scope, the book-length studies to have appeared still seem to labor under the perceived need to provide a comprehensive methodological itinerary in order to produce the "useful regularities" that would ensure the normative status of artistic research. Thus, in the introductory chapter of *Artistic Research: Theories, Methods and Practices*, Mika Hannula, Juha Suoranta, Tere Vaden specify a conception of artistic research as inherently inter-subjective and scientific, linking the epistemological and ontological in a framework emphasizing "coherent communicativity." As guideposts, the authors suggest two metaphors—a "democracy of experiences" and "methodological diversity." The former is defined as a "view where no area of experience is in principle outside the critical reach of any other area," suggesting the relative transparency of different epistemological bodies, while "methodological diversity"—or "methodological anarchy"—borrows heavily from Paul Feyerabend's concept of a plurality of methodologies, each relatively equal in both limitations and capacities to "achieve richness and simplify things."[11] Artistic research itself is posited as a set of characteristics and goals scrutinized within a "research group situation" where "artistic experientiality," self-reflexivity, and historical and disciplinary contextualization are the discursive ingredients, "producing information that serves practices." More prescriptions follow. Artistic researchers should employ communicative methods linked to "defining criteria for making evaluations or modeling ... increasing understanding" of art's link to its social and pedagogical context, along with a critical analysis of art's relation to its constituent fields—technology, economic development, power relations, and so forth.

All of this sounds eminently reasonable, but are areas of experience really equally qualified to judge other areas of experience? Doesn't contemporary experience redound upon the way different professions have developed their own "private code or idiolect" where linguistic norms can no longer be appealed to as a basis for "coherent communicativity"?[12] Further, when the authors state that artistic research is a necessary pedagogical development, because it provides researchers with "intellectual challenges" and "learning experiences" while also participating in developing the field's theoretical basis, doesn't this somewhat condescending formulation precisely duplicate Lyotard's assertion that "knowledge is only worthy of that name to the extent that it reduplicates itself ... by citing its own statements in a second-level discourse (autonomy) that functions to legitimate them"?[13] I also had to take issue with this conception's de-ontologization of artistic work. It grounds it in a rather bloodless strain of rationalism where both the real economic precariousness of the artist and that line of philosophizing in which Kant's disinterested idea of beauty was rejected in favor of a view of aesthetics as inherently invested—Stendhal's conception of the beautiful as *la promesse du bonheur* reformulated by Nietzsche as an experience of "divine terror" where the former's promise "becomes the poison that contaminates and destroys [the artist's] existence"—is nowhere in evidence.[14] Nor could I agree with their basing the argument for a re-scientized art on a supposedly classical fissure between science and art. The actual development of this fissure is far more complicated than a casual one-sentence assertion can do justice.[15]

Further in Hannula, Suoranta, and Vaden's book, my reservations began to increase. In the chapter titled "Artistic Research in Practice," the authors write, "The basic requirement for any research is that it has a clear objective and approach." They follow this prescription by emphasizing the necessity to *clearly* present research objectives and aims. At this point I was seized by the urge

to yank what little hair I possess out by its roots. In my own modest experience, the artistic process is grounded in intuition and the inchoate, no matter how rational the eventual outcome may be. Clarifying one's intentions is a process often realized through praxis, not antecedent to it. "The plan is the prison," Georges Bataille once wrote, and a significant portion of his oeuvre can be read as an attack on the habit of architectonic thinking which eradicates everything the plan fails to anticipate—desire, contingency, chance. This nihilistic trace, a self-imposed corrosiveness that delimits the work of art, upsetting its relations to its own presuppositions and undermining its interior integrity—the work of art's death drive, if you will—is a supplement I doubt any theory of artistic research can assimilate. As a concept it places transgression at the heart of praxis.[16]

landscape—occupying or traversing the liminal space between plural disciplinary formations, discursively constituted.[17] At hand is also the familiar call to an "open exchange" upon which artistic research should be predicated resoundingly echoes. Nilsson disagrees with the authors of *Artistic Research* in terms similar to my own objections—that they seem to imply the need for a methodological structure which specifies aims prior to undertaking research—but both Nilsson and the aforementioned authors advocate the escalation of a collection of research practices "from which inspiration and experience can be drawn,"[18] which leaves me unsure as to whether the ultimate aim of either book is to advocate on behalf of research-based art or an institutional imperative to produce positivist knowledge: research on the research processes of research-based artistic work as it were. In general, this shift in emphasis



Pablo Bronstein, Interim Performance, 2010.

Per Nilsson, a teacher at the *Umeå* Academy of Fine Arts, has also contributed a book-length study to the question of artistic research. In some respects a reply to Hannula et al, *Amphibian Stand* takes the view that artistic research is not explicitly scientific, but "a form of knowledge in its own right," an "amphibian" discipline in a littoral

haunts both works. Since each understandably hesitates before the pointless task of defining art, what practices might *not* be research-based is left equally vague.

But after further thought, it is the homilies to cooperative

and pluralistic platforms for inquiry present in both tomes that triggers my unease. Their conception of a collegial research situation is a little *too* cozy for my taste, as if my discomfort stemmed from an unconscious resistance to conceiving of artistic practice in line with their particular model of Scandinavian-style sociability. And that no formulation exists of how different artistic practices might possibly be antagonistic—even inimical—to one another implies that artistic position-taking is of little consequence in this happy world of the research university. (A quick look at both books' bibliographies confirms this suspicion: Pierre Bourdieu, and with him, a critical-sociological formulation of the art world, is conspicuously absent.) Where is there room in this Ikea of socialized art practice for upsetting the apple cart? Their model marginalizes or even excludes practices based on transgression, aggression, and antagonism, but also those that might view the legitimate authority of the university with circumspection.

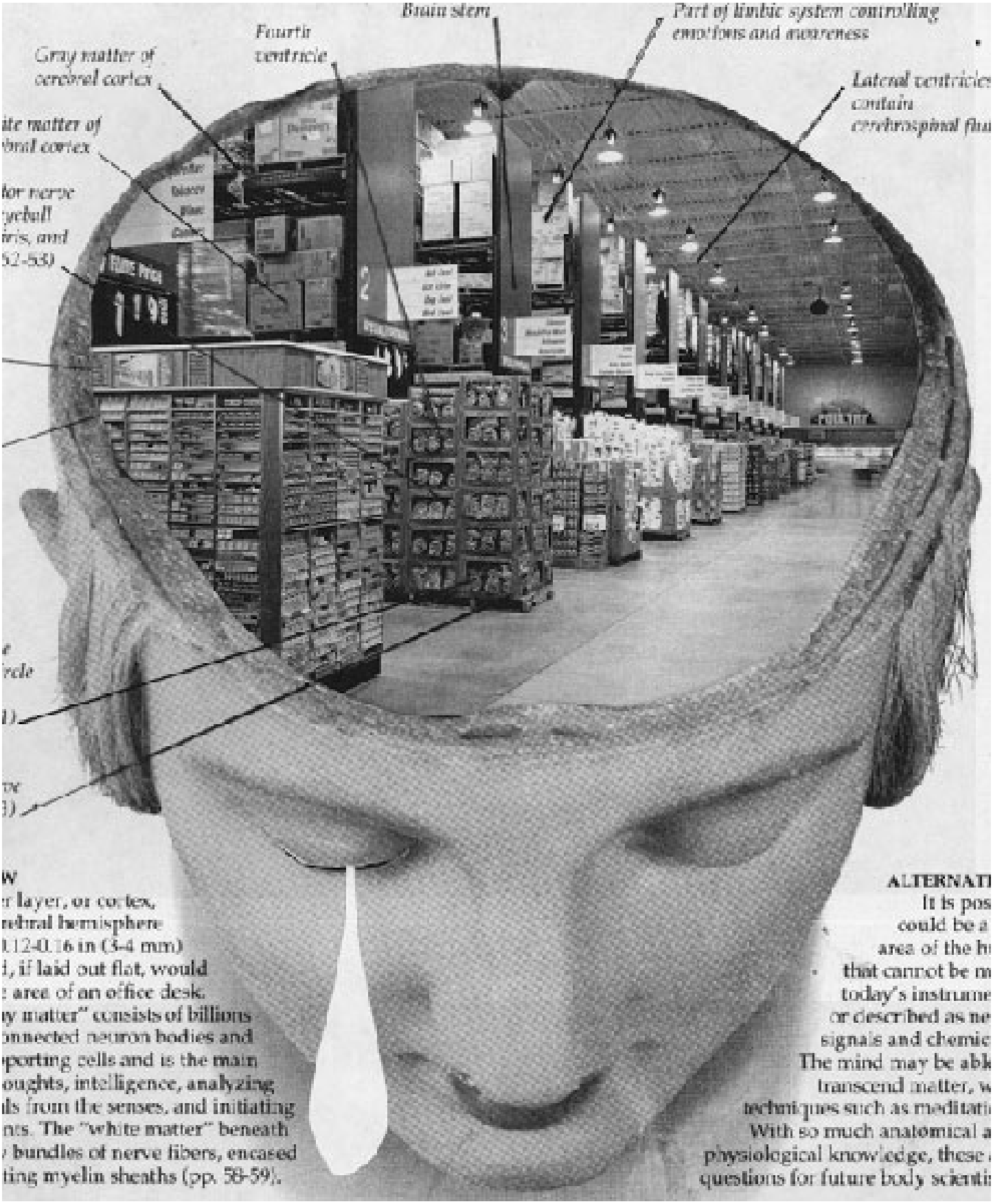
4. Blinded Me with Science

The debate over artistic research, particularly its appeal to scientificity, often rests on defining one's terms. Thus, an examination of some of the keywords deployed might be instructive, especially when their circulation is grounded on an imprecision inherent in language. The connotative meaning of a word, if I may be forgiven for stating the obvious, can diverge greatly from what are often contradictory origins, allowing ideology to reify itself on a lexical level. Let's examine the word science itself. It derives both from the Latin, *scientia*, "to know"—but also from the Greek, *scienzia*, "to split, rend or cleave." That art can be "experimental" or follow a rational set of procedures in the creation of a work clearly denotes "scientificity," but the modern (restricted) sense of science as a body of regular or methodical observations or propositions concerning any subject or speculation would, by any account, limit what one might consider as "art," even "research-based art," the understanding of which, for whatever other imprecision inheres, still derives from a definition of it as both an area of study, acquired skill, and a thing of beauty.

To take a concrete instance of how linguistic polyvalence effects argumentation: in issue 8 of *MAHKUzine*, Hito Steyerl, in the course of addressing how artistic research is currently being constituted within academia, defines "discipline" as something that "normalizes, generalizes and regulates," that "may be oppressive, but this is also precisely why it points to the issue it keeps under control."[19] To push her point further, what is suppressed in her argument, as in most, is polysemy itself, the inherent indeterminacy of language. Examining the origin of the word "discipline," one finds it derives both from medieval French, *descepline,* meaning "physical punishment, teaching, suffering, martyrdom," and the Latin *disciplina* ("instruction given, teaching, learning, knowledge") and *discipulus*, ("object of instruction, knowledge, science, military discipline"). In its current usage, "discipline" also derives from the archaic English, *þeodscipe*, which first meant "branch of instruction or education," later morphing into "military training" *and* "orderly conduct as a result of training." Discipline, in its ambivalent definition as both a regimen of regulation and punishment *and* pedagogic method might be thought of in terms analogous to those Foucault used to define power—as a force "that traverses and produces things ... forms knowledge, produces discourse. It needs to be considered as a productive network which runs through the whole social body, much more than a negative instance whose function is repression."[20]

An effect of considering discipline in its ambiguity might be to transform the debate over artistic research as a normative academic discipline from a black-or-white proposition into something more ambiguous. Many academies that took on the Bologna Accords have in fact demurred from instituting PhD programs, favoring doctoral programs or research stipends, which are roughly equivalent in terms of expectation but without the onus of the PhD. Anecdotally, the avoidance of this nomination has been attributed precisely to a skepticism about turning art practice into a "normative academic discipline"; although this has not stopped such programs from adopting its preferred forms of academic discourse—journals, symposia, and colloquia—where the language games of academia are currently being given the chance to harden into arteriosclerotic forms of comportment. My point is not that this demurral represents an instance of plurality within the field, but rather that the Bologna Process and the appeal to scientificity attending much of the rhetoric around instantiation of the artistic PhD might be considered as a Bourdieuian retransformation of the field that all institutions are impelled to respond to. Secondly (the conspiratorial hypothesis), the stripping of resources from universities' humanities departments (witness the recent closure of Middlesex University's philosophy department) has led art departments to defensively emphasize art's relation to science. Like the changes in coloration an octopus effects to hide itself on a varicolored sea floor, art departments promote a conception of artistic knowledge as something quantifiable and socially beneficial in response to a perceived threat from national budgeting authorities.

There is a final reason why the regular invocation of scientificity in the artistic research debate is dubious, and it has to do with time. Bourdieu has stated that science has a time that is different from practice, a scientific time "so 'detemporalized' that it tends to exclude even the idea of what it excludes."[21] Whether one considers artistic research in relation to science (systematic knowledge gained through observation and experimentation or knowledge gained by systematic study) or "knowledge



Alexandre Singh, slide from Assembly Instructions Lecture (Ikea, Manzoni, Klein, et al), 2009.

production," what is often lost sight of is an ontological idea of art that predates scienzia (as separation) as essentially different from it. As Giorgio Agamben has noted, the Greeks thought of art (considered here as equivalent with poetry) as an uncanny mixture of poesis and production:

> Only because in the poetic ξποχη [rhythm] he [mankind] experiences his being-in-the-world as his essential condition ... Only because he is capable of the uncanny power, the power of pro-duction into presence, is he also capable of praxis of willed and free activity.[22]

This view of art as a paradoxically bounded temporality enabling access to an experience of unbounded time situates it as irrevocably other from science and related epistemological formations—and hence intractable to the sort of disciplinary and departmental border-constructing endemic in universities:

> By opening to man his authentic temporal dimension, the work of art also opens for him the space of belonging to the world, only within which he can take the original measure of his dwelling on earth and find again his present truth in the unstoppable flow of linear time.[23]

In other words, if one justifiably demurs from offering a definition of what art is, one can still suggest, following Agamben, what art performs as its most elemental task: offer access to the unceasing passage of time by ambivalently referring it to temporal boundedness. This is an ontological question that does not resolve itself into a question of truth or of recapturing a lost totality, but of forever having to negotiate the fissure between sensation and language, finitude and infinity, being human and being animal.

5. Continental Drifting

Since my art education took place in the US, where the MFA has long been considered a terminal degree, my understanding of what an art education should consist of is informed by a different set of reference points than an artist educated in Europe. Free from the constraints of accreditation existing in American institutions, the structure of most European art academies remains based on two lingering historical models—the French *Académie des beaux-arts* with its long tradition of aesthetic gate-keeping in the service of a centralized nation-state and the German *Meisterschüle*, where art students study with a single professor: a transposition, perhaps, of the model that once predominated the medieval guilds, where long apprenticeships and clear distinctions of rank between master and neophyte fulfilled social, economic, and political regulatory functions (although in the German academy this relationship has been transformed from learning a craft to absorbing the master's artistic oeuvre). Whatever their advantages or deficits, neither model possesses the same relationship to knowledge production or discourse of the American art school. If we were to look for proximate causes, this is one reason why European efforts at formalizing a discourse of art-as-research has been so fractious, idiosyncratic, and, at times, so divorced from a legacy of artistic production taken for granted in the US.

