e-flux journal

issue #18

09/2010

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

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

Issue 18 of *e-flux journal* marks the beginning of our third year of publishing, and the start of a "Letters to the Editors" feature, with reader responses to issues or individual essays published in the journal. To offer your own response, write to **journal@e-flux.com**.

***

Robert Smithson's well-known indictment of art institutions as lobotomizing apparatuses—neutralizing all that is placed within their walls—remains relevant today. But can we say, even in a Smithsonesque manner, that this problem now extends far beyond art museums? What if the edifying and embalming functions of museums and art institutions simply serve to double a latent tendency within culture itself, one that wants to hold on to things and remember them? Surely, if we were to demolish all art institutions, they would reemerge; and anyhow, as Toni Negri suggests in this issue, society needs institutions—the alternative is much worse.

In "History in the Making," **Peter Friedl** considers the image as a marker of death—not only that of images' subjects, but of historical events that are altered and staged through this supposedly documentary medium. From the Paris Commune, to Neda Soltani, to the Spanish Civil War, to Courbet, to Robert Capa, the issue is not only that selective framing produces deliberate misreadings, but that "all images lie when they are not read right."

Hassan Khan recuperates the figure of the corrupt intellectual as an opportunity to understand a condition of being simultaneously empowered by and embedded in the limitations of cultural practice. While the corrupt intellectual may be the worst kind of coward, this figure also heralds a capitulation to popular, or populist, sentiment, to the malleable force of the crowd, that you or I may not only have already recognized, but implicitly internalized...

How can the multitude constitute a singularity, asks **Antonio Negri** in **Hans Ulrich Obrist**'s conversation with the philosopher. How can the wild, dangerous creativity that exists in the metropolis be harnessed to mobilize people? How does "all that rationalist art" represent the link between Surrealism and Fordization? And how can we rediscover the common as a space of resistance?

Marta Jecu looks to the works of artists such as Carlos Bunga, Gutai, Ei Arakawa, and Sancho Silva to explain how the uses of space and time that followed from post-conceptual practices are most usefully considered in light of how they function within the realm of the virtual. How do we understand works that utilize spatial realignments and temporal processes to constitute an embodied potentiality that surrounds, and often evades, the exhibited material?

Gean Moreno and **Ernesto Oroza** articulate the world of

generic objects sculpted by the brutally abstract flows of trade logistics, global exchange, and abject necessity. They key into a type of formal engagement that not only bypasses and supersedes modes of display, but also considers concrete object-production in terms of a kind of "meta-author" working at the intersection of small-scale need and worldwide processes of industrial standardization. "What is most interesting about the generic quality is that it clarifies objects as compressed and manipulable energy and information, free of the magical cloak of meaning and added value with which the fairy dust of sanctioned creativity wraps them."

Finally, **Maria Rus Bojan**, **Beatrice von Bismarck**, **Liam Gillick**, **Jens Hoffmann**, **Adam Kleinman**, **Sohrab Mohebbi**, **Nato Thompson**, **Vivian Rehberg**, **Dorothee Richter**, **Jacopo Crivelli Visconti**, and **Tirdad Zolghadr** reply to Anton Vidokle's polemical essay "Art Without Artists" from issue 16, which warned against curatorial ambition usurping or erasing the work of artists in spaces of art.

—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.

Peter Friedl

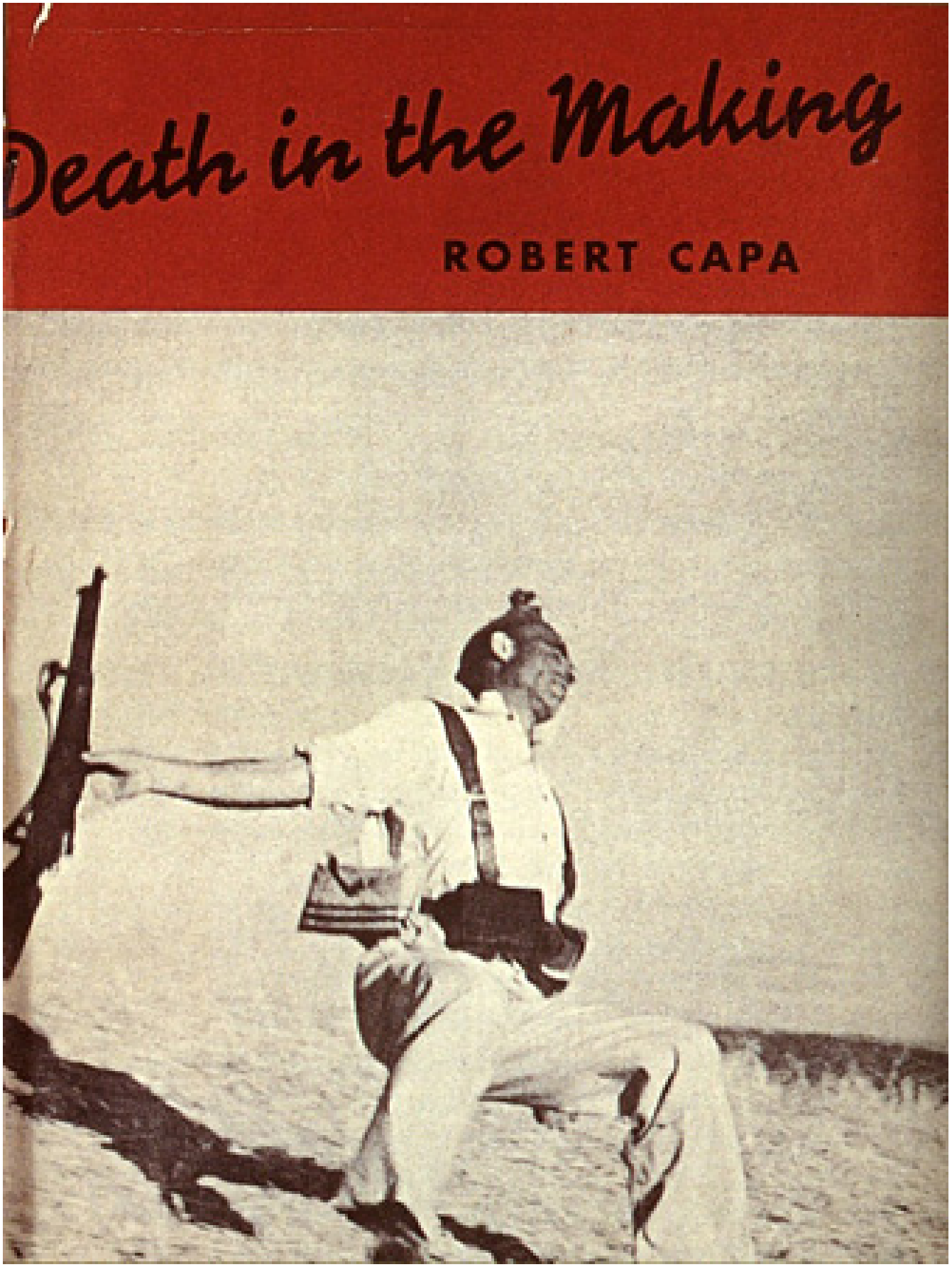
History in the Making

To capture death, you need the right technique and the right moment. The public, filmed death of Neda Agha-Soltan had just been sent from Tehran via email, Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, and every possible television station to the entire networked world when the usual reflex of media critique and propaganda began. Since the photographic image can no longer be trusted, yet no one wants to deprive themselves of it, the roles in this short-lived game are predefined. The anonymously made video, probably shot with a cell phone camera, gave a face to the protests against the results of the Iranian presidential election. The protests became a story that could be retold, fitting for the invention of the "Twitter revolution."

Left: Neda Agha-Soltan, right: Neda Soltani.

Due to the news embargo imposed in Tehran, and a lack of other journalistic witnesses, the video simultaneously fulfilled multiple functions of real and symbolic politics. In an initial reaction, the Iranian state media declared the video a fake. At the same time, however, they also confirmed that several people had been killed during the day's protests. Then, parallel to the blossoming of the Neda cult worldwide, various versions of and conspiracy theories about the death of the young woman began circulating, for example, that British or CIA agents (but no Basij militiamen) had been involved, or that co-conspirators had shot her as a spy while she was staging her own death for the cameras using fake blood. Her striking gaze into the camera was held against her. And while the Iranian cyberwar between state power and the opposition began to grow, thanks to new filtering and anti-censorship programs, the hoax community on the internet also debated all possible details and particularities of the Tehran street scene.

In its emotional logics, the entirely de-contextualized scene recalled another prominent victim icon of recent history: televised images of the death of a Palestinian boy in Gaza shortly after the onset of the Al-Aqsa Intifada. The "France 2" clip from September 30, 2000, shows



Book cover of Robert Capa's Death in the Making. Covici Friede Publishers, New York 1938.

Hippolyte Bayard, Autoportrait en noyé, 1840. Courtesy SFP, Paris.

Jules Andrieu, Désastres de la guerre, Galerie des Fêtes de l'Hôtel de Ville, 1871. Gelatin silver print. Courtesy National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa.

twelve-year-old Muhammad al-Durrah hanging onto his father for protection as he is hit by Israeli soldiers' bullets: Palestinians throw stones, Israeli soldiers shoot back, a child dies. In this case, the cameraman was known by name (Talal Abu Rahma), although the correspondent who edited and provided commentary on the film material (Charles Enderlin), was not on site. Numerous streets, squares, and schools in the Arab world were named after Muhammad al-Durrah, the young martyr. The picture of the boy also haunted the macabre video from Pakistan with which the world learned of the beheading of *Wall Street Journal* reporter Daniel Pearl in February 2002. In France and Israel, legal and political quarrels, ballistic examinations, and counter-statements culminated in accusations that the filmed scene had been staged by the Palestinians—in the tradition of blood libel legends. Some eccentrics claim that Muhammad al-Durrah is still just as much alive now as he was before.[1]

Neda, the philosophy student who did not go out to vote, was selected as 2009's Person of the Year by the London *Times*. At Queen's College in Oxford, a scholarship was set up in her name. According to the *Times*, she was entirely apolitical, but according to her fiancé (a photojournalist appearing in a dubious minor role), she is thought to have said that "each person leaves a footprint in this world."[2] In Farsi, Neda means "voice" or "call." The anonymous authors of the Tehran video were honored with the George Polk Award, one of the most prestigious journalistic awards in the US, in the newly created category of videography. The award also served to pay tribute to news shows and agencies' increasing tendency to fall back on user-generated content. Video writes history. Adapting lines from *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte,* it might be possible to say here that "under circumstances existing already, given and transmitted from the past," not only do men "make their own history," but also personally illustrate it.[3] NEDA, as an acronym for "Nothing Except Democracy Acceptable," appeared printed on T-shirts.

But there was one more little surprise: the other Neda. At first glance, her full name, Neda Soltani, could be easily mistaken for that of Neda Soltan. She worked as an English lecturer at the Islamic Azad University, where Neda Agha-Soltan was a student, and was busy with Joseph Conrad at the time. When the video of the dying Neda was sent out to the world and a photo was sought to show her in better days, someone found Neda Soltani's portrait on her Facebook profile and copied it. Thus, the wrong picture landed in the hands of a hysterical mass media. Television companies throughout the world broadcasted it, newspapers printed it, and it was used in online blogs and articles, sometimes even with the correct name. Mourning ceremonies for the dead Neda were held in front of this photo and angry demonstrators carried it before them as an icon. For the woman depicted, the photo transformed into a memento mori: all of her attempts to weed it from the internet were in vain. She fled from Iran and applied for refugee status in Germany. Even after the parents of Neda Agha-Soltan provided authentic photos, the wrong Neda was still used. Or the wrong name. The online edition of the *Guardian* from June 22, 2009, had the correct portrait of the deceased Neda under the headline: "How Neda Soltani became the face of Iran's struggle." Two weeks later, the BBC posted the mix-up in "The Buzz," a weekly online inventory chronicling the world of internet forums.[4]

At issue here is the dictatorship of the fragment and not checking the validity of various individual reports and bits

Eugène Appert, Assassinat des otages dans la prison de la Roquette, 1871. Photo montage. Courtesy Musée de l'Histoire vivante, Montreuil.

Eugène Disdéri, Cadavres de Communards fusillés, 1871. Courtesy Musée d'Art et d'Histoire, Saint-Denis.

of information. The snuff film's return as ultimate proof is no good omen. It arrives as a desperate attempt to gain existential meaning from the consumption of images, rather than from the consumption of faith, as in former times. But it is also reminiscent of the old dilemma: what is heard is decisive, not what is said. Perhaps this dilemma (an unsuccessful revolt or coup against contingency?) has replaced the problem of how to represent history.

In July 2008, the photo of an Iranian missile test was published, among other places, on the front pages of papers such as the *Los Angeles Times*, *Financial Times,* and *Chicago Tribune;* and online, on several news sites. It did not take long before the coarse Photoshop manipulation was detected: in the photo, two of the dust clouds had exactly the same shape. The cited source was the website of Sepah News, the propaganda site of the Iranian Revolutionary Guards. But apparently that was also the source for an unaltered photo distributed via Associated Press and Reuters showing three missiles rising diagonally into the sky while the fourth, which misfired, fell. *The Washington Post* commented ironically: "Iran Apparently in Possession of Photoshop."[5]

Photography's melancholy is based on the fact that it shows something that once was and has meanwhile elapsed. By the power of its existence, it confirms that what one sees was actually there; to this extent, it is the epitome of standstill and enchantment. What else is capable of stopping time? "History is hysterical: it is constituted only if we consider it, only if we look at it—and in order to look at it, we must be excluded from it."[6] Barthes referred to the relationship of photography to the *tableau vivant*, "whose mythic prototype is the princess falling asleep in *Sleeping Beauty*," that is, to its reliance on mortifying power.[7] In the era before digital image editing, it was not difficult to produce viable proof of the reality of what was depicted—or, if necessary, of the depiction. Should Robert Capa's *Falling Soldier* turn out to be a staged photo, not taken in Cerro Muriano in September 1936, but further from the front in Espejo (as has recently been claimed, but not proven), then it would document the reality of a perfectly staged image. Did the photographer use a tripod? Was there a sniper from the Moroccan *Regulares* who turned a photo shoot into a gory, earnest affair? No other war photo by "Kamikaze Capa" has been subjected to such persistent investigative critique.[8] Most likely, critique is aimed more at the fairy-tale moment (*kairos*) in which the wounded militiaman turns into an angel than at the spectacle of death.

As we know, this snapshot functioned as a symbol for the anti-fascist campaign, as a sign of the demise of the Second Republic in the Spanish Civil War, and ultimately as the "most famous war image." Capa used it in 1938 on the dust cover for his book *Death in the Making*, which brought his own photos together with those of Gerda Taro, who had died in El Escorial. Throughout Spain, the quickly buried dead who, in mute opposition to the *pacto de silencio*, still wait to be exhumed and identified, have not thereby become any less real.

A fake corpse has accompanied the history of photography right from the start. Hippolyte Bayard was independently experimenting with photographic processes at the same time as Daguerre and Fox Talbot. After the Parisian Academy of Sciences refused his application for a patent, in June 1839 he publicly exhibited thirty of his direct positive photographs. It was the first photo exhibition, but Bayard had lost the race for recognition and commercial success won by Daguerre. The following year Bayard produced *Autoportrait en noyé*, a staging of, and commentary on, the situation: a portrait of the unrecognized inventor as a suicide.

Arthur Boyd Houghton, A Barricade in Paris. Engraving, in The Graphic, 8 April 1871.

Left: Edouard Manet, La Barricade, 1871. Silverpoint, ink, watercolor, and gouache on paper. Courtesy Szépmüvészeti Múzeum, Budapest; Right: Edouard Manet, La Barricade, 1871–73. Lithograph. Courtesy Museum of Fine Arts, Boston.

Bruno Braquehais, Commune de Paris, la colonne Vendôme à terre, 16 May 1871. Courtesy Bibliothèque nationale de France, Paris.

Numerous Parisian Communards who in spring 1871 posed on the barricades for the photographer Bruno Braquehais (a veritable passion, due to the long exposure times) were later identified—from the photos—by Thiers' police and executed under martial law. It was the founding era of police records and photojournalism. Braquehais was one of the few photographers who had remained in Paris. After the massacres and mass executions during the bloody week in May, which cost a quarter of the working class population their lives, the photographers set out to capture the deserted ruins of Paris. Jules Andrieu photographed the Hôtel de Ville and the palace of justice, the Théâtre de la Porte Saint-Martin, the Tuileries, the arsenal, and Pont d'Argenteuil. He called his series of silver prints *Désastres de la guerre*. At first glance it is not clear whether the photos are pro or contra Commune—that "sphinx so tantalizing to the bourgeois mind," as Marx put it.[9] And this was clearly not referring to the sphinx from Gustave Doré's grisaille painting *L'Énigme.* Ruins are obscure and romantic; they no longer present any danger. When the aesthetic view intersects with the politics of forgetting, ruins no longer even have to serve as portents of doom. The photos show the scorched capital of the nineteenth century as a modern Pompeii (Andrieu had gained relevant experience in Palestine and Egypt). Such photos were treasured souvenirs and stirred the imagination; they inspired London travel agent Thomas Cook to offer all-inclusive tours to the original Parisian sites of action, just a few weeks after the end of the fighting in summer 1871. There, too, business was being done. Henri Dombrowski, a pianist, demanded damages from the photographer Pierre Petit. Petit had falsely presented a portrait of Dombrowski, taken before 1870, as depicting Ladislas Dombrowski, the Commune general mortally wounded in the barricade battles; and had sold 200,000 copies of the photo.

With his *Crimes de la Commune*, Eugène Appert was the wartime profiteer among the photographers. As "photographe de la magistrature" he compiled photo montages, *after* the gory defeat , to discredit the Commune. Appert had privileged access to the prisons where he made hundreds of portrait photos; then he staged several spectacular events from recent history for the camera using actors and extras, and inserted the heads of prominent Communards. His theatrical montages of particularly gruesome events were government propaganda and folklore. They are easily recognizable as set-ups. Photos such as *Assassinat des otages dans la prison de la Roquette, le 24 mai 1871, à 8 heures du soir*

François Aubert, Execution Squad Standing at Ease, 1867. Albumen print. Courtesy Musée Royal de l'Armée et d'Histoire militaire, Brussels.

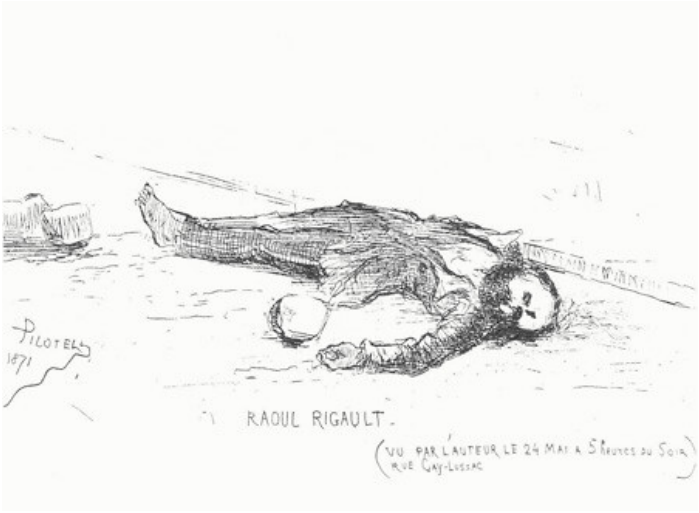
Gustave Courbet, Le château de Chillon, 1874. Oil on canvas, 86 x 112.5 cm. Courtesy Musée Courbet, Ornans.

(Murder of the hostages in La Roquette prison, May 24, 1871, 8 p.m.) or *Massacre des Dominicains d'Arcueil, route d'Italie n° 38, 25 mai 1871, à 4 heures et demie* (Massacre of the Arcueil Dominicans, Route d'Italie no. 38, May 25, 1871, 4:30 a.m.) were printed in the popular *carte de visite* format and served to create a lasting memory of the victors' version. Appert's portraits of the prisoners enjoyed great popularity, even among followers of the Commune. Louise Michel carried the photo of her friend Marie Ferré with her for the rest of her life.