By contrast, the evolution of arts pedagogy in North America has for many decades been informed by the art academy's integration into a research university model, where after World War II, as Howard Singerman notes in *Art Subjects: Making Artists in the American University,* higher education became "dedicated to the production of theory, and founded on the primacy of theory over practice"—a development that coincided with the burgeoning knowledge economy's re-orientation towards information-over-production.[24] A second result of this introduction was art education's infection by a sort of "spread of language" into places where artists had previously been "imagined as incapable of, and even damaged by, the 'the abstract reasoning and manipulation of words and symbols demanded by the usual academic tests of aptitude and achievement.'"[25]

In personal terms, this meant that by the time I entered art school in the late-1980s, the constitution of arts education had undergone a theory-oriented transformation many years back, adhering to the dictates of a national accrediting body responsible for deciding what kind of non-studio coursework was a necessary complement to studio instruction. Being blissfully ignorant at the time of this disciplinary realignment, I experienced art education as one privileging historical consciousness over the acquisition of manual skill or conceptual competence. The predictable result was that I came to view creation as necessarily dialectic, abiding under the shadow of Thomas Crow's admonition that "Consciousness of precedent has become very nearly the condition and definition of major artistic ambition."[26] Not long after entering CalArts in 2000, I had also accepted Singerman's second point regarding the transformation of arts education—the professional imperative to speak (and to speak well), since in the contemporary art world articulation has become a metonym for valuation, a point of distinction coextensive with artwork itself. So thoroughly did I absorb this conceit that at some point I no longer considered it a separate capacity from artistic practice: an incoherent artist was, by definition, an inferior artist.[27]

How did these extra-artistic exigencies emerge? One

Unidentified image of a project found in the European Art Research Network website, →.

answer Singerman gives concerns the instability of what the MFA bestows in terms of professional credibility. Since art schools don't control the right to a title as in other professions, within the art field a degree is a marker of educability rather than talent. Holders of an MFA, as Singerman notes, do not control training in or a market for artistic skill since any number of people can draw or paint, and can learn to do so outside the art academy. Without the ability to definitively stabilize significations surrounding its academic title, art schools have focused on discursive competence, participating in a broader postmodern movement encompassing the economic and cultural spheres in equal measure. In fact, Singerman attributes the emergence of performative and conceptual practices to this shift, arguing the inception of video and performance art was coextensive both with this cultural transformation and a re-situation of cultural production within the sphere of higher education—since art departments were one place that could offer material support for practices that were immaterial or dependent on a once prohibitively expensive technological armature by providing equipment, paying salaries to non-commercial artists, or providing them with a place to exhibit.

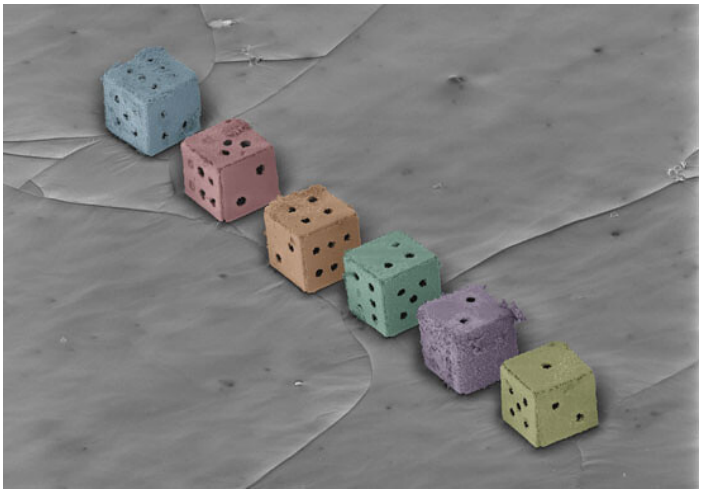
6. Tough Little Tricks

Clearly, the respective legacies of American and European artistic pedagogy have had an impact on one another. But in this to-ing and fro-ing across the Atlantic, traditions have hardened into economic, political, social, and cultural agendas that are contextually far removed. So, if one narrative of the transatlantic cross-fertilization of the arts traces the assimilation of the European avant-gardes into American artistic production, the narrative concerning the export of American-style educational standardization to Europe has often been ascribed as proximate cause for broader transformations in European art education and the commencement of a PhD track in art. But the changes wrought by Bologna cannot be solely attributed to a malignant American influence. They also reflect propinquity between the project of European integration and the neoliberal reform of European educational institutions. Slating the art academy into the framework of the research university has been one consequence. Considering how fraught the terms of the debate have become, how amnesiac the institutional arguments over constituting the artistic PhD as a new discipline, one is justified in asking whether the outpouring of so many spoken and written words, and the accumulation of so many frequent flyer miles in the process of attending the dozens of symposia now crowding the academic calendar are not symptoms of the same sorts of disciplinary instabilities that Singerman argues accounted for the formulation of the MFA in America. Another answer applies directly to the European context: money—state money, EU money, academic appointments, fellowships, and the legitimacy accompanying them. But if indicating that economic considerations motivate processes of academic legitimation is considered a cynical line of argument, a more accurate answer might posit a kind of fatal synergy between legitimacy-as-money and money-as-legitimacy.

Setting cynicism aside for the time being, if I initially (naıvely) thought that by entering a program I could participate in reorienting the discourse to reflect some of the tensions, oppositions, and points of irresolution that motivated this article, as I near the end of my first year in a PhD program, I am reminded of the dangers of the incremental approach. Attempts to reform the system from the inside always end in re-forming the reformer: the outside of academia is really another inside. Having become interpolated within the field, I find myself in the uncomfortable position of having to tally up the advantages and disadvantages accrued, not from some remote vantage of comfortable objectivity, but from within the horizonless terrain of the debate itself. OK, finding a vantage isn't possible, but a principle problem I have with what I've witnessed and read thus far has to do with Crow's dialectical imperative. To quote Steyerl's essay again: "It simply does not make any sense to continue the discussion as if practices of artistic research do not have a long and extensive history." The a-historicism I have seen is perhaps the most bewildering aspect of the debate, the two-ton elephant in the room.

Why? Would emphasizing that art is already inter-disciplinary, contextual, and employs diverse sorts of research methodologies detract from establishing it within the research university? Is denying this concomitant with the cynicism that accompanies any effort to bestow something common with a special new name? Clearly, the dangerous projects produced under the auspices of artistic PhD or doctorate programs adhere not so much to a standardized methodology but have to be justified by appealing to a standardized logic. The effect upon nascent artist-researchers being, as I have tried to demonstrate, reification of a kind of means-ends logic familiar to anyone who has ever applied for a grant. Because, and this is my main point, art cannot be a normative academic discipline when the hermeneutics for judging research-based art do not exist and are beyond formulation; such a project would inevitably be oriented toward a set of aesthetic biases privileging "knowledge production"[28] (in the reflective tradition) or "contestatory practice" ("a tradition in which philosophy is already politics"[29]) instead of any number of alternative conceptions of artistic practice.[30]

I am not suggesting that romantic regression is an appropriate means to escape the straightjacket of Modernism or modernity, but I *am* advocating for a pressing need to view art in terms other than a comparison to science, and to pose our "inert and disinterested idea of art" that is "violently egoistic and magical, i.e., *interested* idea."[31] As Joseph Beuys, that other proponent for the efficacy of sympathetic-magic-as-grassroots-politics put it: "When I do something shamanistic, I make use of the shamanistic



First prize in the Science as Art 2007 competition. Scientist Timothy Leong of Johns Hopkins University created six 200 micron dice, photographed them with a scanning electron microscope, and then used Adobe Photoshop to add pastel colors.

element ... in order to express something about a *future* [my italics] possibility."[32] What the research university model presents us with instead is a situation where art becomes progressively more entrenched within a regime of bi-univocal utterances that suppress polyvocity ("By aligning itself on the voice, graphism supplants the voice and induces a fictitious voice"),[33] creating a cynical situation where, as Sande Cohen writes in *Academia and the Luster of Capitalism*, "the impossible future [is] made impossible to publicly discuss."[34]

Meanwhile, I've talked myself away from the ledge. Let me resume my earlier art-historical line of argument. Given that one of the central projects of both modernism and postmodernism has been to interrogate the conditions of art's appearance, the intercalation of the artistic PhD into artistic pedagogy means artists must necessarily interrogate this situation, questioning the presuppositions and multiple outcomes of academic confinement. One place where the legacy and implications of institutional critique might still be of some consequence is exactly this site where, it could be construed, those with a vested interest in PhD programs would prefer it not to appear, the place where they themselves situate artistic research physically and discursively—that is, in the research university. Maze and labyrinth: here a formal equivalence leads science out of its restricted field of competency, back into the dominion of myth. As Robert Smithson wrote in 1972, "It would be better to disclose the confinement rather than make illusions of freedom."[35]

The construction of *habitus*-as-edifice is, in retrospect, what I witnessed at the EARN conference in Murcia: PhD students and professors preoccupied with playing to the gallery of national and supranational regulators and funding bodies, busily working (albeit at times self-critically) to concretize and legitimate an emergent university discipline as a going concern. As Sande Cohen writes, the danger in this preoccupation is that art, like criticism, loses site of itself as a field of activity where "it is not a question of taking sides, but of ambiguating a relentless unfolding of knowledge."[36] Another way of phrasing this problematic is to say that despite the presumption that artistic research, by virtue of its situation within academia, lies outside the purview of market valuation, the legitimation game being played in artistic PhD departments throughout Europe displays a strong conceptual linkage with the affirmative products of the art market, introducing a different sort of reifying threat. As Cohen writes, "Criticism of inertial continuities ... or of mythic conjunctions ... does not prevent criticism from becoming another link in the labyrinth of chains. Indeed, not only does criticism [or art-as-research] not transfer to inventing existences independent of the system of Capital, but it is increasingly another commodity, whose book forms [or art forms] signifies a nonbreak with forms..."[37]

7. Footsteps Down the Corridor

As for my *actual* experience in a PhD program, I think it best to pass over the matter in silence, save for one or two observations reflecting in a different register the gist of what I have written.

Passing through the halls of the academy's Schillerplatz building on the first day of classes, what I recall most vividly is the distinct impression of becoming somehow physically changed, made diminutive. It was as if at the moment I entered the academy building as a student, I reverted to an earlier student incarnation—like the young novelist Kowalski in Witold Gombrowicz's 1937 novel *Ferdydurke* who is remanded to gymnasium after being transformed into a pimple-faced student by his former professor. In its opening scene, the freshly-minted adolescent Kowalski attempts to flee, and in failing to do so, precisely describes institutional interpellation as a condition which runs from placement in architectural space to attitudes of bodily comportment to the gradual paralysis of independent thought, ending finally with meek submission to an institutionally determined identity:

> I jumped up to run away, but something caught me from behind, a kind of hook which dragged me back, and there I was, caught by my childish, schoolboy's little behind. It was my little behind that stopped me from moving, because of it I could not budge, and the master still sat there, and such an overwhelmingly, schoolmasterly spirit emanated from his posture that instead of crying out I raised my arm like a schoolboy in class.[38]

After my first week in Vienna, I had an intimation that this was also to be my predicament, positioned again as a student, bearing all the ignominy of a studenthood in which, deprived of a certain authority in speech, one lapses into a docile, almost unconscious passivity. It was pointless to argue or fight against this subject-position. Doing so would only make me look vain and querulous in front of my newfound peers. I could only sit quietly, with feigned attentiveness while being advised as to the importance of using correctly and consistently formatted footnotes.

On my second trip, I carried a portable futon purchased at Ikea with me, since, knowing only a few people in Vienna, I had received tacit permission to sleep in the seminar room—a secluded suite of classrooms on the school's attic floor. The night of my arrival, I had quickly fallen into a deep sleep when I awoke to the sound of a key turning in a lock, followed by the beam of a flashlight sweeping the room. In a voice that brooked no argument, the night watchman advised me that I had five minutes to vacate the premises. I fumbled for my cell phone: it was just after 2:00 in the morning. Now, not only did I feel like a student, but like a disobedient student in the bargain. Having established that I was unprepared to spend the rest of the night wandering the streets of Vienna, I checked into a hotel, but the shame of my summary expulsion kept me awake for a long time.

X

Michael Baers is an artist based in Berlin. He has participated in exhibitions throughout North America and Europe, usually with graphical publications exhibited sculpturally. He frequently collaborates with **Fucking Good Art** and has contributed to many publications including **Chto Delat**, **SUM**, and *Princess Lulu*. An important correlate to his artistic practice is his work as a teacher. He has been a guest instructor in Denmark and Norway, conducting seminars that mix theory and artistic praxis. Currently he is an instructor at Det Fynske Kunstakademi in Denmark. He also occasionally writes catalogue essays, articles, and reviews.

1
Frederic Jameson, foreword to *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge* , by Jean-François Lyotard, trans. Geoff Bennington and Brian Massumi (Minneapolis and London: University of Minnesota Press, 1984), xii.

2
Ibid., ix.

3
Pierre Bourdieu, *The Field of Cultural Production* (New York: Columbia University Press), 30.

4
Denis Hollier, *Against Architecture: The Writings of Georges Bataille* (Cambridge and London: The MIT Press), 61.

5
The most baldly instrumental prospectus I read came, naturally, from England – the country where cultural tourism policies have been pursued with the most vehemence. A call issued by the University of Northampton sought applicants for a praxis-based PhD analyzing public behavior to curated sites, one aim of which is "to investigate how experience and understanding of particular public spaces in Northamptonshire might be enhanced through interdisciplinary arts research." How can we read this aim other than as another palliative in countering the degradation of the English hinterlands by decades of neoliberal public policy, which have consistently championed cultural tourism and other forms of service-based remediation as a solution?

6
Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition* , 35.

7
Ibid., 35. The issue for Lyotard is that the passage from the denotative to the prescriptive is unintelligible: it does not necessarily follow that statements describing real situations of social iniquity are remedied by prescriptions based on those statements, or that such remedies will be just. If their combination is a type of linguistic operation, which "is also that of liberalism," it is also one that conceals its difference, since plugged into the theoretical ordering of a denotative statement "there are some implied discursive orderings that determine the measure to be taken in social reality to bring it into conformity with the representation of justice that was worked out in the theoretical discourse...." See Jean-François Lyotard and Jean-Loup Thébaud, *Just Gaming* (Minneapolis and London: University of Minnesota Press, 1985), 21.

8
See Mika Hannula, Juha Suoranta, and Tere Vadén, *Artistic Research: Theories, Methods and Practices* (Gothenburg: Göteborgs Universitet/Art Monitor, 2005), 19. A presumably academic boilerplate that admits the impossibility of defining artistic research or at least complicating the possible definition through recourse to its impossibility—would not be an acceptable premise for comprising an academic discipline. Admitting this impossibility, however, might be one way of modulating the search for an adequate definition, since, as Derrida writes, "impossibility is not the simple contrary of the possible. It supposes and also gives itself over to possibility, traverses it, and leaves in it the trace of its removal. There is nothing fortuitous about the fact that this discourse on the conditions of possibility ... can spread to all the places where performativity ... would be at work: the event, invention, the gift, the pardon, hospitality, friendship, the promise, the experience of death, et cetera."