Strictly speaking, the Paris Commune did not have its own photographers. The erroneous belief that the camera—the "eye of history," in the words of Mathew Brady during the US Civil War—is an objective and democratic medium, lives off of such omissions. Commercialization of Eugène Disdéri's *cartes de visite* made photo portraits affordable for the petty bourgeoisie in the Second Empire, but definitely not for the working class.[10] During the Commune, workers were photographed either on the barricades or as corpses. Included in the ritual handling of technology was the possibility of depictions being perceived differently according to political views and sympathies. In the perception of Versailles, the exhibited, numbered dead bodies in open coffins were insurgents who had received their just punishment. For the Communards and their supporters, these photos (attributed to Disdéri) documented the unparalleled brutality of repression. The iconography of the Commune's association with death is no coincidence. One of its decrees (of April 10, 1871) contains the order to systematically photograph unidentified National Guardsmen who had fallen in combat.

Various reasons can be found for the blind spots in the visual representation of the Commune. A majority of the photographers fled to Versailles with the government, and the situation was similar with many artists. At the start of the Franco-Prussian War, Cézanne, Pissarro, and Monet deserted Paris. Manet and Degas, who had both been members of the National Guard during the German siege, followed after the French surrender. Millet retired to Normandy, old Corot left the city on April 1, 1871. Renoir was not disturbed by the urban revolution; he continued to paint along the Seine. Artists and illustrators involved in the Commune were busy with politics and had no time to make pictures. Instead, there were press illustrators—from England, for example, such as the Pre-Raphaelite-influenced Arthur Boyd Houghton—who came to document the events in Paris for weekly papers such as *The Graphic* or its competitor, *The Illustrated London News*.

Most of the photographs that have come down to us were made before or after the Commune, very few during the seventy-two days. Braquehais attended the preparations for the destruction of the Vendôme Column on May 16 and then also photographed the statue of Napoleon lying on the ground. One of the men in the background, festively lining the site of action, resembles the painter Gustave Courbet. His involvement in the Paris Commune is well known, as is the price that he had to pay for it. In June 1870, at the age of fifty, he refused the Grand Cross of the Légion d'honneur. In a letter he wrote, "The State is incompetent in matters of art."[11] Two days after the proclamation of the Third Republic in September 1870 he became president of the art commission and demanded that the Government of National Defense remove the Column—a symbol of the imperial dynasty "void of any artistic value"—from the Place Vendôme. In April, he was elected to the Commune's Council (which brought him Zola's ridicule); he became president of the egalitarian Fédération des Artistes and as delegate was responsible



Georges Pilotell, "Raoul Rigault" from Avant, pendant et après la Commune, 1879.

for instruction and education. At stake were the artists' self-organization and the remodeling of hierarchically organized institutions. After the end of the Commune, he was sentenced to six months in prison and a fine. When the new government under Marshal Mac-Mahon confiscated his property and demanded that he personally repay the entire cost of erecting the Vendôme Column again, he feared re-arrest and fled to Switzerland in July 1873.

How much contemporary history is harbored in Courbet's still lifes and landscapes from his final years? What in them is defensive self-censorship, loss of power, or allegorization of his own matters? Are the countless copies painted by assistants, signed by Courbet, *études* on the commodity character of art? In Breton's *Nadja*, the wonderful light of Courbet's paintings is the same as that of the Place Vendôme at the moment the Column fell to the ground. On his first trout painting (1872), which he dated 1871 (one year earlier, when he was in prison), he wrote in red next to his name "In vinculis faciebat" (produced in captivity). In this he quoted Jacques-Louis David, who in the tradition of Christian martyr mythology signed his works created in prison after Thermidor 1794 with the same Latin phrase. (Incidentally, Giordano Bruno's treatise *De vinculis in genere* also deals with political thinking and the manipulation of reality; Bruno was in fact executed.) The direct depiction of violence is found in only a few sheets in one of Courbet's sketchbooks, where as an inmate he captures the internment and execution of *fédérés*. Courbet paints himself in the Sainte-Pélagie prison (thinner and without gray hair), but mainly he paints still lifes: apples, pears, flowers, and lifeless or dying trout. His fish with a hook in its mouth is an image of life's stubbornness. The apples look like human limbs or miniature bodies; sometimes they seem already a bit rotten.

One of these exile motifs is the Grotte des Géants (a travesty of Courbet's vulva images?) in the Canton of Valais; another, the Château de Chillon, the castle on Lake Geneva overrun by tourists both then and now. Courbet and Co. (including his assistants Marcel Ordinaire and Cherubino Pata) painted these souvenir images for a solvent tourist clientele, and on commission. Chillon appears in Jean-Jacques Rousseau's novel *La Nouvelle Heloïse*, one of the most successful books of the eighteenth century; William Turner painted the landscape around Lake Geneva in 1809 on one of his "Grand Tours"; and Victor Hugo and Flaubert visited Switzerland's most famous castle, which in the past had served as a dungeon for political prisoners. Courbet also certainly knew the narrative poem *The Prisoner of Chillon* by Lord Byron, who visited Chillon in 1816 with his friend Percy B. Shelley and scratched his own name on a wall. "My very chains and I grew friends," says Byron's poem.

What is the meaning of connecting Courbet's inflationary picture production during his final years to the Vendôme episode and the end of the Paris Commune? The answer that reality has withdrawn from depiction seems too obvious. Is it about not wanting to divulge anything anymore? All images lie when they are not read right. For Marx, the Commune was "a thoroughly expansive political form, while all previous forms of government had been emphatically repressive."[12] The Situationists saw in it the biggest festival of the nineteenth century, the "only implementation of a revolutionary urbanism to date."[13] In Paris, the Impressionists dreamed of their light-flooded gardens, but the specters of the Commune still walked. Parc Monceau, which Monet painted three times beginning in 1876, was full of corpses by the end of that bloody week in May.[14] Two or three decades later, when anarchists such as Maximilien Luce painted Neo-Impressionist street scenes from the Commune, it was already too late to let the dead bury their dead. Citizen Courbet had experience and practice in controlling market demand and manufacturing multiple versions of particular motifs. It suffices to recall several of his nudes, hunting scenes, or *The Source of the Loue* views from the 1860s. In the claustrophobic vulgarity of the Second Empire, they had become *vedute* of grueling trench warfare: a painter takes revenge using the means available to him. Pictures painted by the ex-Communard who was ostracized in France were highly sought after, from Boston to Vienna. If his realism could be overtaken by political reality, just like any other style, then he might as well have gone ahead and forged his own palette-knife paintings. Genre painting is prosaic. Here, politics is no longer the material that withstands transmutation, as was the case with Courbet's pictures ca. 1850.[15] Looked at in this way, the Commune, too, was no escape. But Courbet's resignation and mimicry are no less modern than his pornographic materialism in *The Origin of the World*.

Two lithographs by Edouard Manet refer to the Commune during the "Ordre moral" era. They remained marginal in

the atmosphere of brutal state censorship of images, which after the "Semaine sanglante" relied on the politics of major forgetting. Already in 1869, Manet could not show his anti-history painting *The Execution of Maximilian* (a picture without heroes) in the Salon; his lithography on the same theme was censored. During the "Semaine sanglante," Manet returned to Paris. Several months later, on November 28, accompanied by two colleagues, battle painter Henri Dupray and illustrator Emile Bayard, he witnessed the execution of three Communards—Rossel, Bourgeois, and Ferré—in Satory. (Shortly thereafter, Eugène Appert's version of this scene was sold as a *carte de visite*.) *La Barricade* (1873) shows a scene in which a Communard is shot by Versailles' soldiers; *Guerre civile* (1874) shows a corpse in front of a barricade. The faces are blurry. Both sheets tarry in vague realms, unspecific details, and fall back on previously used motifs. The model for *La Barricade* was a gouache from 1871. Manet simply took the group of figures with the execution commando from the censured Maximilian sheet, traced it, and transferred it to the litho stone (prints were first made ten years later, posthumously). The civil war corpse lying in front of the barricade clearly recalled the supine torero from the painting *L'homme mort* (1864–65), which Manet had also made a version of as an etching.

For *The Execution of Maximilian,* Manet referred to Goya's painting *El tres de Mayo de 1808*—as would Capa for the magical snapshot of the mortally wounded Republican militiaman. In 1814, Goya announced to the interim government in Madrid his burning desire "to eternalize the most heroic deeds of our glorious revolt against the tyrant of Europe" in two propaganda paintings.[16] He was concerned with correcting his political entanglements during the French occupation. Six years after the pictured events, that was best accomplished through passionate empathy with the victims. Goya had not witnessed the shootings on the Príncipe Pío; *The Third of May* is a work of imagination.

Nor did Manet have firsthand knowledge of the Cerro de las Campanas in Querétaro, Mexico, where Maximilian I was executed on June 19, 1867, together with his generals Miramón and Mejía. He gathered the information that he needed from the press and from images in circulation, to the extent that they were able to slip through Napoleon III's censorship. A member of the European aristocracy being sentenced to death by a Republican president of Zapotec origins in a legal proceeding was just as new as it was unsettling. News of the execution of the Habsburg puppet emperor—symbol of the political debacle of French intervention in Mexico—reached Europe by telegraph (the overseas cable had been put into operation in 1866). François Aubert (Maximilian's favorite photographer) had taken several shots of the execution site, the men in the firing squad, the embalmed corpse, and the emperor's perforated relic-like shirt. There are no photographs of the shooting itself. However, Aubert made a pencil drawing on location.

Manet signed the final version of his *Execution*, completed in 1869, with the historical date of the execution. The often-invoked indifference involved in this kind of painting can lead one to assume that here the painter took on the role of photographer or photojournalist.[17] But what is Manet's *punctum*? It is the glamorous white and gold tones that flit through the entire picture from figure to figure; the ornamental veil of sleepiness that lies over the event; the diffuse shadow on the right in the foreground . . . or the painted adobe wall, which "is no more than the repetition of the canvas itself."[18]

From time to time, style-conscious art historians voice regret that Baudelaire, whose "modernité" was intended as a counter-concept to photography, chose "Monsieur G.," the illustrator Constantin Guys, for his program of painting modern life instead of Manet. In Baudelaire's canonical essay, it is said that Monsieur G. provided pictures from the sites of war, for example, the Crimean campaign, as engraver's drafts for an illustrated weekly paper (*The Illustrated London News*).[19] The first war photographer, Roger Fenton, did not photograph combat operations or dead bodies. In his photos, war is a picnic. James Robertson's and Felice Beato's photos show the ruins of Sevastopol; as Mark Twain remarked, the devastated Pompeii looked good by comparison. Beato was probably also the first to photograph dead bodies in a war: the remains of Indian resistance fighters in Lucknow after the crushing of the Sepoy revolt in 1858. Shortly thereafter, the iconography of the American Civil War delivered exhaustive proof that photographers roam the world as agents of death. Artists as war reporters (during the Civil War for *Harper's Weekly* or *Leslie's Illustrated News*) were a dying breed, but until the spread of half-tone printing, their drawings continued to be used as up-to-date illustrations.

Under the title *Avant, pendant et après la Commune* and in an edition of only fifty copies, a portfolio appeared in London in 1879 with twenty-one etchings by Georges Pilotell, "ex-directeur de Beaux-Arts" and "ex-commissaire spécial" of the Commune, even briefly a rival of Courbet. During the bloody defeat, Pilotell fled from Paris. A military court condemned him to death in absentia. He was a survivor, a living dead who in exile wanted to keep his memories of the "République universelle" alive. "La Révolution est une souveraine," says an April poem in Victor Hugo's *L'Année terrible*. Liberty was a woman, at least in the dreams of men. Most of the sheets were created between 1870 and 1873, first in Paris for Pilotell's own magazine, *La Caricature politique*, then in Geneva and Milan. In London he worked over his drawings and exhibited them in 1875 at the Royal Academy. Sketch artists like Monsieur P. had to be fast: at the National Gallery, he portrayed the art critic John Ruskin looking at Turner's *Apollo Killing the Python*. Later, Pilotell worked as a fashion designer, for example, for Debenham &

Freebody. In an etching based on a hastily created sketch, one sees the desecrated dead body of the Communard Raoul Rigault lying in the gutter, with the inscription: "Seen by the author on May 24, 1871, at 5 p.m. on Rue Gay-Lussac." Photography had not yet monopolized the aura of authenticity. At this very moment, the draftsman was the eye of history.

X

Peter Friedl is an artist based in Berlin. He has participated in documenta X (1997) and documenta 12 (2007). Solo exhibitions include "luttesdesclasses," Institut d'art contemporain, Villeurbanne (2002); the retrospective survey "Work 1964–2006," Museu d'Art Contemporani de Barcelona; Miami Art Central, Musée d'Art Contemporain, Marseille (2006–07); "Working," Kunsthalle Basel (2008); and "Peter Friedl," Sala Rekalde, Bilbao (2010). Since the 1980s he has published numerous essays and book projects such as *Four or Five Roses* (2004), *Working at Copan* (2007), and *Playgrounds* (2008). Sternberg Press recently published *Secret Modernity: Selected Writings and Interviews 1981–2009*.

1
See the comment by Gideon Levy, "Mohammed al-Dura lives on," *Haaretz* , October 7, 2007, http://www.haaretz.com/print-edition/opinion/mohammed-al-dura-lives-on-1.230571 .

2
Martin Fletcher, "Iranian student protester Neda Soltan is Times Person of the Year," *The Sunday Times* , December 26, 2009, http://www.timesonline.co.uk/tol/news/world/middle_east/article6967927.ece .

3
Karl Marx, "The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte," in Karl Marx, *Surveys from Exile: Political Writings* , vol. 2, ed. David Fernbach (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1973), 146.

4
See David Schraven, "Das zweite Leben der Neda Soltani," *Süddeutsche Zeitung Magazin* , no. 5 (February 5, 2010): 26–30; Siobhan Courtney, "Neda: A Case of Mistaken Identity," *BBC News* (July 3, 2009), http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/programmes/newsnight/8129083.stm .

5
Al Kamen, "Iran Apparently in Possession of Photoshop," *The Washington Post* (July 11, 2008), http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2008/07/10/AR2008071002709.html .

6
Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography* , trans. Richard Howard (New York: Hill and Wang, 1981), 65.

7
Ibid., 91.

8
Recently, the media-effective debate of the Capa photo has been based mainly on the investigations of José Manuel Susperregui in his *Sombras de la fotografía: Los enigmas desvelados de Nicolasa Ugartemendia, Muerte de un miliciano, La aldea española, El Lute* (Bilbao: Universidad del País Vasco, 2009).

9
Karl Marx, "The Civil War in France," in Karl Marx, *The First International and After: Political Writings* , vol. 3, ed. David Fernbach (Harmondsworth: Penguin Classics, 1992), 206.

10
Gen Doy, "The Camera Against the Paris Commune," in *Illuminations: Women Writing on Photography from the 1850s to the Present* , ed. Liz Heron and Val Williams (London: I. B. Tauris, 1996), 30.

11
Courbet to Maurice Richard, June 23, 1870, quoted in Linda Nochlin, "Courbet, the Commune, and the Visual Arts," in Linda Nochlin, *Courbet* (London: Thames and Hudson, 2007), 87.

12
Marx, "The Civil War in France," 212.

13
The fourteen "Theses on the Paris Commune" were signed by Guy Debord, Attila Kotányi, and Raoul Vaneigem on March 18, 1962. Quoted in *Situationist International Anthology* , ed. Ken Knabb (Berkeley: Bureau of Public Secrets, 2006), 398–401. A more epic version was undertaken by Henri Lefebvre, *La Proclamation de la Commune, 26 mars 1871* (Paris: Gallimard, 1965).

14
See, for example, Bertrand Tillier, *La Commune de Paris, révolution sans images? Politique et représentations dans la France républicaine (1871–1914)* (Seyssel: Editions Champ Vallon, 2004), 373.

15
See T. J. Clark, *Farewell to an Idea: Episodes from a History of Modernism* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1999), 21.

16
Quoted in Janis Tomlinson, *Francisco Goya y Lucientes 1746–1828* (London: Phaidon Press, 1994), 94.

17
"Indifference to the subject" or even "supreme indifference" was a central concept in Bataille's 1955 essay. See Georges Bataille, *Manet*, trans. Austryn Wainhouse and James Emmons (New York: Rizzoli, 1983), 73.

18
Michel Foucault, *Manet and the Object of Painting* , trans. Matthew Barr (London: Tate, 2009), 38. The text is the transcription of a lecture delivered on May 20, 1971, in Tunis.

19
Charles Baudelaire, "The Painter of Modern Life," in *The Painter of Modern Life and Other Essays* , ed. and trans. Jonathan Mayne (London: Phaidon Press, 1995),

18–21.

Marta Jecu

Concepts Are Mental Images: The Work as Ruin

> Images don't have to be descriptive; they can be concepts, and Deleuze and I often discuss this point. Concepts are mental images.
>
> —Paul Virilio [1]

I am thinking here of a number of divergent works sharing a form of architectural thinking concerned with the potentialities of space. Without suggesting a narrative or illusionary effects, they touch on the *virtual* by involving everyday material from nearby social and cultural locations in the creation of a moment of suspension—one that can translate into spoken words, installations, staged discourse, drawing, and so forth. In a digital age, this approach to the virtual often assumes an analogue form of expression, for instance by substituting video with camera obscura as a means of not only dealing with the analogue image, but also of using minimal means to construct spaces that are handmade and mechanical.

Ei Arakawa and Amy Sillman, BYOF - Bring Your Own Flowers, 2007, Performa07, New York.

The interventions of New York-based Ei Arakawa, for instance, symbiotically integrate different forms of art until they become unintelligible. His performances often involve the works of other artists (like those of painters Amy Sillman and Nikolas Gambaroff), which are left to oscillate between changing concepts and situations. [2] He solicits the participation of the audience, not to invoke an inherited avant-garde concern with interactivity, but rather to accompany provisory manifestations in his works' development and changes over time—also as a meditation on destruction, decay, and theatricality. But his works also

Carlos Bunga, Ruins, 2008. Site specific cardboard installation. Cardboard, tape, at Artunlimited Basel, Elba Benítez Gallery.

seem to lead an initial narrativity into stoic abstraction.

Arakawa's architectural constructions cannot be fully absorbed in terms of their contingent development in time, as forms of narration, nor in terms of the objects they incorporate in space; they may thus be better understood in relation to the *virtual*, what Gilles Deleuze has described as a presence, which, though situated in proximity to our material reality, has not been actualized.[3] Following Henri Bergson, Deleuze regards the possible as a correlative of the real, as that which will transform itself into reality. The possible conforms to the real, like a plan to be materialized in the future; it is understood as no more than a past form of what later became real. In place of this relationship, Deleuze proposes the virtual and the actual; the virtual is real, but has no actuality in the present; the actual has no resemblance to the virtual—it neither limits it nor selects from it.

Another artist who incorporates the virtual as a formative dimension of his works is the Portuguese Carlos Bunga. Preoccupied as Bunga is with construction as a form of recurrent documentation, spaces appear in his works not as discrete entities, but as intervals between, outside, under, or projected onto other structures. Bunga builds installations—often with fragile, perishable materials—which he sometimes later destroys in performances or even before an exhibition opens. What remain for the audience are only the marks of something that could have been. Some of his works display only the emptiness that results from a previously built installation's complete destruction. But this emptiness also comprises a collection of moments of loss—perspectives, accidents, and gaps of understanding that failed to find their place in the functioning of a project's construction. His work ranges from huge installations, like the recent *Metamorphosis* at the Miami Art Museum in 2009/2010, to abstract compositions such as the *The Phaidon Atlas of Contemporary World Architecture* (2008), in which the reference book has been shredded and displayed as a mass of remains. His drawings and sculptural objects propose a moment just *after*, without revealing when, where to, or where from. This moment of transition is not a technical mutation, but rather what Bunga calls a "pictorial space" that does not search for completion by itself or within its own logic. Rather, he performs what could be called "documentary alterations" to his own constructions, modifying past forms of his present buildings.

Here it is important to reiterate that the virtuality we experience in Bunga's or Arakawa's superimposition of spatial and temporal layers has no direct causal relation to the works' perceptible construction or unfolding—their positioning in the realm of the actual. Like the works of other artists I deal with here, Bunga's built ruins can easily be considered in relation to the destruction of representation; but they can also be related to post-conceptualist works acknowledging the impossibility of the image's disappearance. For Bunga and others, it is not only the modern trauma of the visible that is at issue, but also the more contemporary contamination with the virtual—to which the works' *performativity* is key. In the case of Bunga's works, it is through their performative force—and not through a suggestion of possibility or the possible—that they operate in the realm of the virtual.