9
From my parsing of the discussion, despite the imperative of Bologna, the European construction of the artistic PhD has failed to establish a uniform conception of theory, praxis, and methodology. By way of anecdote, a Romanian friend compelled to enter a PhD program in order to keep the teaching position she has held for the last nine years, related how in Bucharest, the department overseeing her PhD did not even consider the PhD in-art as necessitating any special formulation whatsoever. Accordingly, it has been constructed in line with the standard requirements for disciplines in the humanities—namely art history.

10
See http://web.archive.org/web/20110228060555/http://www.konst.gu.se/english/ArtMonitor/ , http://web.archive.org/web/20110315160834/http://www.artandresearch.org.uk/v2n2/v2n2editorial.html , and http://web.archive.org/web/20110411043625/www.mahku.nl/research/mahkuzine9.html . An indication of the editorial line of these journals—the *Journal of Artistic Research* has published seven thematic issues devoted to the following topics: critical methodologies, the politics of design, spatial practice, and the issue of the MA degree.

11
Hannula, Suoranta, Vadén, *Artistic Research* , 38.

12
Frederic Jameson, "Postmodernism and Consumer Society," in *The Anti-Aesthetic*, ed. Hal Foster (New York: The New Press, 1998),131.

13
Hannula, Suoranta, Vadén, *Artistic Research* , 114; Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition,* 38.

14
Giorgio Agamben, *The Man Without Content* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1999), 5.

15
A cursory glance into the history of Western culture, in fact, reveals the quattrocento transformations of science and art were driven, on the one hand, by the Spanish Inquisition, which dispersed Jewish scholars of the Kabalist tradition into the centers of Western European commerce, and, on the other, this strand of theosophical thought was immediately linked by Christian scholars to a nascent Neoplatonic tradition. In both philosophies, one finds a conceptualization of the unity of human endeavors—arithmetic, geometry, harmonics, and architecture—wedded to a mystical notion of a divine correspondences between man, God, and nature. Historical research indicates both Kabalist and Neoplatonic traditions influenced the gradual development of autonomy within the different disciplines (architecture, music, representational art, technology, the sciences)—although from the fourteenth up to the eighteenth century these were not seen as separate disciplines but as different expressions of an underlying unity. (See the work of British historian Frances Yates who has written extensively on this topic.)

16
Denis Hollier writes: "Transgression does not belong to the same space as the idea, except as something that subverts it. That is why transgression is a matter not for theory but for practice."

17
Nilsson quotes Arthur C. Danto to the effect that "art objects need discourse in order to become one."

18
Per Nilsson, *The Amphibian Stand: A Philosophical Essay Concerning Research Processes in Fine Art* (Umeå: h:ström Texte & Kultur, 2009), 165.

19
Hito Steyerl, "Aesthetics of Resistance? Artistic Research as Discipline and Conflict," *MaHKUzine Journal of Artistic Research #8* (Utrecht, winter 2010).

20
Michel Foucault, *Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews & Other Writings, 1972–1977* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1977), 118.

21
Pierre Bourdieu, *Outline of a Theory of Practice* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 9.

22
Agamben, *Man Without Content*, 101.

23
Ibid., 101.

24
Howard Singerman, *Art Subjects: Making Artists in the American University* (Berkeley, Los Angeles, and London: University of California Press, 1999), 181.

25
Ibid., 155. Here he quotes Henry S. Dyer, "College Testing and the Arts," in eds. Lawrence E. Dennis and Renate M Jacobs, *The Arts and Higher Education* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1968), 89.

26
Thomas Crow, "Unwritten Histories of Conceptual," in eds. Aleader Alberro and Blake Stimson *Conceptual Art: A Critical Anthology* , (Cambridge and London: The MIT Press, 2000), 564.

27
I still recall how when I arrived at

CalArts in the fall of 2000, students still mythologized the attitude prevalent in the late 1990s, when graduate students had become *so* discursive they ceased producing objects altogether. We who came later, arriving with at least one eye on the burgeoning art market, did not participate in the ideological purity of this *habitus*. Nevertheless, we could still feel its absence as something that had passed.

28
The term "knowledge production" is generally associated with the cultural transformations that coincided with the emergence of a "knowledge economy" (a term first coined by Austrian-born economist Fritz Machlup in the early 1960s), and as such, reflect the conflicts arising in a society where knowledge, in the words of Tom Holert, "has become the source of social and economic value production, that is, the object of exploitation and class struggle." My own familiarity with the term stems from its employment by Marxist oriented artists who considered the appropriate *telos* of artistic work as fundamentally rooted in an investigation of existence under capitalism. I once asked Michael Asher, my mentor at CalArts, if he considered art to have a function *other* than knowledge production. His response was "no."

29
Jameson, foreword to *The Postmo dern Condition* , ix.

30
Examples of such alternative practices could be based on the deployment of symbol systems to heal the social wound, or a Neoplatonism governed by the correspondence between number, architectonics, music, and the natural sciences, or a pre-Colombian ideology of expenditure—a world without art where things are made for use.

31
Ibid., 10–11.

32
Heiner Bastian and Jeannot Simmen, *Joseph Beuys: Ziechnungen/ Tekeningen/ Drawings* (Munich: Prestel-Verlag, 1980), 46.

33
Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus* (Minneapolis and London: University of Minnesota Press, 1983), 188.

34
Sande Cohen, *Academia and the Luster of Capitalism* (Minneapolis and London: University of Minnesota Press, 1993), 2.

35
Robert Smithson, "Cultural Confinement," in *Conceptual Art: A Critical Anthology* , 281.

36
Cohen, *Academia and the Luster of Capitalism* , 11.

37
Ibid., 3.

38
Witold Gombrowicz, *Ferdydurke* (London: Penguin Books, 1989), 24.

Lars Bang Larsen

Giraffe and Anti-Giraffe: Charles Fourier's Artistic Thinking

1. After the War

The writings of Charles Fourier (1772–1837) are a glorious fuck you to all that exists. Yet they are neither punk's provocation nor the apodictic objectivity of Marxian dialectics, but an *enculage* of civilization through the filigree work of total world reinvention.

Marx complained that Fourier's utopia was all in his mind, that he was obliged to construct a new society "with elements supplied by his brain" because capitalist production was underdeveloped when he wrote.[1] But it is perhaps this appeal to reason rather than history that makes Fourier's imagination so radical. Even today, it has not been bought and sold: there is still nothing that surpasses Fourier's projected state of absolute Harmony.

For André Breton, who claimed Fourier for Surrealism in his poem *Ode á Charles Fourier* (1947), only minds as febrile and immoral as Fourier's could possess the "extreme freshness" necessary to re-imagine the world in the aftermath of destruction: "Fourier they've scoffed but one day they'll have to try your remedy whether they like it or not ..."[2] Breton was the first to consult Fourier after World War II, echoing the time when Fourier himself was writing in the early nineteenth century, in a Europe that had similarly collapsed in wars. There was not much available in his historical present that one could appeal to.

[figure fullpage
8d230c20209baea1047949eca0d574e3.jpg
Laurent Pelletier, *The dreamt Phalanstère of Charles Fourier*, 1868. Watercolor on paper.

]

According to Fourier, the world is cosmically out of whack. He blamed the arrogance of the philosophers and the charlatanism of priests for having systematically repressed the passions, leaving humankind stuck in an incoherent civilized state for 2300 years. Faced with this universal misery, Fourier heralds the triumphant reign of a Harmonian cosmic order based in his science of Passional Attraction—the primordial, ubiquitous force that connects the whole in social series.[3] According to this order, government must be based on a consultation of the passions since they essentially characterize the human being and its community. Conversely, a repression of the passions will result in hypocritical social institutions like marriage and the nuclear family, from which Fourier argued that women must be freed—and in fact, Fourier took the proto-feminist view that the measure of happiness was the degree of independence of women in society.

In Harmony, communal living will be the order of the day and will be organized in micro-societies called Phalansteries, founded on collective sensuousness and

industry. According to Fourier's group theory, each Phalanstery would be populated by 1620 people—one male and one female for each of the 810 temperaments Fourier recognized. This combination would enable infinite social, aesthetic, and sexual encounters, through which humankind would regain its equilibrium. It is "schlaraffisch eingerichtet" (Benjamin; "furnished like an El Dorado"), and even pleasures—hunting, fishing, gardening, playing music and theatre, staging operas—are to be rewarded. The children organize themselves in Little Hordes where they raise each other and contribute to the everyday life of the Phalanstery. The social series of temperaments, generations, and divisions of labor describe subgroups and passionate inclinations that work in complex ways across the collectivity, resulting in a communal euphoria, a constant social high. In Fourier's famous phrase, "the passions are proportional to the destinies." Forget about genital love: *society is erogenous*, and Fourier's scorn for the doubt of the Cartesian subject is endless.[4]

[figure fullpage d5340d68235f8a98f544aed9e7a771db.jpg

The *Familiestère Godin* was constructed between 1856-1859, by the industrial entrepreneur, Jean-Baptiste-André Godin inspired by the ideas of Fourier and Saint-Simon. As a social experiment, work facilities were linked to a communal settlement, equipped with all the necessary amenities: residential buildings, a pool, cooperative stores, a garden, a nursery, schools and a theatre (the temple of the Familistère community). This experiment lasted in cooperative form until 1968.

]

Harmony will bring about vast improvements, genetically and socially. In keeping with the redemption of its Harmonian birthright, humankind will mutate and over nine generations will reach an average height of seven feet and a life expectancy of 144 years. There will be plenitude on all levels. The Earth's original five moons will be restored and its polar tilt corrected, and the oceans will have lemonade flavoring as the poles become ice-free by 1828. Constantinople is set to be the world capital and planet Earth will be crowned by a permanent aurora borealis. Fourier, a theoretical hedonist if there ever was one, also develops an entire *gastrosophie* that involves the gratification of all of our 810 senses (again 810!), trumping the common understanding that there are only five. Likewise, food is a cosmic vision, a "psychedelic gastronomy!" as the editor of the first Danish translation exults.[5]

If all this sounds far out, then consider Fourier's margin of error: all his calculi, he writes in *Theory of the Four Movements* (1808), are subject to the exception of a fraction of an eighth or a ninth:

> This is always to be understood, even when I do no mention it. For instance, if I say as a general thesis, *civilised man is very miserable*, this means that seven-eights, or eight-ninths of them are reduced to a state of misery and privation, and that only one-eighth escapes the general misfortune and enjoys a lot that can be envied.[6]

This margin of error can perhaps also be applied to Fourier's own brand of radical Enlightenment thinking: if he argues in favor of the emancipation of slaves and women, his anti-Semitism, his prejudiced view of the Chinese, and his hatred of the English show the darker sides of his thinking.

Fourier cannot be taken seriously. This is exactly the power of his text against any *esprit de sérieux*. With his blatant inventions and inconsistencies, his writings are ridiculous, *too much*. Roland Barthes called Fourier's science "overmuch," and considered his work as a kind of literary practice. "Never was a discourse *happier*," wrote Barthes, for it describes a new social order articulated on excess, bedazzlement, and, in Fourier's own words, the "need to protect everything we call vice."[7] Barthes writes with fascination on Fourier's "vomiting of politics" in a "vast madness which does not end, but which permutates."[8] As Adorno summed it up, "if it can be said about anybody, then these lines apply to Fourier: 'a fool leaves the world, and it remains stupid'"[9] Benjamin, more politely, took a Nietzschean angle: "Fourier is more of an inventor than a s *avant*."[10]

2. Love of Lesbians and the Sound of Absolutely Positive Truth

Fourier's happy discourse also relates to a systematization and practical application of his radical imagination. He was neither a mysticist nor a reformist or a revolutionary. Contrary to his reception by Marx and other socialist thinkers, he did not consider himself a utopian. Harmony does not demand work and sacrifice, but is rather the inevitable outcome of scientifically-adjusted human behavior. His controversial views on the permissive, innovative character of sexual practices—including homosexual, polygamous, extra-marital, manic, and "omnigamous"—were thus a purely scientific appreciation of one way of moving toward new social structures. (Fourier himself was prone to an ambivalent extra-mania he termed "Sapphienisme" whereby he was a lover and protector of lesbians and promoted their wellbeing. He assessed to be among about 26,400 companions worldwide with similar ideas.)

In this sense, the aim of science is simply to harness Passional Attraction as a cosmic source of energy and to

bring mankind within the ordered domain of Passional Gravitation. Thus, Fourier's socialism is not what *ought* to be (the essence of Marxian socialism, according to Marcuse), but what *will be*—naturally, rationally, and without revolution—as soon as our passions are realized socially; as soon as we are tuned in correctly, as it were, to a social space that in Fourier is reconfigured and proportioned *harmonically*.

The optimism of Enlightenment philosophers was often legitimized by utilitarian application. Truth—that in Fourier is "absolutely positive" (Blanchot)—was the practical task of helping humanity to become humanity, through the eradication of illness, poverty, ignorance, and so forth. The Phalanstery thus provided the ground for the commonsensical applicability of Fourier's argument. Moreover, utilitarianism rejects the ranking of (moral) value according to a priori criteria in favor of the equal validity of each person's own search for happiness and pleasure. Fourier, to be sure, accepts and celebrates the subjective multi-directionality of vanity, passion, and inclination. To him, one must embrace the delights of contrast, competition, and rivalry on the level of the individual and social series: in Harmony, Industrial Armies roam the world and compete in aesthetic battles to build large-scale engineering projects, cook the most delicious pie, or stage the most impressive opera. Thus Fourier's anti-conformist God resides over a Combined Order whose permanent social revelation consists in variety and complexity—difference in age, fortune, ability, temperament. In the 1960s, the hippies would sum up such undogmatic tolerance with the slogan "do your own thing." Let the pleasure principle rule. Don't moralize, don't pathologize.

Of course, Fourier also had a theory for the history of the entire world. His cosmogony is a theory of the "ages of happiness," which explains the progress and decay of civilization in ascending and descending vibrations, together comprising eighty thousand years and thirty-two social metamorphoses, after which humankind will cease to exist. The ascending and descending vibrations serve to "pattern" movements between different stages of individual and historical being, corresponding to the progression from youth to decrepitude in the human life span. The musical analogy is elaborated in the way Fourier organizes the subject's passions and senses as a keyboard with thirty-two keys. Like the passions are a keyboard, for example, so is the Sun surrounded by a claviature of planets arranged in octaves; thus social change on Earth will influence the entire solar system and affect the planetary orbits positively. This ties in Fourier's theories with the ancient Pythagorean and Renaissance beliefs in an affinity between natural law and divine law, between the harmony of the passions and the harmony of the spheres.[11]

[figure de2245c44bffdb7d28de683c7b74c177.jpg
Engraving of *A Perfumer's Dress*.
]

In 1814, Fourier discovers the Aromal Fluid, a medium for the great chain of being, a connection between the Earth and the rest of the universe.[12] The Aromal Fluid (or Aromal Movement) is a "system for the distribution of known or unknown aromas, which control men and animals, form the seeds of winds and epidemics, govern the sexual relations of the planets and provide the seeds of created species."[13] He notes that, "if everything is connected in the system of the universe, there must exist a means of communicating between creatures of the other world and this." This means of communication is the Aromal Fluid, the supersensible exhalation of the planets. It is an exemplary vital matter: a single, all-pervasive, imperceptible substance—a bit like capital in our present cosmogony, we can say; a universal middleman.