Founded in 1954 by Yoshihara Jiro in Osaka, the Japanese group Gutai can be considered to have marked a crucial shift from performance to performativity. In Rossitza Daskalova's 1997 interview with Gutai artists Yoshio Shirakawa and Masachi Ogura, the artists explain that in Japan it is possible to identify two avant-gardes: the one before the World Wars that was strongly influenced by socialist movements, but had to stay underground due to the Emperor's occidentalization policies; and a second one in which artists repressed before the wars became active, with the intention of affecting their social environment in direct ways. [4] This shift brought with it an intentional preoccupation with the nature of matter—a confluence of Marxist ideas and genuine spiritualistic consideration of the object that stemmed directly from Japanese culture. Gutai (meaning "concrete") also represented a very early reaction against abstractionism, and pleaded, a decade before the Nouveau Réalisme and Conceptualism, for the convergence of art and the everyday. According to their manifesto:

> Yet what is interesting in this respect is the novel beauty to be found in works of art and architecture of the past which have changed their appearance due to the damage of time or destruction by disasters in the course of the centuries. This is described as the beauty of decay, but is it not perhaps that beauty which material assumes when it is freed from artificial

Saburo Murakami, Passage, Recreated at the Centre Pompidou, Paris, 8 Novembre, 1994. Photo Philippe Migeat.

Yukihiro-Taguchi, Moment , 2007, Floorboards, Air Garten Galerie, Berlin

> make-up and reveals its original characteristics? ... Above all, we had to search for a centrifugal approach, instead of the centripetal one seen in abstract art. In those days we thought, and indeed still do think today, that the most important merits of abstract art lie in the fact that it has opened up the possibility to create a new, subjective shape of space ... We tried to combine human creative ability with the characteristics of the material in order to concretize the abstract space ... we were overwhelmed by the shape of space still unknown to us, never before seen or experienced ... we have struggled to find an original method of creating that space ... Sometimes, at first glance, we are compared with and mistaken for Dadaism, and we ourselves fully recognize the achievements of Dadaism. But we think differently, in contrast to Dadaism, our work is the result of investigating the possibilities of calling the material to life. [5]

In their exhibitions, the works were almost never attributed to a single artist-author, but were all signed with the Gutai name. Nevertheless, the group's bond was not formed around a unitary form of expression, but, on the contrary, permitted various approaches without privileging any single one as being more important than any other—a devoted conceptual, non-authorial gesture. It is apparent in their manifesto that performance, as an artist's act and art form, is not seen as an end in itself, but rather as a means of giving expression to space and matter—considered to be characterized by intrinsic processes in which the human cannot intervene. Gutai explicitly reject parallels between their work and that of Dada, Action Painting, Happenings—approaches to art stressing artists' subjectivity. While the processes of material decay and transformation that come to the forefront of their work are meant to be conjugated with human agency, they are not taken as an order of the subjective, nor as an immersive space for the audience to experience, but rather as an investigation into the possibilities of making matter active and vivid—in and through the work of art, as a complete dimension in and of itself.

These concerns speak to a potential in artworks that reveals itself through their performativity. Contrary to performance works, which foreground the agency of the artist, performativity departs from the point where the outcome, impact, and influences of a work detach from its author. Dorothea von Hantelmann defines it as follows:

> The performativity of a work of art is the *reality*, which it manifests by the force of its existence at a place, in a situation, by the force of its production, reception, and lasting. Performativity is an allegation, the power to create reality ... The performative dimension designates the bounding of art in a reality, which every single work is also generating. [6]

From the Gutai interventions to the works of a

Sancho-Silva, Scotoma, 2009. Installation, camera obscura, Kunsthalle Bern

contemporary artist such as Ei Arakawa, this reality that a work generates can be said to belong paradoxically to a mental dimension; the works are not experienced through their material proximity, but through a work's conceptual statement, which opens up another dimension of experience. This is, in other words, the virtual. In Deleuzian terms, these works temporarily actualize a world that is real, but has no actuality in the present—the world of the unmanifested potentialities of matter sought by the Gutai Group, whose works are experienced not through physical devices, but through conceptual ones. The experience offered to the audience becomes a mental counterpoint to the visible.

Another Japanese artist, Berlin-based Yukihiro Taguchi, works in a similar way. In his installation *Moment*, the wood floor panels of a Berlin gallery were removed and used in an installation inside the gallery that changed form daily from a ping-pong table, to a cinema, to a party room with table and chairs, where he threw a closing party. In a second phase of the work, titled *Moments—Performatives Spazieren*, he integrated the wood panels into Berlin's public spaces, making a stop-motion video to document the panels becoming a public bench, street furniture, or melting into the environment. In other works, Taguchi reconfigures space by installing and reinstalling objects (in *Ordnung*, for instance, from 2008), shifting air to another environment (*Giftplatz*, from 2007), or transforming an architectural environment into a fluid fabric sculpture (*Fabric/k*, from 2008). Without introducing or removing any element, it is through the interrelated forces of human presence and movements in space that Taguchi's self-generating processes sculpt his work in time and begin to function in a very concrete way.

A final artist whose work is relevant in this context is Sancho Silva, an artist who uses vision and its cultural determinations to dismantle pre-constructed space. His works are tautological to the point of collapse, with installations consisting of various entrances to a nonexistent work; hidden mechanisms that simultaneously sustain and destroy constructed space; machines or cabins directing vision both onto the city and back into the mechanism itself; and architectonic urban interventions. One can begin to identify a performative dimension in the way his analogue, spare architectonic spaces invoke political, historical, or social systems, but distort their reflections. A subtle interplay of authority between subject and subjected allows his spatial and temporal conjunctions to disappear between various perspectives through the use of camera obscura and other unpredictable real-time viewing mechanisms. For *Kunstgriff* (2006), Silva constructed a plywood tunnel with eyelets, which allowed a person to see only specific details of works in the museum where the tunnel was placed. By altering institutional architecture to redirect the contemplation of artworks, Silva modifies not only the focus of the viewer, but also the status of the work.

In the sense that these works use the potentialities of space to transpose the work's expression and reception onto a virtual dimension, they link to problems originating in the Conceptual Art of the 1960s and '70s that resulted in the self-annulation of the artwork. Beyond the formal dissolution achieved by Minimalism, the theoretical dissolution favored by Conceptual Art sought to renounce the work as visible form altogether by replacing the physical work with pure Idea, with philosophy. Post-conceptual art responded to this problem of creating an ideal philosophical surrogate for the absent object, by rendering visible those processes through which the artwork would stage its own disappearance, simply by opening a space for those processes to be problematized. In this sense, the fluid, empty spaces of the works mentioned above look to break existing continuities in a way that does not push the work into total disintegration or pure ephemerality.

It is interesting to note that Michael Newman has

Yukihiro Taguchi, Performatives-spazieren (wandering), 2008. Floorboards.

suggested that works avoiding documentation theoretically manifest a stronger tendency to blend with other domains of knowledge. [7] And it is through the use of documentation that one can begin to discern the contradictory heritage of Conceptual Art. Originally understood to be a medium allowing for the effects of works to be prolonged and actively maintained, documentary materials did not serve to prolong concepts in and of themselves, but rather the forms of documentation became objects in their own right—a system altogether foreign to the logic of the work. Post-conceptual art, in contrast, employed documentation as discrete works, without renouncing its function. According to Newman, this response constitutes a symptom of the crisis caused by the contradictions embedded within Conceptual Art's own logic.

Carlos Bunga, for whom documentary material plays a crucial role, has explained the importance of the idea of simulacrum in his work in relation to the work of Gordon Matta-Clark:

> Contrary to Gordon Matta-Clark, who works with houses as social identities, with their specific stories and buried histories, and also with habitation and the social and material cycles of certain historically fixed constructions, I am more interested in the idea of simulacrum. A simulacrum for me is not so much a copy, in a formalist sense, but is closer to the idea of model. When I made my first small models, the first ones came very close to reality. And for me the simulacrum is a way to make use of a certain reality, but to use it in a more abstract way, to change its content. The simulacrum shifts things slightly: it could be reality, but it is not exactly. It transforms one thing into another on the basis of a formal logic system. Like a model, it seems like something concrete, but it is not, though both are projections of a space. It is one idea—one possible idea—rather than a concretizable idea. A simulacrum is a projection. And we come back again to the idea of utopia. [8]

A ruin is a virtual yet material space that carries within it multiple spatial forms—not only past versions of the same construction, but also the innumerable effects of its

environment, crossed with other spaces to which it has been connected. A ruin represents not only the past, but, through its form in the present, the future as well. Through its progressive destruction, a ruin creates room for new spatial configurations in the future. It is a form that adapts to a temporal rhythm in the course of its decay. And the processual nature of time conversely finds its own visible form through the ruin. As it allows different spatial and temporal configurations to confront each other, the ruin also has the potential to overturn established hierarchies and provoke a redistribution of value within space.

X

1
Louise K. Wilson, "Cyberwar, God and Television: Interview with Paul Virilio," in *Electronic Culture: Technology and Visual Representation,* ed. Timothy Druckrey (New York: Aperture, 1996), 321–329.

2
See the performance *BYOF (Bring Your Own Flowers)* , which took place in November 2007 in New York as part of Performa 07, and https://www.contemporaryartlibrary.org/project/ei-arakawa-amy-sillman-at-japan-society-new-york-1321 .

3
See Gilles Deleuze, *Bergsonism*, trans. Hugh Tomlinson and Barbara Habberjam (New York: Zone Books, 1991); and *Difference and Repetition* , trans. Paul Patton (New York: Columbia University Press, 1995).

4
See the official website of the Gutai Group: http://pagesperso-orange.fr/articide.com/gutai/fr/sy_om.htm .

5
See https://web.archive.org/web/20101021060741/http://www.ashiya-web.or.jp/museum/en/103education/nyumon_us/manifest_us.htm .