In Fourier's cosmic order, the world is folded in upon itself in analogies mirroring the principles that constitute it (with octaves, harmonies, planetary orbits, and so on). It has no messianic horizon because it is held together by divine, mathematical laws—geometrical principles that contain parcels of all states of being, including their respective polarities and all ambivalent and transitional forms, and that are only complete in the totality of their variety and infinite multiplicity. Every moment in a geometric time-space corresponds to myriad events that are distributed across a plane defined by cycles, scales, and symmetries.

In the few remarks that he made on Fourier, Maurice Blanchot deconstructs the status of desire in the former's system. To Blanchot, the "strange gift" of Passional Attraction is a "passion without desire."[14] Where desire is that of an individual subject, of a sovereign "I" that affirms the law that it destroys in the consumption of a transgressive desire, a passion *without* desire—measured, non-erotic, yet obliging the entire universe to modify itself—never coincides with pleasure, even if pleasure is one of its moments. Blanchot's reading implies that cosmic happiness goes beyond the individual human subject: instead, Passional Attraction becomes a tendency that rises into the non-time of 80,000 years of ascending and descending vibrations toward universal harmony and sympathetic fusion within the given order of the cosmic household.[15] Fourier's harmonial vibration is the cosmic timbre of a higher pattern to which the soul is already attuned.

[figure fullpage f5202c1d1f74fee946f848efa72a8626.jpg
Max Ernst, *Une semaine de bonté*, 1936. Graphic novel.
]

3. Fourier as a Way of Life

Fourier's vision for communal living, liberated sexuality, and cosmic harmony resonated with countercultural,

"tribal" emancipation and holistic utopian projects of the 1960s, such as Buckminster Fuller's "spaceship earth" and Martin Luther King's "beloved community."[16] After his writings were republished in France in 1966–68, commentaries and new translations sprang up across Europe and his work was almost obligatorily referenced in critical writing at the time, as well as and in architecture, with the Phalanstery being an inspiration for Le Corbusier's *Unité d'habitation* (1947-–52). In art and counterculture, Fourier's work had an at least a spectral presence, as in Constant's *New Babylon*, the mandatory daily exchange of sex partners in Otto Mühl's *Aktionsanalytische Organisation*, or in the name of the Danish student and youth organization Det Ny Samfund ("New Society"). In general, Fourier's conjoint theorization of labor and love dovetailed with the many post-World War II attempts at thinking Marx and Freud together.

As Fourier's teachings had been sporadically realized in communes in Europe, North America, and South America in the nineteenth century, so was there also the psychedelic Phalanstery. As members of the San Francisco commune Togetherness explained to Dominique Desanti in the late sixties, "We are Fourierists."[17] Asked whether they have actually read Fourier they reply, "we've been told." Theirs is "Un Fourier par ouı-dire," infused with elements of Gandhism, concocted in a mix of memory and invention that in itself is quite Fourierian. Still, the members of the commune remain faithful to Fourierian pillars of faith such as the inclusion of children in production, the division of the working day into two-hour shifts, and the integration of male and female tasks. Visitors have told the members of Togetherness that Fourier condoned the use of drugs as an adjuvant or stimulant, and they sell the handicraft of the commune in the Haight-Asbury district: "ex-hippie-capital turned into necropolis, where the bourgeois come to watch the post-hippies, drugged to the point of drifting away, voluntary onlookers, the foam of a broken wave."[18] While Fourier's nineteenth-century followers tended to underplay or even censor his emphasis on the unrestrained development of desire, it seems that his resurgence in sixties' collectivism was focused on exactly the Dionysian aspects of his socialism. Accordingly, Togetherness was built on the rule of love, and its denizens embraced Passional Attraction in an *amour diffus* that included lesbian and gay relationships, and in which orgies, instituted by Fourier as a superior form of love, is an act of principle. In Desanti's micropolitical turn of phrase, the drop-outs of Togetherness have found "their universal love, a total tolerance of minoritarian and singular tendencies."[19]

By 1969, Togetherness suffers a meteoric decline and is dissolved by its members. The former communards choose social revolt as their next endeavor, in factions of post-Proudhonism, post-Marxism, post-Leninism, or "para-Maoism." Even in its collapse, Fourierism generates difference. Short-lived as it was, the example of Togetherness during the Summer of Love seems to refute Benjamin's claim that "only in the summery middle of the nineteenth century, only under its sun, can one conceive of Fourier's fantasy materialized."[20] Writing in 1969, Roland Barthes predicted the decline of the Fourierist commune,

> Could we imagine a way of living that was, if not revolutionary, at least unobstructed? No one since Fourier has produced this image: no figure has yet been able to surmount and go beyond the militant and the hippy. The militant continue to live like a petty bourgeois, and the hippy like an *inverted* bourgeois; between these two, nothing. The political critique and the cultural critique don't seem to be able to coincide.[21]

Similarly, to Herbert Marcuse it is also close but no cigar with Charles Fourier. In his *Eros and Civilization* (1955) Marcuse notes that, "Fourier comes closer than any other utopian socialist to elucidating the dependence of freedom on non-repressive sublimation."[22] But the nature of Fourier's idea is based on the repressive elements of "a giant organization and administration," which for Marcuse risks fascism, for the working communities of the Phalanstery "anticipate 'strength through joy' rather than freedom, the beautification of mass culture rather than its abolition." To accuse Fourier of aestheticizing politics seems to rationalize his work through the historical knowledge of a totalitarian modernity. In the mid-twentieth century, however, it was no doubt inevitable to comment on the fascist connotations of the *Phalanstère*. (Or maybe it was simply a question of irreconcilable temperaments between Marcuse, the well-intentioned utopianist schoolteacher and Fourier the "delirious cashier," as Flaubert called him.)

Also other post-World War II thinkers were uncertain as to whether Fourier's imaginative intoxication could be reclaimed for critical purposes. While his work was eagerly referenced, it remained exotic if not intractable; thus Kenneth White asks whether Fourierism is of "any interest to us in the present historical conjecture, or whether it is to be placed, once and for all, as a particularly grotesque item, for dilettante admiration and curiosity, on the shelf of political antiquities."[23] Fourier never quite fit history, yet his happy discourse is a specter that seems to trans-illuminate any given historical moment as an x-ray of that which is not, but exists anyway because it can be imagined.

Fourier wasn't read only as a "vomiting of politics," but also as a regurgitation of psychoanalysis. His philosophy was in a sense already anti-Oedipal, corresponding to Deleuze and Guattari's assertion that desires don't belong to the realm of the imaginary, and are never transformed

through desexualization or sublimation. Once sexuality is conceived as a force of production in its own right (the unconscious as a *worker*), it escapes restriction into narrow cells of family, couple, person, object. "Sexuality is everywhere," Deleuze and Guattari wrote, recalling Fourier's "vibrations and flows" to evoke how libidinal energy proceeds directly to the entire social field:

> For the prime evidence points to the fact that desire does not take as its object persons or things, but the entire surroundings that it traverses, the vibrations and flows of every sort to which it is joined, introducing therein breaks and captures—an always nomadic and migrant desire, characterized first of all by its "gigantism": no one has shown this more clearly than Charles Fourier.[24]

As a result, and as per Fourier, "we always make love with worlds"—which is, in fact, a good definition of artistic thinking: to make love with worlds—nothing less.

[figure cd733d3e59a9312405457b92d25cf250.jpg Franscisco Goya, *The Witches' Sabbath*, 1797-98. Oil on canvas.
]

4. Giraffe, Reindeer, Dog

Planetary lovemaking makes us recognize strange signs in civilization. According to Fourier, the hieroglyph of truth is the giraffe:

> The hieroglyph of truth in the animal kingdom is the giraffe. Since the characteristic of truth is to surmount error, the animal that represents it must be able to raise his head higher than all the others: this the giraffe can do, as it browses on branches 18 feet above the ground. It is, in the words of one ancient author, "a most fine animal, gentle and agreeable to the eye." Truth is also most fine, but as it is incapable of harmonizing with our customs, its hieroglyph, the giraffe, must be incapable of helping humans in their work; thus God has reduced it to insignificance by giving it an irregular gait which shakes up and damages any burden it might be called upon to bear. As a result we prefer to leave it to inaction, just as nobody will employ a truthful man, whose character runs counter to all accepted customs and desires.[25]

Fourier reasons that just like truth is only beautiful when it is inactive, so the giraffe is only admirable when it is at rest. With this analogy he proves that God created nothing without a purpose—even the giraffe, which is supremely useless. Thus, if one wishes to know what purposes it will serve in societies other than Civilization, one can study this problem in the "counter-giraffe," the reindeer. A creature that only lives in hostile climates, the reindeer is "an animal which provides us with every service imaginable: you will see that God has excluded it from those social climates, from which truth will also be excluded for as long as Civilization lasts."[26] Fourier continues,

> And when the societary order has enabled us to become adept at the use of truth and the virtues which are excluded from our lives at present, a new creation will provide us, in the *anti-giraffe*, with a great and magnificent servant whose qualities will far surpass the good qualities of the reindeer, which so excites our envy and arouses our anger at nature for having deprived us of it.[27]

Fourier's delirious parable will get us nowhere near objectivity and consensus, yet it in its irreducibility it circumscribes the absence of truth. As we wait for this fantastic animal—the anti-giraffe—to arrive, we can delectate its profoundly aesthetic incongruence with all that exists, its devastating power of counter-actualization. If one wants a social aesthetic, then this is it: all that Fourier's philosophical system talks about is the social, yet it can never be *socialized*, never become one with society, never become operational or ameliorative. Power will never be able to use Fourier to heal the miseries it has created. More than 200 years after Fourier wrote his first book, at a time when art is encroached by economy like never before, this fact alone seems more important than ever for the thinking and the making of art.

If we were to consider Fourier's text a blueprint for a new life-world then we will, melancholically, get sucked back into the Real that we can never master. Just think of the personal misery of Charles, who each day at noon waited for the patron who would sponsor the realization of one of his Phalansteries, but who never arrived; who dreamt of gastronomic orgies but ate bad food his entire life; who was found dead kneeling by his bed in his old frock-coat... Instead, if contemporary life appeals to none of your 810 senses, one can take a hit of the perverse systematic of Fourier's Harmony to invigorate sensing and speculation. "It was all in the mind," said Marx of Fourier—but so is any other theory, institution, and discourse that reproduces the world. Most of all, reading Fourier today is a perfect anachrony to capital's pre-emption of the future through calculated responses in the present. Even (or especially) capital will never catch up to this. It is a text that tops off all the absurdities that we are being served, by economy and politics alike, revealing them not as false and theatrical, but as gnomic and forlorn—incapable of touching

Fourier's divine and unapologetic bullshit that makes you defenseless, lifts you up and sets you free.

Adorno and Horkheimer write that in the culture industry, imagination goes to the dogs. Not so in Fourier. Here we always make love with worlds.

X

Lars Bang Larsen is an art historian and curator based in Barcelona and Copenhagen. He has co-curated group exhibitions such as *Pyramids of Mars* (Fruitmarket Gallery, Edinburgh, 2000, a.o.), *Populism* (Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam 2005, a.o.), *La insurrección invisible de un millón de mentes* (Sala rekalde, Bilbao 2005), and *A History of Irritated Material* (Raven Row, London 2010). His books include *Sture Johannesson* (NIFCA / Lukas & Sternberg 2002) and a monograph about Palle Nielsen's utopian adventure playground at Moderna Museet in Stockholm, *The Model. A Model for a Qualitative Society, 1968* (MACBA 2010). The series of pamphlets *Kunst er Norm, Organisationsformer and Spredt væren* ('Art is Norm', 'Forms of Organisation' and 'Dissipated being', published by the Art Academy of Jutland), discusses the experience economy as a mutation in art's DNA towards a new normativisation of art. He is currently collaborating with Maria Lind for a project at Tensta Konsthall titled *The New Model*, and with the Roskilde Museum of Contemporary Art for an exhibition that deals with the genealogy of Conceptual Art.

1
Marx quoted from Kenneth White, Introduction to *Ode to Charles Fourier* by André Breton, trans. Kenneth White (London: Cape Goliard/Grossman, 1969).

2
André Breton: Selections , ed. Mark Polizzotti (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003), 32.

3
In Fourier there are twelve passions common to everybody. The five "luxurious" passions (that correspond to the five senses) tend toward luxury, pleasure, the formation of groups and affective ties. The four cardinal, affective passions – friendship, ambition, love and "familism" – concern relationships with others; and finally the three "distributive or mechanizing" passions, the Cabalist, the Butterfly, and the Composite that have to do with calculation and organization of pleasurable work. The twelve passions combine in a thirteenth super-passion, Unityism, that rules the Destinies for all time. This is the "inclination of the individual to harmonize everything around him and of the whole human race... it is a boundless philanthropy, a universal well-being," the comprehension of the whole. Charles Fourier, The Theory of the Four Movements, eds. Gareth Stedman Jones, Ian Patterson (1808; Cambridge: Cambridge University press, 1996), 81.

4
Walter Benjamin, "Fourier," (c.1940), in *Das Passagen-Werk* (Berlin: Suhrkamp), 792.

5
Michael Helm, introduction to *Stammefælleskabet* by Charles Fourier (Copenhagen: Borgen, 1972).

6
Fourier, *Theory of the Four Movements* , 34.

7
Fourier, *Theory of the Four Movements* , 72. To Barthes, Fourier is a "logothet," the founder of a new discourse whose social inventions are facts of writing. Roland Barthes, *Sade Fourier Loyola* (Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1971), 83.

8
Barthes, *Sade Fourier Loyola*, 88.

9
Theodor Adorno, forward to *Theorie der vier Bewegungen und der allgemeinen Bestimmungen* by Charles Fourier, trans. Gertrud von Holzhausen (Frankfurt am Main: Europäische Verlagsanstalt, 1966), 5.

10
Benjamin, *Das Passagen-Werk*, 775.

11
For Joscelyn Godwin, Fourier's cosmogony is "as traditional as could be" viewed from the point of a Pythagorean tradition. See Joscelyn Godwin, *The Harmony of the Spheres. A Sourcebook of the Pythagorean Tradition in Music* (Rochester, VA: Inner Traditions, 1993), 357. Unlike Godwin, Benjamin holds that "Man muss sich klar machen, dass Fouriers Harmonien auf keiner der überkommenen Zahlenmysterien beruhren, wie dem pythagoräischen oder dem keplerschen. Sie sind gar aus ihm selber herausgesponnen und sie geben der Harmonie etwas Unnahbares und Bewahrtes: sie umgeben die harmoniens gleichsam mit Stacheldraht. Le bonheur du phalanstère es tun bonheur barbelé." (*Das Passagen -Werk* , 785–6).

12
Fourier's *Theory of The Four Movements* covers the social (or passionate), animal (or instinctive), organic and material movements.

13
Fourier, *Theory of The Four Movements* , 16.

14
Maurice Blanchot, "En guise d'introduction" *Topique*, 4-5 (October, 1970), 8.

15
Barthes talks about the domesticity of utopia: "The area of need is Politics, the area of Desire is what Fourier calls *Domestics*. Fourier has chosen Domestics over Politics, he has constructed a domestic utopia (but can a utopia be otherwise? Can a utopia be political? Isn't politics: every language less one, that of Desire? ... Politics is what forecloses desire, save to achieve it in the form of neurosis: political neurosis or, more exactly: the neurosis of politicizing." Barthes, *Sade Fourier Loyola* , 85.

16
Linda Sargent Wood discusses holistic world views in the postwar era and how their influence peaked in the sixties; apart from Fuller and King, she discusses Rachel Carson, Teilhard de Chardin, and the Esalen Institute. Linda Sargent Wood, *A More Perfect Union. Holistic World Views and the Transformation of American Culture after World War II* (New York Oxford University Press, 2010).

17
"Ex-capitale hippie devenue nécropole oú les bourgeois viennent contempler des post-hippies, drogués á la dérive, figurants volontaires, écume d'une vague brisée" Dominique Desanti, "San Francisco: Des hippies pour Fourier," *Topique*, 4-5 (October, 1970), 209.

18
"Leur Love universal, une tolerance totale des tendances minoritaires et des singularités" Ibid., 210.

19
Ibid., 209.

20
Walter Benjamin, *The Arcades Project* , ed. Rolf Tiedemann, trans. Howard Eiland and Kevin McLaughlin (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1999), 638.

21
Roland Barthes, "A Case of Cultural Criticism," in *The Language of Fashion* , trans. Andy Stafford, ed. Michael Carter (Oxford: Berg, 2006), 113.

22
This and the following quotes from Herbert Marcuse, *Eros and Civilization* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1956), 217-218.

23
White, Introduction to *Ode to Charles Fourier* by André Breton.

24
Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1983), 293 and 292.

25
Fourier, *Theory of The Four Movements* , 283.

26
Ibid., 284.

27
Ibid., 284.

Mary Walling Blackburn

XOXO Insanity, Institution

1. Mental Institution

In the annals of the Arkansas Lunatic Asylum, the very first patient arrives several days before the facility—a multi-storied, Victorian brick edifice—officially opens in March 1883. The state's first and only public zoo is built next to the asylum in 1926, and at first it houses exactly two animals: an abandoned timber wolf and a circus-trained bear, whose calls carry into the asylum at night.

The bear and the wolf. We're suckers for things coming in twos, for not forging ahead alone.[1] But every mental facility has its first patient: an Adam, an Eve, or an Adameve, stepping or pushed singular into the void of a space still unmarked—without vibration, without community.[2] There were instances in which there was no singular first; in nineteenth-century Canada, inmates from one mental institution were borrowed to provide the necessary labor required to build another. Once the building had been completed, these same patients were secured in a structure of their own making but not their own design.

[figure f37a400a9f8d45559527ebcc4c56ef8e.jpg
The Bear Pits, Forest Park, Little Rock, Arkansas, ca. 1900-1915. Black and white glass negative, Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Division Washington.
]

What does it mean to make an institution? To toil unpaid within a mechanism that is not your own? The inmates of one North American ward crushed excess grapes for a wine they could not drink. Despite the fact that the asylum operated without currency, this communally-built site—replete with hallucination and its own harvest—did not equal a hippie paradise. From a distance, this place could be perceived as inherently progressive, but its patients and staff shared an internal narrative, one that ideologically frames a form without horizons. For the patients, this institution appeared to have no limits. To exit institutionalization seems impossible if one cannot configure from within it how one lives without it.

What is repressed in artists' exploration/flirtation with both undoing and rethinking institutions? Here, I have placed the mental institution at center, but if the mental institution is an impossible material when it comes to the labor of artists that harness the sociological imagination to tread against and away from bureaucracy's material organization of power, what is revealed by the unsuitability of the mental asylum as artists' supply?

In nineteenth-century North American psychiatric facilities, labor was often compulsory and unpaid, the facilities were overcrowded, and patients were held without consent. But what would consent have felt like within any institution? What forms of self-organization would be adopted by those who have loosened their

relationship to a fixed social reality, by those who have been forced into the institution for demanding another social reality? In the history of madness, who has sanely asked to be let into an institution, to be held without touching?[3] And yet, more often than not, one finds the patient ceding his or her self over to it, whether it be a mental ward, a prison, a school, or a museum. Especially for Americans, the institution has become as natural as sky, land, and empire; nothing else exists. Or rather, we fail to imagine how we will fruitfully exist without imperial institutions.

[figure fullpage
a35c1f883cd2d16a029b52b007e0bb66.jpg
Cauleen Smith, *Remote Viewing*, 2011. Digital video, color, sound, 15'24''.

]

When an empire is lurching to a halt at its very end, it might be the moment when it begins, or is forced, to re-imagine its relationship to a national insanity. "The institution is ill," said Dr. Jean Oury, mentor of Félix Guattari and founder and director of La Borde—an experimental psychiatric hospital in France that opened in 1951, just before the Algerian War, while France's colonies were dispatching their "Gauls" during the Indochina War. If the institution is ill, the logic is that it can be repaired; but does Oury refer to one or to all—to the prison, to the mental ward, to the school, to government at large? If these forms couple, the recombinant hybrids can both reinforce and undo the former instrumentalizations of its wards in unpredictable ways.[4] But the real, unanswered question here concerns whether, in forms singular or doubled, formal institutions can operate outside of state structures? La Borde comprised an attempt. Oury and his doctors dismantled the architectural separation between patients and administrators by placing the offices within the wards and inviting patients to be administrators (but not doctors?). Finally, the rhythm of La Borde did away with the capital economy of speed; Oury waited for fifteen years for one female patient to smile—and that fifteen-year smile was reportedly satisfying. Does the smile occur long after France has lost its colonies? He does not tell us.

It is worth considering that the fifteen-year smile—or the treatment that brought it about—might have been bankrolled by the raw materials generated within the colonies occupied by the very same state that supported La Borde. Allow me a partial fantasy: a French businessman trades in West African gum arabic, in peanuts, in fabric, and in gold. Regardless of his successes, his daughter is comatose. Nothing moves her. The businessman will try anything, but his capitalism cannot revive her. But perhaps a site like La Borde can use his business capital to fund its experimentation with a power structure that is not completely aligned with state policy. But once the "daughter" has left the asylum, calibrated, why would the millionaires continue to shell out? Potentially, state and corporate powers sanction and support the creative destruction of the institution—on a micro-scale—because such labor distracts revolutionaries and troublemakers.

Each institutional form organizes its errant citizens by making them captives, because they effectively disorganize communal life when left to their own devices. In the southern wilderness of France, an experimental educator named Fernand Deligny lived with autistic boys that his colleagues had disregarded, dubbing them "unmanageables." Deligny referred to them as "radical others," and he asks how we (unradical others?) can move near and with the radical other. In this instance, autistic space (as Deligny coins it) is generated and maintained by the unmanageables, marking a field of difference within a familiar landscape, within the geographical and ethnic boundaries of a singular nation. It is here that unradical others might enter and negotiate neurologically atypical forms of communication with the castoff sons and brothers of their fellow countrymen; it is where the mental institution and its architecture have been shed, but the state remains.

According to one interpretation of psychiatric history (informed by Fanon and driven by Foucault), colonial empires utilized mental wards in order to negotiate the least mitigated symptoms of native resistance. During the British occupation of Zimbabwe, one mental institution patient refused to call Europeans anything but "Eskimo." His explicit naming of their foreignness momentarily amplifies their difference—in geographic relation to Zimbabwe, he has identified the colonizers as being from the edge of the planet and beyond reasonable proximity. By using a surreal means of exposing the colonizers' excessive foreignness, the patient indicated that although he is a "guest" within the institution, he is neither a guest nor a foreigner within the land.

His illogic is a logic in the illogic of his incarceration, specific and national. To reverse the fact of being proclaimed foreign in one's own land. It is a refusal of the guest status of insanity within one's own culture. In the women's quarters of the same mental ward, the higher-functioning White patients are serviced at the "Fair Lady Salon," where they receive their traditional "Eskimo" hairstyles.

The institution hallucinates. It hurls itself both toward and away from the society at whose threshold it is placed. The terms "Eskimo," "Foreigner," "European," and "Fair Lady" all get swapped—not because they are interchangeable, but because each is a smokescreen used by exterior forces to force themselves across a border. I imagine that there are patients in contemporary American psychiatric wards who have begun to call all of the doctors and their staff "terrorists"; would these patients then be patriots? In this psychiatric imaginary, the authorities are "radical

others"—but they are not the same as the patients. Neither feels that they can pass from one type of radical other to another, or that this passing would be advantageous; after all, such a swap would still not take the doctor and the patient outside of monstrous structures.

[figure be6c0de30d98b7e539399b505e570ab1.jpg
Little Rock, Arkansas, Anti-integration Story, 1958. Black and white film negative, Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Division Washington. Photo: Thomas J. O'Halloran.
]

2. Detecting Others

Before the shadow of that undone Adameve crosses the institution's threshold, there is a domestic story of madness to be told: a story of the mad man, the mad woman, the errant sister, the undone father who thrashes through the family. Now, do we dare reject the institution as holding tank for family members that would otherwise dismember a family? The reality of their violence hardly clears the way for fearless love, sustainable renewal, and equal relations. Would such intimacy with insanity hinder a philosophical transformation of diagnosable illness into an anti-colonial stratagem? Perhaps, but let us first anchor this claim with an example of a person whose hallucinations might clinically qualify as delusional, but who is now held in high esteem as a potential liberator. Despite being responsible for many deaths, Nat Turner—who read an apparition of drops of blood on corn leaves as a hieroglyphic for revolt—comes to mind. While thunder rolls and the sun darkens, a voice clearly articulates, "You are called to see." Are those who slave without protest, plowing dutifully, actually being plowed under by their sanity? Here we find the crazy brother as righteous brother, with the gory botanical hallucination/illustration marking the double ability to recognize inequity and act upon it as well. The hallucination is a vision, and also a transitory drawing that drafts bodies into action. Southampton, Virginia; August 21 and 22, 1831. The demand for another social reality should not, and cannot, be read as sheer madness.

Let us return to a place not beyond, but beside the institution, in Arkansas—not in the capital (with its zoo and its asylum), but beside the Mississippi River, in West Helena.[5] There are cotton fields but no mental ward in the Delta of the early 1930s.[6] Area radio broadcasts will not broadcast Black musicians for another ten years; the official sound of the night is White. Situated within all of this is a sharecropper's dog-run cabin, where my great-grandmother, Fanella, is thirteen years old and newly married. Her husband, my great-grandfather, Jewel, returns unnoticed from picking cotton in the cotton field. He Blacks his hand with shoe polish from elbow to fingertip and hides under his young wife's bed and waits in the dark room. As Fanny crawls into bed, Jewel grabs her leg with his blackened hand. Fanny screams, and the household comes running to her aid, only to discover her White husband with one Black arm, rolling on the floor laughing.[7]

It's heady racist fiction as entertainment in a powerless shack: blackface has migrated to a hand belonging to a White man, conjuring rape by a Black man in a singular action. But Fanny's scream is multilayered, for it was not rape that she feared, but detection. Fanny's mother is, in fact, not White, and the pitch of her scream fell from the terrifying prospect of an end to racial passing, when the Black hand would locate her and claim her as its own.[8] There must be shoe polish on her pale fat ankle. Her husband has revealed her in his minstrel gesture. All laugh hysterically—and it is hysteria. It's the joke stoked by deferred trauma, the hubris of claiming Whiteness for one's own in a town where the consequences of detection as a racial impostor could surpass the violence one endures for being Black. It's the hysteria of passing for White in a county where middle class White men toy with "passing for Black."

At the Exposition Universelle of 1900 in Paris, W. E. B. Du Bois's albums of photographs of African Americans in Georgia featured staged portrait after staged portrait of anonymous women and men selected to represent African Americans in the American South. Conceptually, the subjects are in accord: each represents Blackness. However, it is apparent that some could choose not to. A colleague of mine recently pointed out a portrait of a young man I had selected to be in a 2004 issue of the journal *Women and Performance* focusing on the theme of passing, and remarked that he could have been my brother. I recognized my jaw, my cheekbones, and my hair, but whereas he looked honorable (upright, formally dressed), perhaps I did not. My ancestors had passed into Whiteness and I would not pass back. To turn back would be yet another dishonorable turn, read as trespass rather than return.

In my family blackface story, the psychological contagion of passing is passed between husband and wife. Although she screams, the man who has assisted her passing by marrying her is frightened as well. Will blackness, and its attendant vulnerabilities, claim her? Will it claim him as he has made it claim his hand? He craves and fears the return, crafting a household gag to cope. He engineers group therapy without even realizing what he is after: for Whiteness to be returned to her and to him. Group therapy in negative might staunch the contagion. But her race may not be the sole root of his concern; for he himself may not be as White as he claims. In the litany of his own ancestry, he includes the false ethnic category of "Black Dutch." Together, their whooping and giggling signals their release from a field of racial possibilities into a field of institutional possibilities.

In boarding school, I was assigned to read what was then considered the first African American novel in the United States, Frances Harper's *Iola Leroy, or Shadows Uplifted* (1892).[9] A stock situation in Black Victorian literature is the moment(s) when a character refuses to abandon their race, and Iola Leroy is no exception. My professor did not broach the subject of how we scholarship students might be similarly coaxed into abandoning our class, and why we may decide not to. But in the book, Harper describes the ethical position of holding out: "But he was a man of too much sterling worth of character to be willing to forsake his mother's race for the richest advantages his [White] grandmother could bestow." He was honorable, too. Later, I would watch *Imitation of Life* (1934 and 1954), a Hollywood film that charts the ruinous path of a girl who breaks her mother's heart in an attempt to pass out of Blackness.

Unlike the 1934 version of *Imitation of Life*, in which Fredi Washington (founding member of the Negro Actors Guild of America) portrays Peola, the 1954 version stars White actress Susan Kohner. In one scene, Kohner, as Sarah Jane, stages her own convoluted blackface—a White woman portraying a Black woman pretending to be a White woman of a certain class masquerading as another class of Black woman.[10] This *mise en abyme* embodies a kind of bogeyman for those who have multiple origins, who fear they cannot land, who are endlessly refracting.

[figure ed54f2f3bf7516b042a0507e31e374e4.jpg
Max Belcher, *The Tyler Mansion*, ca. 1880, Arthington, Liberia. From 1816 to 1847, the American Colonization Society recommended that former American slaves, often freed on the condition that they emigrate, settle in Liberia. 17,000 did this, and Americo-Liberians, as these new settlers and their descendants are called, suppressed native suffrage and dominated cultural and political structures in Liberia until 1980. The architectural remains reveal a vexed relation to the plantation elite and provide a visual framework for what it looks like when buildings also attempt to "pass." © Max Belcher, courtesy of the Canadian Centre for Architecture.
]

3. Soft Institutions

But inside of institutions, whether asylum, prison, juvenile hall, army, or college, my finally-White and never-rich kin were not and are not repaired. Will an artists' temporary institution do the necessary psychiatric trick? After all, who gets to experiment with their mental liberation outside of hierarchies? How do we visualize passing as it applies to race, class, or a combination therein, and in a way can that alter the institution? Despite the "new beginning," these Adameves have not yet forged or found an institution capable of repairing them: no prison or juvenile hall, hospital, military base, college, or museum can do it. Some will simply enter formal institutions and artist projects as White people, unrevolutionary and undone.