6
Dorothea von Hantelmann, *How to do Things with Art* (Berlin/Zürich: Diaphanes, 2007), 11–12

7
See Michael Newman, "After Conceptual Art: Joe Scanlan's Nesting Bookcases, Duchamp, Design, and the Impossibility of Disappearing," in *Rewriting Conceptual Art* , ed. Michael Newman and Jon Bird (London: Reaktion Books, 1999).

8
Author's interview with Carlos Bunga, March 2009, Lisbon.

Hassan Khan

In Defense of the Corrupt Intellectual

This essay is primarily focused on a specific phenomenon within Egyptian intellectual history over the past sixty years. Although informed by a set of local conditions and references, I believe that the discussion may lead to a productive reflection upon the relationship of aesthetics to context and cultural practice, and upon the nature of art institutions and their normalizing tendencies. It may also provide a new perspective through which to engage the display and exhibition experiences provided by those art institutions that have emerged internationally in recent decades.

***

Pride of place is given to Naguib Mahfouz, Egypt's Nobel Prize winning novelist alongside actors, artists, musicians, poets, and other novelists on the wall of Café Riche in Cairo.

It seems to me that invoking the corrupt intellectual allows for the real possibility of finally going beyond the tired dichotomies endlessly resurrected in such panels. The too-often blindly accepted oppositions between tradition and contemporaneity, independence and state affiliation, the liberal and the reactionary have dominated the discourse around cultural production in this region for far too long.

For the corrupt intellectual is a figure that I have unfortunately known well and up close through the years. I first encountered him in childhood, as the family friend pontificating on the logic of underdevelopment, expounding theories of conspiracy and the necessity of developing the nation. Later, in my teenage years, he appeared again, smiling wanly at me as he recognized me under all that hair and recalled my parents' credentials within a certain culturally and politically engaged milieu. Finally, in more recent years, as the contours of my own practice became more publicly visible, the corrupt

intellectual has returned as an increasingly hostile figure.

This is a figure who has been deeply implicated in the replication of totalitarian ideas and in the support of an order that, to say the least, has failed to uphold any of its promises. A figure that has consistently and self-servingly promoted a variety of intellectual trends, from the secularist to the Islamic-Marxist, from the Liberal-Democratic to the Democratic-Islamist, depending on what happened to be in vogue at the moment. So what then motivates this, my own seemingly perverse quest to defend a figure that has so distorted public life?

While proposing to open a discussion on the usefulness, even the importance of this figure, I refuse any argument that would construct what I refer to as the "corrupt intellectual" as a transcendental signified floating above the dichotomies of public discourse and resolving them. Far from it: the corrupt intellectual is deeply implicated in the production of official mainstream culture—part and parcel of the current historical moment, a constitutive, immanent figure of the landscape. And it is this very significance that makes this figure so pertinent to our argument. A recuperation of the corrupt intellectual serves as an entry point for engaging and hopefully refining the terms of the aforementioned dichotomies bundled into the commonplace opposition this figure assumes with regard to a self-defined independent art scene. We ultimately take up these opposed terms only so as to first abandon them, then recuperate them—this time, however, within a less telic argument, and one that explicitly acknowledges cultural politics as its field. For even the text you are reading now is proud to be deeply polemical, and ultimately remains in the service of the dialectical process that it refutes.[1] It is also an argument situated within a moment of institutional transition, when new models are actively supplanting earlier ones and all positions are contested.

But before beginning, let us ask what exactly this means in relation to the positions involved: i.e., mine, as the author mounting what must seem like an inexplicable defense of a figure whose claims and statements have supported the flagrant usurpation of the public sphere for at least the past sixty years of Egyptian history; you, the reader informed by vantage points, agendas, and interests; and ultimately that phantasmatic figure of the corrupt intellectual haunting our discussion. What does that figure do for us exactly? What kind of example does it set? What kind of resistance to the dominant order, if any, does it make possible?

The Crowd Walks Down the Street: Dialectics Abandoned and Regained

The density of a crowd walking in the street, and how that

A painted rendition of Ahmed Shawqi, Prince of Poets, based on a photograph of him in the famous thinking pose.

kind of density plays out in relation to the crowd's surface, produces a kind of symbiotic and organic relationship. In this context, density functions at different registers. The first concerns the historical depth of various discursive regimes and the symbolic capital they produce; another refers to a detailed intensity; the highly individual and individuated gestures, the isolated intentions that become articulated as a charged collective of individuals, and the very state of consensus that allows for the crowd to come into being in the first place. In a sense, the crowd is where a seething mass with a unified understanding of its own presence is born, a conglomeration of frictions and tensions that manages to resolve itself into an identifiable entity.

Density relates to two distinct yet interdependent modalities of operation. It refers on the one hand to the heavy and tired legacy of failed discourses that have provided opposition to, and support for, the status quo in the region; it constitutes a sort of discursive article of faith, lending a sense of identity to the crowd itself, a sense of historical purpose to the social organism whose legacy involves ideologies such as socialism, pan-Arabism, Marxism, nationalism, and Islamism. On the other hand, density refers to the sociopolitical practice of these ideologies as a set of rules and regulations that actively impact the daily lives of all the members of the social organism. As a significant element in the formation of the crowd, density here inhabits a unique position as simultaneously antithetical to the regimes of discursive power and constitutive of that power itself. On another

Stills from YouTube videos of young men, in one case stripping down and dancing in the streets of informal areas in Cairo to the sounds of new wave shaabi music.

level, density helps us to describe how groups of individual citizens walking down city streets are transformed by proximity and the very rules of their shared landscape into "the crowd." A new entity with its own "depth" is born.

Straddling various dualities, the crowd is always the *other* to that legacy of state power and dissent, while simultaneously serving as the legitimizing source for both. Nonetheless, the processes of legitimization inevitably increase the distance between discourse (what is used to explain, analyze, and quantify) and subject (in this case the mysterious crowd), by clearly differentiating their roles, making one serve the other. The crowd, through its polyphony, its irresolvable contradictions, its ability to function as a collective while relying on the individual and its stubbornly resistant irreducible core, is, maybe even metaphorically, positioned as an absolute other to both the state (often represented metonymically by its members) and the public figures of dissent—both of whom, ironically, claim to speak for that crowd.

The form of density characteristic of the crowd is never possible within successfully mediated spaces such as those of the new global museum franchise model or the hypercapitalist art "marketplace" of abstract value. The projected success of a marketable future is the basis for both endeavors. The functionalist telos informing the activities of both museum and marketplace calls for the instrumentalization of all elements that come into contact with them, and makes the formation of the crowd an undesirable and distant possibility. Contemporary cultural practice, with its anxious self-referentiality, attempts to consume the image of that crowd, to annex it as a mythical and indexical signifier of art's immediacy and engagement with the public sphere. Insisting on this connection also aids in the accrual of symbolic cultural capital, which is, in turn, communicated to the audience that flocks to these institutions. This symbolic cultural capital is accumulated and ultimately translated into value through the actions of both museum and marketplace.

The crowd's contradictions—positioned both at the margins and at the heart of the dominant power, silent and vocal, unified and dramatic, collective and lonely—make it especially useful for consumption and re-circulation within museum and marketplace. In this relationship, the crowd's density is referenced by the institution in order to articulate the relevance of abstracted spaces of cultural reflection to the general social sphere. It is perhaps at this moment that the rehabilitation of the corrupt intellectual as a remote, yet still present figure becomes helpful for complicating the ways in which engineered cultural spaces today evoke the crowd for their own purposes.

The Specificity of the Corrupt Intellectual

The corrupt intellectual offers a new specificity to the historical experience of cultural practices and to an understanding of the material produced through them. An awareness of that potential should not, however, be confused with an approval of or an agreement with the corrupt intellectual's project. In this sense, my defense could be considered as a strategic coming to terms with the relationship between the labor of a group of state functionaries and the crowd that forms in the streets of the city where that labor actually materializes in terms of rules and regulations and, most importantly, actual forms of public address. Thus a profound and, in this case one can say, *political* engagement with the act of production is only possible through a deep engagement with its context and an implicit acceptance of the presence of this omnipresent and immanent figure. For every rule, every

Football player Saleh Selim, actress Soad Hosny, and writer Anis Mansour in the 1960s.

form of speech produced in this context lays down its own horizons of possibility and its own limits to the act of imagining.[2]

However, the presence of these spaces—the dense and crowded street with its constant reminder of power differentials, of violence, dangers, codes of communication, as well as the corrupt centers of hegemonic knowledge production that are so clearly devoted to propping up the context that threatens to define the crowd's shape yet never quite accounts for its specificity—helps to shape how we, those who live and operate under that context's regime, understand and come to define knowledge itself.

With such an understanding, it is no longer possible to construct knowledge as a form of symbolic cultural capital that is the expression of an ideal "liberated" and liberal subjectivity. So if the machinations of PR and marketing departments are crucial to promoting the refined experiences of the "free" and "informed" museum visitor, art history student, or seeker of knowledge, then the corrupt intellectual is there to remind us of where we, the participants in contemporary culture, actually stand—to balance the claims of the institutional machine, to tragically embody a history in the space where history is banished beyond the horizon of corporate success.

Whether produced in the context of the "independent non-profit art space" or the "new contemporary art museum," in countless panels conducted in English or as quotes in secondary features published in international art magazines that cover an art scene in 1500 words, it is imperative to view the rising liberal institution's superficial critique of the figure of the corrupt intellectual as self-serving and disingenuous. For that figure serves the liberal institution well by imparting it with the legitimacy and glamour of an oppositional and therefore heroic position, while helping to facilitate a sense of definition—in other words, an identity.

Conflict and Aesthetics

Perhaps the central conflict in the field of artistic practice is not that of the "politically committed and critical" versus the "commercially driven and decorative." The key distinction is rather between understanding the practice of art in terms, on the one hand, of a nexus in which an artwork's references and meanings are unhinged from their conventional frameworks (while simultaneously and paradoxically insisting on the fact that a context always assigns meanings); and, on the other, of that space in which artists, institutions, and artworks are

Poster commemorating "Peasant Day" on September 9, the anniversary of the first agrarian land reform laws in 1952, as well as of Ahmed Orabi's revolt against the Khedive in Egypt in 1881.

instrumentalized as, for example, evidence in an argument, or mere illustrations of socially engaged practice. It might not be so surprising then to discover that the new, shiny, and megalomaniacal institutions that are currently under construction all over the region share a deep connection with the elderly functionaries and their minions sitting in neon-lit offices of various palaces of culture all over the Arab Republic of Egypt. Both equally complicit in promoting a model in which art practice is constitutive of, and defined by, each respective institution's horizon of meaning.

It is only possible to move beyond this kind of falsely dialectical relationship by understanding the familiar cultural terrain through a new set of terms. Let us therefore publicly admit to the power struggle latent in all contexts before we then begin to write.

Value and Negotiation: The Refinement of the Dialectic

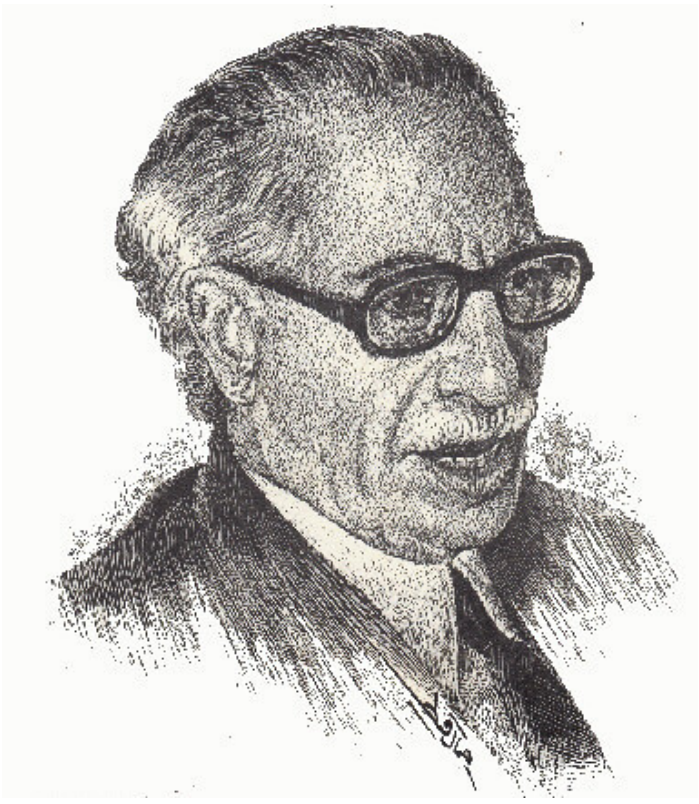
The corrupt intellectual is the result of a historical experience, a legacy. Egypt's now-failing middle class staked a claim within a national power base over the past sixty years by locating its claims and subject positions within the collectivized motivations of a constructed national project. This educated petite bourgeoisie forged its identity through the goals it announced for itself, and then used that identity to generate content for the propaganda it produced for the general social order. The voice that articulated these positions has thus always been of great significance and prominence. Therefore, and almost by structural necessity, the Egyptian intellectual's relation to the imagined collective has always been a public one.

Cairo's history over the past sixty years is the history of this voice. Under attack by the constantly shifting power relations within the social order, this voice has steadily become more and more hysterical as it fights to maintain the clearly defined positions of its class base. This relationship, between the public speaker and the stage he or she performs upon, is one in which the voice has always been inflected and motivated by the process of forging public associations between terms and their referents. The intellectual's main role has thus been that of charting the relationship of the public to the organizing principles of the collective. Public discourse is what will always be a product and a victim of this relationship. Here witness the poet declaiming, the teacher speaking, the imam sermonizing, the guest on a talk show arguing.

Thus both positions, the oppositional and critical, and the affirming mouthpiece of the regime, exist in a state in which the horizon of possible meanings is already defined and assumed as shared. The rhetorical strategies of both are similar, from those that sing praises to those that viciously ravage. Notice the impulse to constantly describe, explain, and resolve artworks in the service of a higher meaning. The mark of corruption is the insistence on validation and lineage in demonstrating the higher aims of the material at hand, and in therefore implicitly refusing the immanent materiality of the work itself.

The corrupt intellectual is an elusive figure: state bureaucrat, public critic, journalist, novelist, pundit, poet, student activist, downtown artist, café philosopher, soap opera screenwriter—one that constantly fails in his or her analyses, yet can still provide us with the possibility of analysis. For it is the collective labor of this figure that has provided the dynamics by which a field of knowledge that is public in nature has been constituted. Maybe what I have been labeling a "figure" so far doesn't refer to any specific position, role, or actual individual but rather a shared sensibility that runs deep within an identifiable period or context.

The "corrupt intellectual" is both a statement about the nature of that which is shared, as well as its main product



A charcoal drawing of Tawfik Al Hakim in a style often used to draw prominent intellectuals.

and symptom. It is thus a statement that is deeply implicated in the doxa of the day; it is what affirms a system, an order, and a regimen in the most literal sense. This kind of statement is inextricably linked to the production of the contours of daily events and their possible meanings. It is thus the labor of this intellectual functionary that lays down horizons, makes definitions, and proposes arguments. This act of production allows the event to unfold within a context that is accompanied by a sense of repercussion, the production of a resonance, an echo. To clarify further, it is only through such activities that a para-doxa, the romantic promise of a space beyond consensus, or a meta-doxa, the possibility of self-reflection and criticality, of holding a relationship to the consensus that is not merely affirmative, are imaginable in any real sense. In other words, it is only through the statement that the proposition is possible.[3]

For new institutions to be able to establish themselves successfully, they need to first supplant their precursors. This is a process that demands an active act of forgetting, as well as the ability to disguise the material and intellectual labor of constructing new edifices. At the same time, these institutions always place structural demands upon the discursive productions that coalesce to mark the moment of the new edifice's emergence. These demands act as signs through which the perceptive reader can analyze something of the logic of such institutions. It is not really the content of these claims that is important here, but rather the manner in which certain utterances can be enunciated and the style in which statements are made. It is all, as Eliza Doolittle learned in the numerous and largely popular reiterations of Bernard Shaw's own version of the Pygmalion myth, ultimately a matter of accent. Our argument or discussion is thus not possible without an implicit proposal about the nature of value and accumulation. To be more precise, the method through which value is negotiated is profoundly connected to how new meanings are assigned and normalized within the social order. The rise of a new institutional model is the occasion in which this kind of accumulation becomes most apparent.

It is thus with some sense of pride that I can now make this statement: the intellectual is always corrupt in relation to the project he or she touts. This is the fate of all those who attempt to produce a field of knowledge. For the function the intellectual performs is to point to the possibilities of a moment beyond consensus, yet only in order to affirm what the doxa itself can be. The location of an utterance or a proposition within the social sphere is invariably assigned by these very paradigms. To understand the resonance of these public statements, it is imperative to identify the position from which the figure of the intellectual speaks. To therefore hesitate for a moment and to evoke this figure, maybe as a conflicted memory or an annoyance, before beginning to write.

The Recuperation That Never Was

My text, seemingly involved in nostalgically and romantically resuscitating a slowly dying breed, does not ask for the rehabilitation of the corrupt intellectual in an absolute fashion. What we have here, perhaps contrary to my opening remarks, is a cynical, knowing defense of this sad, broken figure at the moment in which the triumphalism of the market and the industry of criticality have reached obscene proportions. However, let us not forget that the general symptoms discussed here reflect what is actually a much more powerful figure than my description would imply, for these are the individuals who run fine-art government sectors, head cultural pages in newspapers, write art histories, and lay down recommendations for acquisitions by national collections.

However, our corrupt intellectual has always been a local variant of an international phenomenon. This is a figure that secretly seeks the seal of validation from centralized centers of power, whether national or international, while constantly evoking a parochial and paranoid atmosphere to defend its claim over that seal. For example, in the case of art history, the same consensual if outdated canon is evoked to provide support and meaning for aesthetic practices. The local is always deemed insufficient without some kind of proof and validation provided by the accepted and so-called international canons of art history. As part of this process, the corrupt intellectual's very

Computer rendering of Designopolis, a new hub of art galleries, furniture stores, and restaurants that opened earlier this year on the outskirts of Cairo.

existence provides, as demonstrated earlier, a certain density or depth to the experience of the work. For here the work never exists outside history, but is informed by its relationship to the two modalities of ideology in the discursive past: as discursive article of faith, or sociopolitical daily practice.

This external source of validation, mystified and made secret, is always qualified with local arguments informed by the ideological necessities that foreshadows the viewing experience. It is, however, still possible to bridge to an art history that manages in turn to connect to a wider shared international history and to thus provide a genealogy to the work that is not merely celebratory or damning. It is a project that will help us identify the mannerisms that dominate art practice at any given time. It would also help us identify the true significance of certain works in relation to the resonances they unleash.

This return to shared sources would be a deeply engaged historical project of tracing the contemporary moment through a system of comparative analyses; all divergences of local singularity and international multiplicity would be considered. However, while doing this it is absolutely important to insist that knowledge is instantaneously transferable, that what is understood at any one point or place immediately and irrevocably becomes *of* that place.

Yet the corrupt intellectual's fall from power, accompanying a general decline of the state, can be partially traced back to a stubborn refusal to admit the genealogy of his or her practice that is not purely mythical. Instead, the corrupt intellectual falls back on what is offered as a mystical, authentic source for defining the functions of intellectual work within the system he or she supports and operates under. The moment of such an intellectual's emergence, unfortunately always hidden or disguised, is deeply entwined with the rise of nationalist sentiments. It is therefore no surprise that an emphasis on the site of production is endemic to the political project itself. Thus locale, a situated sense of place that lies in opposition to the floating signifiers of global capital, becomes significant. This opposition between the dictates, constrictions, and potentials of locale and an unfixed non-essential space that accepts and absorbs all influences as its own still provides a meaningful density to the art experience that has never been merely diachronous, but also, and significantly, synchronous. The local art history brought to bear in attempting to describe contemporary art practices is rendered superficial and corrupt, but is constantly understood to be relevant; and it always remains in the background in order to support the doxa.

It may be that the genealogy of the intellectual within the concrete context of the history of the Arab Republic of Egypt could be the very salvation of this figure. Such a genealogy is only the logical extension of a

Books on display in the Cairo Book Fair, the second largest book fair in the world after Frankfurt.

statement—one that acculturates and accumulates over history and layers over time to constitute an inherent part of its own very discursivity in a certain place. That genealogy gives us a handle with which to approach that figure and understand its context, its resonance, and perhaps even its poetics. One may wonder what kind of practice can arise out of such engagement, but this is not the place for prescriptions. Rather, it is only to suggest the possibility of a real form of practice experienced in time through labor, investment, and engagement, that will one day, one hopes, explain itself according to the terms that it sets forth.