Which overarching governing forces heal whom, and which class of people are they meant for? Are we returning to Oury's premise that institutions do not repair their citizens when the "institution is ill"? When the Supreme Court ruled in 1954 that segregation in schools was unconstitutional, the lawmakers of Sheridan, Arkansas bypassed the ruling by forcing all Blacks to reside outside of the town, effectively making Sheridan's schools White-only. Cauleen Smith's sculptural video work, *Remote Viewing* (2011), is built around this incident. Following this forced migration, a hole was dug in front of the town's former Black school, and the building was pushed into the hole and buried. Town zoning stretched laterally and not vertically, and Smith points to the double construction of interior and exterior crypt, reconstructing the moment when the town engineered its own psychosis. The school bell begins to ring as the building tips over. It seems to be an utterance, but it is not Smith's. She is careful to assert: "That story does not belong to me. It simply infected me, and the film was a way to burn off the fever." Here the artist heals herself of an institutional infection. When the institution chooses amputation, she chooses recovery.

[figure partialpage
3e2cdfeb68a41a48b476918440d45417.jpg
Little Rock Arkansas, Anti-integration Story. Classes on TV, after school closings, 1958. Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Division Washington.

]

The artists who make pretend institutions (temporary schools, fake agencies, and so forth) rarely set out to invent little prisons or workable nuthouses that serve real people—really crazy, really violent. It is possible that artists are not equipped. Artists are comfortable making objects that document institutions, and they make objects (relational or otherwise) that perform the liberated institution.[11] Another manifestation is the object that is liberated by abandoning the institution, just as there is the object that believes it can liberate the institution. As I do, these artists flirt with soft institutions, playing with the remains of madness—touching it lightly, quickly, and then moving away. In Paul Thek's notebook he scrawls: "Institutions were formed for lack of spontaneous love." To dilate his line of thought, we could move countercurrent to the institution, not by forming another organization, but by saying, as Thek does: Let me nurse you. Let me defend your body and your spirit. Let me bathe and bury you.

The Institute of Racial Passing. The Bureau of Escape (or is it a museum?). It's an impossible organization: archaic, unfunded, and unspeakable. It's a space that moves with those who stand at the threshold of race and class and gender. It asks how deeply the invention of an institution

can move and whether making art—relational or material, professional or amateur—can attend to the insanity of passing? The artist who plays with institutions won't touch this false storefront. But as artists recast the institution in the loving throes of utopic impulse—rhizomatic, perennial, untrammeled, and operating in some self-modeled notion of the future perfect—I still want to know whether the wake of their efforts reaches a margin, an unattractive demographic, a space unutterable. I'd like to see the articulation of an institution that traces or excavates the shared political dimension of radical others and passing, that considers the application of insane measures toward producing another social reality.

X

Mary Walling Blackburn

is an artist living and working in New York City. She is a Visiting Artist at Cooper Union School for the Arts. She has writen for Afterall, Cabinet, and Women and Performance.

1
At nights, when doctors and attendants hear the zoo animals roaring and howling as they approach the asylum, they know that the patients will be agitated and that it is "going to be a bad long night."

2
n. an individual who refuses to ascribe to one gender or another from the very beginning.

3
An institution that "touches" would operate under the rubric put forth by Jean-Luc Nancy when he writes about sex: "There is no such thing as penetration, only touching." The institution without penetration would carefully and slowly determine how the surface of its intentions moved against the surface of their participants/clients/citizens' vulnerabilities. It would not override the emotional structure of a tentative and weird singular being.

4
A number of instances exist in which institutions combine or rise within the remains of the former. In Los Angeles, for example, the country jail includes a wing for mental patients. The asylum and the prison fuse.

5
West Helena is the town where future novelist in a rented room after his Uncle Silas was murdered by white men in the middle of the night. Living in West Helena in 1918 "under the threat of violence," Wright saw himself as the "victim of a thousand lynchings." Passing was not an option. He headed norh, and eventually east to Paris.

6
These institutional possibilities include suffrage, and protection from the police. The poll tax of 1892 effectively dispatched with the brief window of enfranchisement after the Civil War. In the summer of 1919, after black sharecroppers had gathered in a church to discuss unionization, whites murdered over a hundred black sharecroppers from Elaine and West Helena. In 1921, the Ku Klux Klan was aggressively recruiting in Phillips County as well as nationwide. In Phillips County, lynching rates were "comparatively" low, but some claim this was not so much progressive as it reflected the manner in which local blacks had adapted survival strategies in response to reported extreme police brutality.

7
The family retells the story for seventy more years, decades after migration from West Helena to the West Coast, because it's their creation myth. They left Helena long before the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) attempted to integrate Habib's Cafeteria, opened in 1888 by Syrian immigrant Habib Etoch, long before Robert Miller became Helena's first black mayor in the 1990s. The site of their peonage fused to the notion that to be raced is to be powerless remains static for them because they have not returned. And yet, the return might not shift any sense of whiteness as indemnity. Helena is situated in Phillips County, the poorest county in Arkansas, and over 60 percent of its inhabitants are black. In November 1963, at Habib's, the demonstrators were arrested and their leaders were charged with "inciting to riot." "Across the street, Habib ran a (whites only) private zoo, which housed deer, a pelican, wildcats, and monkeys." Whenever the latter escaped, the animal were suddenly visible to all citizens, who touched them in the process of handling them. The deer is held by black hands, this once... See Robert Whitaker, *On the Laps of Gods: The Red Summer of 1919 and the Struggle for Justice* (New York: Random House, 1999), 68.

8
See https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Passing_(racial_identity) .

9
It is actually the second.

10
Here the infinite instability of race tangles with a longer philosophical tension between the optical and the oracular; in other words, believing in what is self-evident to the eye versus the abstract contextualization generated in and through speech.

11
An object, not institution, that describes passing fluently, clearly, and carefully is Courtney Smith's Psiche Complexo (2003), a sculpture constituted of early twentieth-century Brazilian bedroom furniture. Here, the materialization of how passing is psychologically structured unfurls – the armoire, vanity table, stool with cushion, and two side table cabinets were initially crafted after European models by Brazilian furniture makers – they substitute tropical woods. Now, severed and then hinged together again, the pieces sometimes form one central body, able to hold each element, folded and collapsed within. Passing feels like this, at its best. Oswalde de Andrade's *Cannibal Manifesto* (1928) and Smith's source furniture come into being at roughly the same time, yet their metabolization of colonization are at odds. De Andrade's ribald text, clearly a precursor to post-colonial critical theory, suggests a path where things pass through a body rather than constitute one. "I asked a man what was Right. He answered me that it was the assurance of the full exercise of possibilities. That man was called Galli Mathias. I ate him." Here, eating Galli Mathias translates as consuming "the nonsense of scholastic reason." It cannot become him or cling to him. De Andrade's refusal of the internalization of Western institutions – psychological, penal divine, or literary, includes the mental bulwarks of passing. He ends: "Against social reality we are complex, we are crazy, we are prostitutes and without prisons..." De Andrade cast his bets with the imaginary and he wishes for a future without institution, of our own making and our own design. Although Smith chronologically follows de Andrade, her piece embodies a rather indexical form of art making. She points backward, toward what existed, when your body was institution. The indexical versus the imaginary. The object that documents an institution versus the object (relational or otherwise) that believes it can be an institution and be liberated. Versus the object that is liberated because it abandons the institution and, last but not least, the object that believes it can liberate the institution.

Jon Rich

The Blood of the Victim: Revolution in Syria and the Birth of the Image-Event

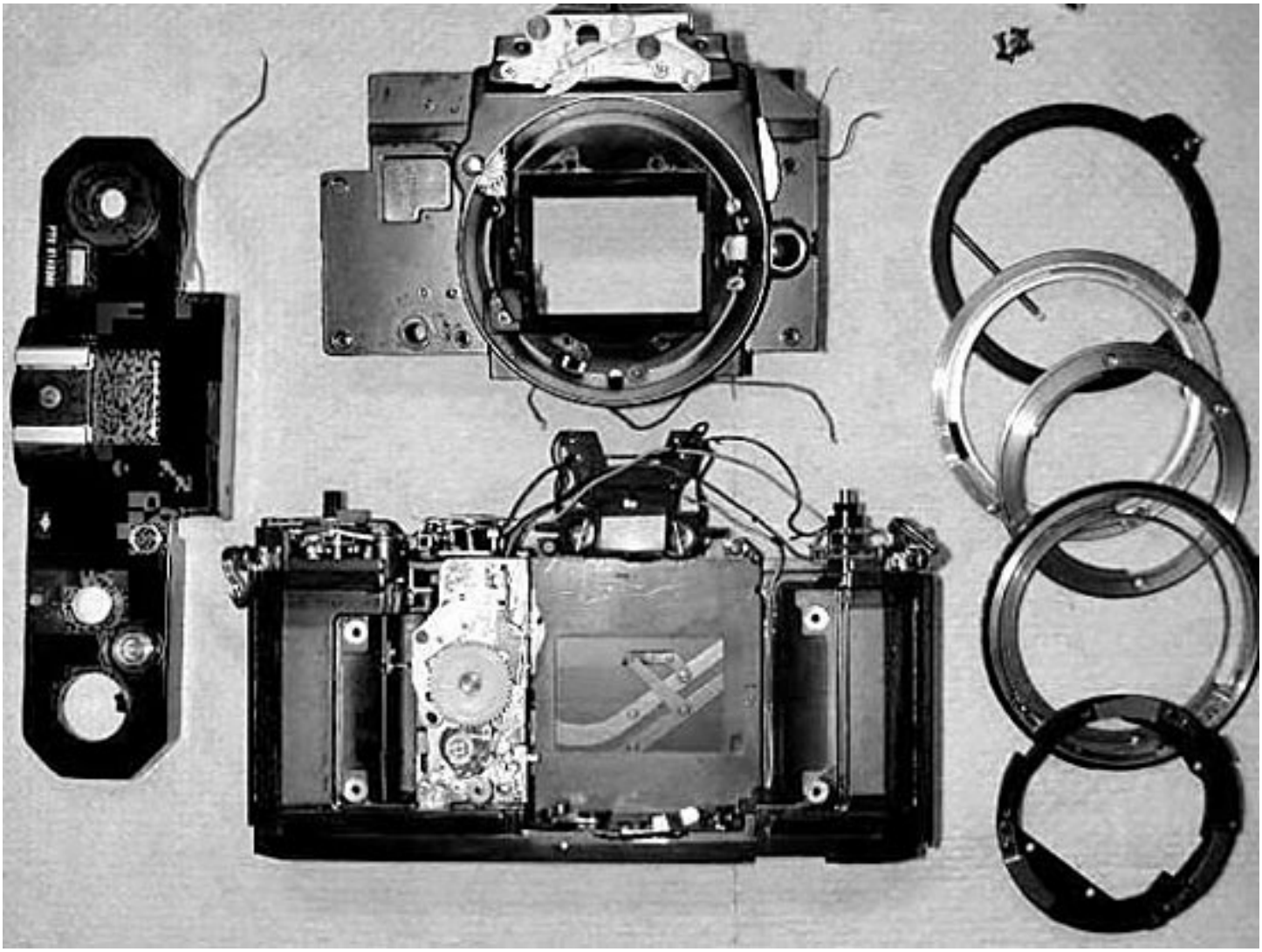
In March 1993, Kevin Carter took a photo of a starving Sudanese child crawling towards a UN relief camp less than a mile away. A few meters from the weary child stood a vulture, waiting for her death to begin his meal. Birds also must eat, and in southern Sudan they were eating because humans were not. Kevin Carter stood across from the vulture, lit a cigarette, and took his shot. Twenty minutes passed and the bird didn't move, waiting in its place as the child continued to struggle towards the camp. They say that the child survived, but Kevin Carter didn't. His photo was published by the New York Times and won the Pulitzer Prize, but Carter committed suicide just weeks later. In his last letter, he wrote, "I am haunted by the vivid memories of killings and corpses and anger and pain, of starving or wounded children ... The pain of life overrides the joy to the point that joy does not exist." Carter was said to have witnessed the survival of the child he photographed, but the photo itself traveled the world, the photo of a child without a name awaiting her death. The child is a symbol for many others, for children that cameras can't begin to account for, neither by number nor by place, all of them dead or barely living. It appears that this was too much for Carter himself to bear. The photo he took succeeded, against his will, in fabricating an idea of how death takes place. Now, for every report of a child's starvation, whether in southern Sudan or elsewhere, there is a scenario lodged in the imagination of all who saw Carter's photo or were moved by it.

If the naked child in Carter's photo survived, then she survived not as the child-individual in the photo, but as the image of hunger, as the image of the fate that befell the children of southern Sudan in the early 1990s and not as that of the child that might now be grown, married, or pregnant. Carter had not taken an image of a child, but of a destiny, and for a photographer to realize that he photographed death by starvation as the destiny of the children of Sudan was in itself enough to make life impossible. It is as if he had awakened a giant by producing an image for it. And, still worse, this giant began to devour countless victims and only walked away from the imagination after accomplishing its mission, having fed on enough lives. Images like the one Carter captured create an observable process for death, and the pain that precedes and permeates it, which is difficult for humans to bear even from a geographical distance. It is in this sense that the image creates meaning, and one can say that this one created an expression: those of us who saw the photo and were affected by it are now able to chart the course of death walked by this child. Carter's photo is an image of the isthmus that separates life from death. It is thus pain imagined, and pain transformed from an individual and private feeling to a shared and public one.

But while Kevin Carter's photo successfully constructed an expression for one of the more painful courses of modern death, it still didn't kill any of the Janjaweed murderers, nor did it alter the conduct of Al Bashir's mobs. Today, seventeen years after Carter's suicide, Al Bashir is

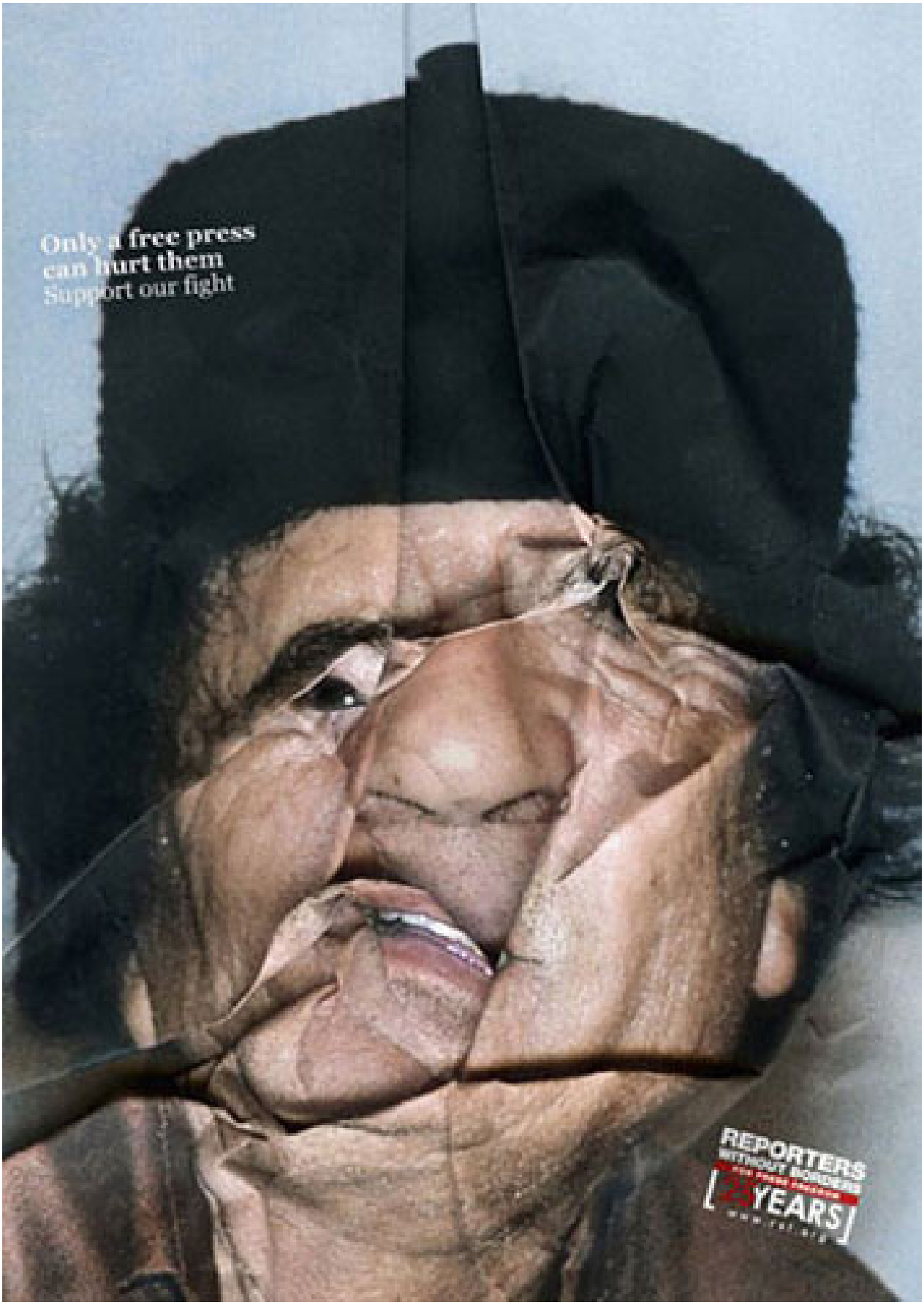
Kevin Carter, right; João Silva, center; and Gary Bernard after the death of the photographer Abdul Shariff in Katlehong, South Africa. Jan. 9, 1994. Photo: Mykal Nicolau.

still in power and we still hope that the giant of hunger won't be awoken again. One can claim based on Carter's last statement that this image and its likes are an ethical burden on both the individual and collective levels. Kevin Carter was undoubtedly capable of walking back to his hotel to spend the night, tired and anxious, but safe from death. That same night did not bring any expectations of safety to the hungry and vulnerable, for they were hungry day and night, and dying day and night, whereas the photographer who supports them and the journalist who wants to protect their stories will proceed with almost all the tools to shield them from death—money, food, commodities, equipment, and so forth. In this ownership we find what makes the disparity between the supportive journalist and his starving subjects immense and intolerable. Ultimately, these supporters are left to face moral denunciation or suicide, for media around the world choose to ban the broadcasting or publishing of violent or bloody images with the premise that such images might literally be deadly for their viewers. On a collective level, the implications were broader and more comprehensive, for such images compelled many around the world to sooth their wearied consciences by providing donations and charity. But they also unleashed an ethical debate blaming photographers for taking such photos in place of abandoning their work to help the victims. It was as if the world repented for its part in giving birth to the monster that turned a faceless death into an illustrated, observable death—one that can be imagined. What became clear was that the world is determined to know, and is capable of providing some support. However, the world is not yet willing to witness the charting of courses for death or to account for it in precise and pertinent terms. In the following wars and crises, we witnessed death as a pervasive fact but we refused to observe its course of action. We refused to look because, under the right circumstances, we would possess the means to stop it from reaching its natural end. With such images, the world came to realize that some death, and perhaps most of it, can be avoided, but what prevents us from saving some of those who die is precisely our chronic addiction to caring for our daily affairs and small concerns. We are unable to disregard our jobs or overlook our morning coffee in order to go save the starving from death and prevent the killers



from killing. One final issue concerns the place of the spectator in the equation of the murderer and the victim. In the era of contemporary images, the spectator is no longer capable of sympathizing with the killer. Rather, one is now more willing to identify with the victims. Given a choice between taking the place of the victim or that of the killer, anyone would choose the former without hesitation. The worst nightmare is to be put in the place of Abu Musab al-Zarqawi while slaughtering Nick Berg. Images such as these have buried historical heroes—Hercules, Hannibal, and Napoleon have in some sense become murderers, terrorists, or Zarqawists. Nevertheless, the clarity in choosing to side with the victim has not bridged the painful distance between the victims of death and their spectators. Perhaps it has made this distance wider by encouraging people to evade such difficult tests. Thus, while we watched events in Iraq, Lebanon, Gaza, Haiti, and Iran on our screens, the people in those places were only able to watch their own deaths through the same media. And when circumstances became worse, the fragile media networks became incapable of reaching those in the worst affected areas, which is to say that the people of south Lebanon could not watch their death on-screen as easily as the French and Portuguese could. If they had a chance to watch their own death, it was through the same media as the French, Americans, or Portuguese, effectively making their own death less personal, given that they were still alive to witness it. Here we have what is primarily a separation of the dead from the living at the moment of death: those who watch CNN are survivors, while those who don't are either dead or potentially dead.

During wars and crises, the leading broadcasters regularly create an image of death that goes beyond mere burial to acquire an afterlife of stories, opinions, or even policies—as was the case after the New York attacks, when the victims wanted additional proof that they were victims. Accordingly, the American administration, impelled by the contagion of revenge, engaged the industry of death in Afghanistan, Iraq, and Pakistan to the point where it became expected of the people of Washington and New York to go out on the streets after midnight to celebrate the assassination of Bin Laden. The broadcast image remained dominant during the



Campaign image from Reporters without Borders.

revolutions throughout the Arab world, from Tunisia to Egypt, Yemen, Bahrain, and Libya. Yet, with the outbreak of the Syrian revolution, it looks as if something major has changed. The revolution in Syria did not confront an authoritarian regime like those of Egypt or Tunisia. Aziz Al-Azmeh has labeled the regime in Syria a *nizam mamlouki*—a regime (*nizam*) that sees the people, the land, and everything above or below it, as an unquestionable part of its own exclusive property. In a sense, the Syrian *mamlouki* regime doesn't care for the lives in its possession, and therefore finds it simple to punish them with death and starvation. In Daraa, things could not have been more clear: a city is punished by withholding electricity, water, and food, leaving it to choose between dying or yielding. It was a medieval kind of military procedure with no relation to modern times. It is well known that president Bashar al-Assad governs Syria from the memory of his father, the president Hafez al-Assad, who used fighter planes to bombard the city of Hama in 1982, executing a massacre with no modern parallel other than the massacre of Hiroshima. For Bashar al-Assad to govern from the memory of his father is somehow explainable, but if that memory is to be so obsolete and defunct as we have seen most recently in the actions of the Syrian security forces, then the invitations to coexist with the regime necessarily become irrelevant. Consequently, the equation created by the Syrian rebels, with their profound modernity, defeats not only Bashar al-Assad, but also the conscience of a world showing limited support for rebels who die in front of cameras. From the outset of the crisis in Syria, political analysts waited for a demonstration of millions in Damascus so they could begin to anticipate the collapse of the bloody regime. Images of a million demonstrators is itself enough to change the logic of politics in the world, for it is irrefutable evidence that "the people want a change of the regime." Yet the first weeks passed without a demonstration by millions. There were small demonstrations springing out of unexpected places in many Syrian towns and cities, and they were met by unspeakable violence from the security forces. The toll was modest in terms of numbers, but the rebels demonstrated an audacity that the world has not seen, and is probably not yet willing to see. International television networks and news agencies backed away from showing the images of the blood and torn flesh that protesters shed fearlessly in the face of their oppressor. The excuse was the same: some violent scenes should not be broadcast live, for such images could have undesirable effects on viewers. But the images from Syria are not those that were previously the subject of distaste. They are not the images of Zarqawi, nor the images taken by privileged journalists in southern Sudan. The image-makers of Syria, for the first time in history, simultaneously occupied two enormous roles: the role of the victim and that of hero. The Syrian photographer is a protester, but instead of filming the crowd he films his own personal death. It is a form of suicide against the cameras that spares no one, even if the world's networks refrain from broadcasting its images. The protester in Syria is simultaneously a victim of bare repression and a historian. A protester who writes history with his own blood, body, and nerves will be a challenge for future historians, but the revolution in Syria has also put the media to a difficult test. Régis Debray has said that the journalist is a dog going following scents, but this precise description does not apply to the Syrian image-maker/protester. The protester there does not resemble the journalist as a vulture attracted by the distant smell of blood. The protester in Syria transforms the security forces into vultures, for they show up wherever the protester is, and begin feeding on bodies. So much for the ordeal of the media and the traditional politics of solidarity.

The Syrian bloodshed puts yet another party to a harder and more significant test. One can assert without hesitation that the Syrian protesters defeated all forms of political movement using violence as a means of achieving their goals. The first losers were Osama bin Laden and Abu Musab al-Zarqawi. The Syrian image-maker is not the aggressor like Zarqawi, who used to film himself killing his victims. The video showing the security men in the village of Bayda stepping on the backs of the arrested might be close to this, but it is an exception more than it is the rule. The Syrians broadcasted images of their own death by live bullets, and the slain cannot be blamed for his blood. Still, this image-maker places the spectator in a complex position, for the person who sees these images can no longer risk being on the side of the killer, nor can he or she identify with the helpless victim. The Syrian image confronts the spectator with the impossibility of being Syrian, whether the Syrian is killer or victim. It is more than a spectator can withstand. This is perhaps why the Syrian images did not proliferate, as did those of the Egyptian revolution, for it becomes very difficult to say, "we are all Syrians," as some would say we are all Palestinians or Egyptians. We are still far from equaling the Syrians in their stature or courage. It is for these reasons that the victory of the Syrian revolution is imminent. If the Syrians were to fail in face of the *mamlouki* regime, no one in the world would endure this defeat. Since the beginning of the Syrian revolution, the world has had no choice but to side with the repressed.

The Tunisians and Egyptians, and before them the Iranians and Lebanese, have struggled to divert the image and the word from familiar paths. Their effort was not the product of an intellectual or conceptual maturity, but a concrete endeavor. These rebels knew that if they didn't assume control over the processes of interpretation, and if they didn't announce their manifestos concisely and without embellishment, they wouldn't be able to shape their own destinies and those of their countries. Some revolutions succeeded and others failed, but the ones that failed were no less exemplary than those that were victorious or that still have hope for victory. Victory in revolution is not a theoretical lesson, for who can assure us that the French or Russian revolutions failed or succeeded? Yet we know that they inspired and effected

The lack of images from any type of news coverage in Syria contrasts with the many images of president Bashar al-Assad and his wife Asma, such as this one from Getty Images. Here the couple leaves the Grand Palais after visiting the exhibition dedicated to Claude Monet on December 9, 2010 in Paris. Al-Assad is on a two-days official visit to France.

change, not only in their immediate context but on an international scale. It seems that the eagerness of those rebels to assume control of the meaning of their revolutions was decisive in defining their nature and importance. However, those rebels did not experience the medieval machine of repression facing Libyan and Syrian rebels. The case of Libya is of course different from that of Syria, for the world rushed to condemn Gaddafi and his regime, and this made the theoretical burden on the Libyan rebels less imposing. The Syrians face a regime that hasn't yet played all its cards, as its Libyan counterpart did. The Syrians want to prove that their affable president is not a reformer, as Hilary Clinton describes him to be, and that the secular regime is not a guardian of minorities as its men like to claim. The Syrian protesters knew, while the rest of the world didn't, that the moment they chose to go into the streets they would certainly fall into the blind trap of the Ba'athist death. By carrying their cameras and filming their personal deaths they deeply and radically changed the logic of an image that we once recognized from a commentary on an event to an accomplished event in itself. Presumably, this change will continue to trouble the international media. In Egypt, Tunisia, and Iran, the word was the event, but this has always been the case. In Lebanon, the image never reached an event, but in many ways the events became an image. The Lebanese proclaimed that they faced a terrifying machine of repression—the same one that the Syrians now face—but that machine was dismantled early in the course of their revolution. The Lebanese simply waited in front of cameras, showing their willingness to confront the cruelty of repression without its ever having to materialize. In Syria we find the other side of the same equation: there were only a few people compared to the crowds of the other revolutions, but all of them were shot at and all of them were dying in front of cameras that documented their deafening and bloody deaths. The Syrian authorities immediately made it a crime to possess a camera, and they arrested anyone found taking images on a mobile phone. The image that became an event has been strictly Syrian, for no one in the world has produced anything similar. The media, and television networks in particular, can no longer equal what the Syrian rebels have produced. They might have been lucky for having been banned from reporting on Syrian soil.

By turning the image into an autonomous event, the Syrian rebels were able to safeguard its meaning. They succeeded in guiding the process of interpretation while they claimed and endorsed the images of their own deaths. From now on, no state, people, or group has a right to tell them what is best for them, or whether their

Broken LCD screen.

president is a reformer. The Syrian rebels now hold the exclusive right to interpret their own images, for the images are of the event of their death, and it is for this reason they hold the exclusive right to decide the future of their country.

X

Translated by Bechara Malkoun and Rebecca Lazar.

Jon Rich was born in Amman in 1965. He teaches Arabic and Sociology in Lisbon, where he has lived since 1990.

Ghalya Saadawi

Post–Sharjah Biennial 10: Institutional Grease and Institutional Critique

In 1971, a solo exhibition by German artist Hans Haacke, planned to take place at the Guggenheim in New York, was censored due to the artist's intention to exhibit a work titled *Shapolsky et al., Manhattan Real Estate Holdings, a Real Time Social System, as of May 1, 1971*. One of the most discussed works of the 1970s, the piece brings together Haacke's research on slumlord Harry Shapolsky's real estate holdings in Manhattan. A series of over 140 photographs of run-down blocks of residential buildings displayed with detailed data from public records clearly exposed the NYC's real-estate tycoon families' monopoly over those slums. The Guggenheim decided to shut down the exhibition because it was deemed inappropriate. Rumors circulated that Guggenheim trustees might have been implicated in those dodgy financial dealings. The exhibition's curator, Edward Fry, was then fired, and apparently never worked in the US again. Of course, Haacke's work was not conspiratorial, as some had conjectured, but was a diligent archival excavation that has since become exemplary for the forms of institutional critique circulating at a time when self-organized artist initiatives abounded in New York.

[figure 9e895692246c40a5b1011242427f58ef.jpg
Hans Haacke, *Shapolsky et al., Manhattan Real Estate Holdings, a Real Time Social System, as of May 1, 1971*
1917. Installation view.

]

Flash forward to 2011. Arab countries that have been enduring the legacy of colonialism and the backbreaking ideologies of the 1950s and 60s are revolting against decades of dictatorship. First the multitude of Tunis rises against Ben Ali, then Egypt overthrows Mubarak, and now Libya, Bahrain, Syria, and Yemen.... The results of these struggles are still uncertain as NATO and American forces (not to mention internal security forces and tribal leaders) react in the spirit of the times, catching on to the so-called intelligence oversights, and initiating campaigns of bloody intervention. However, what was noted as singular, inspiring, and unprecedented about these revolts was the degree of spontaneous and organic self-organization. Without a leader, commander, or traditional political party hierarchies, hundreds of thousands of bodies descended into capital cities and town centers and invented new economies of exchange, assistance, and expertise—be they medical, visual, or linked to basic sustenance on the streets.[1] Even more recently, images from protests in Spain, albeit stemming from a very different set of crucial demands vis-à-vis the state, have been notable in the way they similarly portray self-organized, networked, collaborative, and mobile forms of action—also equally leaderless and still ongoing.

In the meantime, related battles are being fought on the terrain of art and culture. Billions of petro- and real estate dollars have made it possible to invest in bringing mega art institutions, such as the Louvre, the Guggenheim, and

Christie's to Abu Dhabi and its environs. As has been clear to many, the massive interest and investment in the art of the region (whether the Arab region or the Middle East in particular) is turning it into an asset class of its own, a new commodity, in surprising and sometimes less-surprising ways. Yet this burgeoning interest (both locally and internationally) in the category of Arab art sometimes goes beyond mere market trends, and evinces not only a familiar form of political control, but has always been, for many critics and commentators, the other arm of foreign policy, exerting its power through cultural politics.[2]

[figure fullpage fdbddada6fb7ed0e987c1732aa776d47.jpg

The Egyptian Pavillion at the 1867 World Fair exhibition, Paris.

]

Informed by modernist, universalist discourse following World War II, as well as the rise of capitalist and globalization discourses in more recent decades, the ideological forces driving the field of art have become many-sided and increasingly indistinguishable from one another. Roughly, on the one hand there is the art market composed of collectors, buyers, dealers, investors, and auction houses; on the other, there are the local and international donor agencies, private funders, promoters, audiences, and artist projects. Add to this a third body of centralized cultural policy-making and state-sponsored art, and it becomes clear that these various interests cannot be easily separated. Although foreign and domestic cultural policy in the arts is not a new political phenomenon (for it includes the World Fairs of the nineteenth century, the support of Abstract Expressionists in the modern period, through to the biennials, triennials, and the dubbing of a transnational category of art today[3]), let us be clear about an age-old and inevitable relationship between art (its production, exhibition, not to mention its existence) and money. Yet could and should the idea and the category of art be understood solely under these terms?

Some have speculated that many of these contradictions and ill-fated relationships came to a head when, more recently, an international group of highly visible artists reacted to a recent Human Rights Watch report regarding the decrepit and unjust state of migrant workers in the UAE by writing and circulating a letter titled "Who's Building the Guggenheim Abu Dhabi?" The group of artists (many of whom are already part of the Guggenheim's collection in New York and have exhibited there) state in their letter that they will boycott the Guggenheim branch in Abu Dhabi if it does not provide the exploited workers building the gigantic Frank Gehry–designed structures with adequate rights and privileges.[4] However, although this gesture is ethically necessary, one wonders whether it actually sets in motion a critique of the structure of art institution-building practices fundamentally. As such, while the boycott targets the Guggenheim Abu Dhabi (where many of these very artists' works would have been exhibited, and possibly owned), why not also begin questioning the other institutions that carry and exhibit their work? Who built, renovated, or funded, say, Mathaf in Doha, the private galleries of Dubai, let alone museums and galleries throughout the Western world?

[figure partialpage
fc075ed6e626d667362e1044c0409494.jpg
Project for the Helix Hotel in Abu Dhabi by Leeser Architecture.

]

In the neighboring emirate of Sharjah, politics (and even budgets) in the arts have not been identical to the importation of cultural institutions to Saadiyat Island—the massively costly collection of islands especially built for these mega institutions in Abu Dhabi. The Sharjah Art Foundation (SAF)—in part the brainchild of Jack Persekian, who helped found it in 2009 as Artistic Director of the Sharjah Biennial—was perceived by some as a more organic "umbrella" platform for contemporary artistic production and reflection, producing the well-attended Sharjah Biennial and the yearly March Meeting, as well as artist residencies, publications, and numerous other initiatives and programs.

Funded by the ruling Sheikh Sultan Al-Qassimi and funded through Sharjah's Ministry of Culture, the foundation's remit was in part to showcase modern and contemporary art and provoke discussion about its relationship to its immediate context and ecosystem (at least through its biennial, which in its early iterations exhibited painting, drawing, and sculpture, and at a later stage came to include sonic and visual arts production, workshops, outreach events, and even social or political critique by extension through some of the projects it hosted). Whether it succeeded or not is a point of contention. For some, it pushed certain important limits, broadening the scope of Sharjah as an urban locale, and over the years producing reverberations that were seen as essential for keeping networks and conversations open. Yet, "in the eyes of cynics," as Hanan Toukan writes in her recent article on the matter, the foundation and the Biennial remain "an autocratic regime's futile attempt to market a humane and civilized face to the rest of the world." Possibly all funding and support in the so-called Arab and Gulf regions is merely the legacy of post-Cold War diplomacy and "the culmination of the politically motivated space that has been developing in between the new markets on the one hand and the civil society formula as the conduit for international cultural diplomacy and soft power on the other."[5]

A month after the opening of the tenth edition of Sharjah Biennial on March 16, 2011—curated by Suzanne Cotter,

Rasha Salti, and associate curator Haig Aivazian—Jack Persekian was fired. The official explanation for the sacking cited an allegedly offensive artwork by Mustapha Benfodil for having sparked a chorus of disapproval from certain members of the public, stating that, given his role as director, Persekian should have shown more responsibility toward local sensitivities, tastes, and the emirate's stringent laws against insulting Islam. In addition, the work was censored and removed from view, and it was also said that other works were tampered with or placed "under review." In a contestable piece, curator Okwui Enwezor recently wrote:

> What undid Persekian, I would argue, was actually a confluence of forces: the irreconcilability of the ambitions he held for the Sharjah Art Foundation as it grew, his supporters' false impression that Sharjah was no different from any other cosmopolitan city, and the narrow space he had to navigate between transgression and conformity that his patrons had allowed him. In the end, he could not serve these conflicting constituencies.[6]

In order to protest against these moves and express solidarity with Persekian, a group of individuals collectively wrote a protest letter and posted an online petition, which was signed by around 1600 art practitioners, those with or without a stake (including artists, writers, curators, biennial and museum directors, and so forth).[7] This was accompanied by statements from curators Rasha Salti and Haig Aivazian decrying the sad turn of affairs, but more importantly highlighting that they are not "outsiders" imposing their views on a local public, and are well aware of the thin line between sensitivity to local laws and outright (self-)censorship, not to mention that Aivazian himself was a longtime inhabitant of Sharjah throughout the 1990s.

[figure 234615985a716e249f5dc6909b188e80.jpg

]

Although censorship and self-censorship were, are and always will remain an issue in the showcasing of art, whether in the UAE or elsewhere (or perhaps one should say that overt censorship exposes a show of force by the powers-that-be when the implicit rules of self-censorship fail), it is clearly not the only issue at stake now, several weeks after these events began to unfold.[8] In some (probably expected) odd-but-happy marriage between SAF, now run by Sheikha Hoor Al-Qasimi, and Fitz and Co (ironically, the New York–based company hired to promote Sharjah Biennial 10), a PR campaign was launched to condemn the petition, reinstate and reiterate the reasons for the ruler's decision to oust Persekian, and generally save face. This included articles in the press, circulating disclaimers forcibly signed by Persekian, and a moderate, conciliatory letter sent in the name of Hoor Al Qasimi to all artists participating in the Biennial. As such, a call to boycott is not a benign gesture at all, as a way of saying "I prefer not to" that can always be a vibrant form of protest and abstention. Meanwhile, via the Facebook conversations and comments, published articles, and live polemic this story generated, some of the retorts circulating in reaction to the letter of protest ran along the lines of "What did you expect from the UAE except censorship?", "Censorship and self-censorship are endemic to the art world, what's the point of protesting against them?", "What is the real reason behind this cultural colonization of the UAE? You should get out of there," "These Gulf art world protests can be seen as a delayed symptom of the fact that artists were in no way at the forefront of the Arab spring," "This is what you get when you go into contract with this industrial-type complex for contemporary art," and so on.

Some of these claims are indeed accurate and legitimate, while others are problematic, deeply reductionist, and borderline racist. For one, they implicitly view the Gulf as a singular out-group entity to be discriminated against for its backwardness and lack of local culture, without nuance or differentiation. They create false dichotomies between original and imported, authentic and fake, or local and transnational, however contentious or loaded the politics of these terms may be. In addition, viewing any or all engagement with artistic practices in this region as solely informed by liberal, unrestrained market forces and a form of colonization, disregards some of the vital and powerful artwork at stake, including work that calls into question this very market-engineered dynamic (Hans Haacke's work being but one example), and in some instances missed the point. The history of institutional critique is an old and fruitful one, and the relationship between ideological function and commodification of art has been extensively written about. It is time to revisit these in a serious fashion, in practice—and not dismiss all artworks in a facile manner by confusing the whole of the machine with the potentialities of its parts, which, in innumerable cases, in no way reify it.

Moreover, some of these reactions neglect the fact that large-scale institutions are institutions nonetheless, in that their funding comes, if not from the state, then from private banks, trustees, or those with capital interest. From this strictly structural viewpoint, whether we are in Sharjah or in London, the forces of the art market in its many guises, as well as the dominant cultural policy, are and have always been the major, heavyweight protagonists. In other words, this is the life and mechanics of the art market (and of capitalism itself), which is as old as (if not constitutive of) the so-called art world itself. If some insist that we should look at this matrix from a purely socio-political and economic perspective, perhaps it would be more productive to focus, in the words of anthropologist Kirsten Scheid, on what we do not know

about “contemporary Arab art”—from its audiences to its forms, concepts, historiography, all the way to its funding and institutions.[9]

[figure fullpage 93d7e2782ec0fec50ff018ccc4028905.jpg Walid Raad, *View from Inner to Outer Compartment VI*, 2011. High density foam, wood, stainless steel. © Walid Raad. Courtesy Paula Cooper Gallery, New York.

]

Furthermore, the problematic idea that one should not protest censorship or engage with (state-sponsored) art institutions in this area of the world (since these emirates are a bunch of dictatorships) is equal to saying one should not work with national cultural centers or with art institutions in China, Syria, Jordan, or anywhere else where autocratic rule is rampant or brutal (not to mention so-called liberal democracies where censorship can be just as pervasive; the US and Lebanon are just two random examples). The idea that established museums, galleries, funders, cultural/foreign policies, and even art history anthologies make visible and invisible what is politically convenient at a given time is high school textbook material.

Instead of merely presenting materialist conceptions of art and power, reiterating how capital operates in “liberal democracies” and dictatorships alike with what Slavoj Zižek has called “a moralizing critique of capitalism,” let there be a renewed, vibrating critique of institutions or, in the words of artist Doug Ashford, “deprofessionalization.”[10] As Ursula Biemann and Shuruq Harb have written,

> Initiatives for building strong civil networks and institutions are bound to emerge now ... that will lay the grounds for a discourse on art and visual culture from the bottom up. We need platforms where artists can speak their mind about foreign investment in the arts, national cultural politics, massive institution building, their relation to the international art industry, and their needs for de-centered and revised histories.[11]

This is exactly the time to learn from the Arab revolts, from their visceral, urgent, organic self-organization, and their rejection of hegemonic structures. It is the time to re-celebrate and initiate independent, provisional, improvisational, idiosyncratic, contingent organizations, collectives, initiatives, artworks, fanzines, and a time to revisit old and new conversations and excavate art practices that—whether within the walls of the museum or outside it—have dedicated themselves, sometimes radically and without naıveté, to interrogating the weight of institutional idioms and capital in producing, circulating, and consuming art. Could now be the prescient time to re-imagine an alternative?

X

Ghalya Saadawi is an independent writer and editor. She is a PhD candidate at Goldsmiths University in London. She currently lives in Beirut.

1
As a side note, Lebanon is seen by many as an exception to these mass demonstrations to bring down the old guard, as it struggles to form a government, stuck as it is between the status quo of the March 8 and March 14 coalitions/politicians. And when obedient partisans do take to the streets, it's more often than not in support of one of the two distinct alliances ruling the country in different guises for almost as long as the country existed, and thus, in the words of historian Faisal Devji, cancel each other out. Further south-east near the Persian-Arab Gulf, recent Gulf and international media have released news bulletins regarding the tracking down and detention of bloggers, activists, and even academics demanding free elections and the creation of political parties in these autocratic emirates.

2
Irrespective of the type and interest of the work shown here, note how Ministries of Foreign Affairs mandate their cultural centers in Arab cities, often perpetuating their colonial legacy as the new cultural outpost. Paris and London being two such epicenters, with the French Cultural Centers and British Councils.

3
For instance, consider the 1970 Biennial of Alexandria, the 1974 First Arabic Biennial of Baghdad, and the 1975 Biennial of Arab Countries of Kuwait, to name a few examples of state-sponsored interests and promotion of art in the so-called Arab region.

4
See http://gulflabor.wordpress.com/ .

5
Hanan Touqan, "Boat Rocking in the Art Islands: Politics, Plots and Dismissals in Sharjah's Tenth Biennial," *Jadaliyya*, May 2, 2011, see http://www.jadaliyya.com/pages/index/1389/boat-rocking-in-the-art-islands_politics-plots-and .

6
Okwi Enwezor, "Spring Rain: Okwi Enwezor on Ai Weiwei and the Sharjah Biennial," *Artforum* (Summer 2011), see http://www.artforum.com/inprint/id=28339 .

7
See http://web.archive.org/web/20110828091443/https://sharjahcallforaction.wordpress.com/ .

8
For example, note the strange, but not unpredictable wall text (or, rather, the blatant disclaimer) used in an Emily Jacir exhibition at the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art in 2009 stating that "SFMOMA is committed to exhibiting and acquiring works by local, national, and international artists that represent a diversity of viewpoints and positions. Works of art can engender valuable discussion about a range of topics including those that are difficult and contested, such as the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Additional information about Emily Jacir's *Where We Come From* , including a list of frequently asked questions, is available at the information desk." See Tyler Green, "SFMOMA installed unusual wall-text in Emily Jacir gallery," http://blogs.artinfo.com/modernartnotes/2009/01/sfmoma-installs-unusual-wall-t/ , and http://www.flickr.com/photos/dphiffer/3217175545/ .

9
Kirsten Scheid, "What we do not know: Questions for a study of contemporary Arab art", *ISIM Review* 22 (Autumn, 2008).

10
Slavoj Zižek, *Living in the End of Times* (London: Verso, 2011), 473. Doug Ashford and Naeem Mohaiemen, "Naeem Mohaiemen and Doug Ashford Dialogue," in Naeem Mohaiemen, *Collectives in Atomised Time* (Calaf: IDENSITAT Associació D'Art Contemporani, 2008) 50.

11
Ursula Biemann and Shuruq Harb, "Ibraaz Platform 001," June 2011, see http://www.ibraaz.org/platforms/1/responses/37 .