The density referred to earlier in relation to the crowd is also related to the auratic nature of institutions of power, whether local or international in scope. It is based on the sense that the work of art is in communication with a canon that was involved in the construction of a national archive, a sense that all gestures are therefore charged, and that the meaning of a history is located in the experience of a place. It is thus important to remind the young curatorial-program graduate preparing an immaculate white space in the clean, empty city, that this very aura of history and its institutions (rather than any claims, premises, or promises) was, in itself, a motivational force for a national project.

Always suspended between having to serve a tireless machine of projections and a reified illusionary spectacle of the past, the figure of the corrupt intellectual is thus doomed to lose all relevance in the course of surrendering its place in the imaginary to the infinitely more spectacular and wealthy trans-, meta-, inter-, and post-nationalist institutions slowly rising on the horizon.

The recuperation proposed here makes demands—in a sense, the corrupt intellectual this text has constructed provides a context that, due to its very lack and failure, manages to produce the crowd as an entity that is not merely, completely engineered. These lacks and failures should suggest that the system of cultural reflection is always unable to produce that which it hopes to. The defective product is thus a site of contention in a way the successful one can never be. My argument is precisely that this constitutes a space where an argument can exist and be sustained.

This recuperation is concerned with the question of how to understand cultural production, namely, by means of an insistence on what is always contextual—not as a source of explanation as much as the site of accents, of something that can never be taken for granted and assumed to be a basic right, of what is, by definition, always a constant series of negotiations that one finds strangely productive. It is thus in the office of a rubber-stamping bureaucrat that one can find moments of freedom that are never possible in a deep and engaged critical discussion in an art school classroom.

This recuperation concerns a figure that has been constructed as a necessary fiction against which the liberal, humanist, positivist sphere can operate and gain validity, and a position within the contemporary workings of cultural life. For it is partially in response to this figure (and the system he or she embodies) that the ground has been laid for a banal and no less corrupt opposition.

Our recuperation here is based upon denying the validity of that opposition, on denying the dialectical movement its aura, even if it does take place in a historically conscious fashion. Here we deny this opposition the value it constantly tries to attach to itself.

And finally, our recuperation is a refusal of the lazy lack of investment that is generally discernible in the liberal intellectual's perspective: the space of relativism and disingenuous democratic values, as well as the double-faced gestures of inclusion that subtly enhance the accumulation of power. Whatever is deemed irrelevant to the perpetuation of this system is assigned an ignominious, painful, and silent death.

It is this cold death that we want to avoid.

X

An earlier version of this text first appeared in *How to Begin? Envisioning the Impact of Guggenheim Abu Dhabi*, a thesis project edited by Ozge Ersoy at the Center for Curatorial Studies, Bard College.

Hassan Khan is an artist, musician, and writer. He lives and works in Cairo.

1
It proposes a paradoxical argument; its collection of statements undermines the dialectical model they are based on.

2
Here, the context is not meant as a social, economic, or political explanation, as it is usually understood. Rather, it refers to the coordinates through which actual public discourse is produced. In this sense, the context functions as a system of references that anchors statements and gives it its own depth. It is therefore the order—one can call it institutional in the widest sense—that organizes the information that the statement depends on for its material. This act of organization also invariably puts an *accent* on the statement when it is produced. This accent or mark, when analyzed, communicates valuable information about that statement, from a genealogy of the origins of the statement, to a premonition of what that statement is supposed to achieve.

3
All socioeconomic systems are constantly involved in producing or even searching for discursive fields where their constitutive elements and subjects, regardless of their specificities, are held to an absolute measure. Composed of limits and ends, these discursive fields are also collections of general statements that define the public discourse and dominant paradigms at any historical moment. In order to question these assigned meanings, to even register the assumptions that they are founded upon, it is necessary to engage the discursive formation that allowed these statements to be made in the first place. Developing the protocols of this engagement would constitute a full-fledged theoretical project, one that I will hopefully have the opportunity to discuss more fully elsewhere. It suffices here to point out that this is an engagement that does not necessarily have to be an affirmation.

Gean Moreno and Ernesto Oroza

Generic Objects

1.

By generic objects we don't mean objects that affect a kind of generic quality—brilliantly commonsensical and ordinary objects that come from the rarefied space of the designer's studio, and draw their value from that space. We mean really generic—milk crates, plastic buckets, shipping containers, wooden palettes, traffic barricades, decorative concrete blocks, urban trash cans and dumpsters, rubber tires, scaffolding, Scotch tape. It's not that any of these aren't designed, but rather that they are designed so incredibly well as to function with unparalleled efficiency within the systems of circulation for which they are intended. Their most telling quality is that they have slipped below the threshold of what would otherwise mark their identity as designed artifacts.

Functioning within the large field of conventions inevitably established by global markets and transnational productive systems, generic objects are designed with such programmatic exactitude that spaces accommodating authorial expression are reduced to make room for qualities that foster efficient and competitive performance in commercial processes. The more extensive and decentralized the circuits of production and distribution in which generic objects participate, the more numerous the universal norms by which they are informed. The space for authorial display or geographically specific markers is compressed to a minimum, when not eliminated altogether.

2.

Generic objects are synthetic genetic objects: a genome or a strict chain of codes, a tight script of metric chromosomes, cuts across them and the systems to which they are attached. The shipping container, for instance, like the bucket and the milk crate, is marked by multiple conventions, by a global consensus—a genome—established between all the parts of the system

in which it functions. This guarantees compatibility at every interface. The weight and structural resistance of metal used for the container, the dimensions of the cranes and of the storage facilities in ships, the width of the trucks, the width of the interstate highway lanes used by the trucks, the walkways in the storage areas of ports, the width and reach of forklifts—they all work together. It's an alliance that generates, in proportion to the efficiency of the system, an internal violence—a force, like that of genetic coding, which imposes morphologies, from the minutest detail of the object to the very edges of the system. Everything is determined by everything else.

What we have, then, is a group of objects determined by a metric regime that they themselves empower, a genetic pool and the shapes it produces through relationships of mutual reinforcement, affected occasionally by exterior demands (which then translate into alterations in the system, into new information). In this sense, every aspect of the generic object has its own dimension of necessity. And every object is an elastic surface: if it receives a blow, it channels it to the entire system, and the blow is manifested in the individual objects that make up the system. If the resistance of the container's metal changes, then the gripping power of the crane has to be altered. The shape or weight required by these objects, for instance, produces invisible expansive waves that mark the global landscape of trade. The process dictates compatible features to all the elements with which the object engages. Likewise in the opposite direction, a massive change at the global scale of trade sweeps down as a series of awesome waves that alters the shape of the individual elements.

3.

One of the visual "frequencies" transmitted by generic objects metonymically signals the massive and elastic systems to which they belong. These are systems to which we often remain physically, if not cognitively, blind. A run-of-the-mill shipping container, once deprived of its emblematic status on the sales catalogue page and the corporate website, becomes inseparable from the systems of distribution, transportation, and storage for which it was undoubtedly designed and manufactured—even when other uses may be possible. One conceives the container, within the stacks in ports and storage yards and on ships, as a small but essential and interconnected part of an intricate web of lines bustling with activity—lines that mark not only the routes of global/national/urban transportation of which it is an obvious part, but also the exchanges of capital that produce and benefit from these routes. These lines also link back to the factories that produce the goods stored and transported by the container, as well as to the offices that draft marketing plans for these goods and to the retail stores where they are sold. These lines to the factory, the ad agency, and the points of retail sale are, in turn, plugged in to lines that lead back to the farms, forests, mines, and rigs that generate or collect the raw materials necessary for the production of goods. And if we are imaginative enough, these lines can be linked to lines that map out the systems that allow the raw material to emerge in the first place. Every container plots a massive arabesque of relations as it dissolves into it and relinquishes the illusion of its singularity.

And this complicated weave of interpenetrating lines is crossed by other patterns, such as the one that tracks the fuel production necessary for the factories to be fired up and to keep the transportation vehicles moving. And woven into it are the patterns of war that keep oil economies in place, and the patterns of intricate investment and political maneuvering that keep those wars going. Even where murky zones appear in this complicated tapestry, they too are abuzz with obscure and connected activity. Discreet realms—the military site, the factory, the boardroom, the advertising firm, the port, the shopping mall—all collapse into one another. Or, more accurately: the idea of a world of discrete realms collapses altogether. Adjacencies become interpenetrations. The container languishing on a dock can beam us, if we zoom in just right, to a woven substrate of invisible materialities, to an intricate matrix of flows and forces that spreads out like a chemical LSD sky before us. It may not be there, *but it's there*.

4.

Generic objects encourage us to consider the field over its individual elements. The singular seems superfluous in defining generic objects. Surely, a bucket is a bucket—irreducibly particular. But a bucket is a generic object only in the presence of another bucket (or, at the very least, in its implied presence). Generic objects draw on the dense fields of repeating specimens for their very definition. It is in the presence of other objects of their kind that they actualize their individual capabilities.

Coupling and stacking and nesting are, after all, relations between multiples; instant replaceability implies equivalency and sameness among a large quantity of identical artifacts. Generic objects are defined by and live through a *monstrous contiguity* that mocks atomized conceptions of the world. Fields find meaning and function in ways that their individual components may not.

5.

Within their systems of circulation, generic objects are alien to the way a city produces meaning. Plastic crates used to distribute milk are abstract and autistic objects, blind and rigorously inelastic artifacts that unwaveringly respond to a set of specific demands. They are collections of data, programmed to function with the utmost efficiency, and nothing else. Though the crates surely carry the potential for a social function, they have been optimized to such a degree that their relation to the human is reduced to a single value or dimensional datum, inscribed by the weight of a gallon of milk or the storage capacity of a delivery truck. Milk crates in this environment are surfaces radically devoid of meanings, figures of such alarming blankness on a symbolic plane that their emptiness overwhelms.

Milk crates invariably leave full and return empty. They are part of a loop that, as a continuum of contiguous, melded information units, can remain active forever. If the world stood still, the loop that milk crates sketch out in the city would continue to flow, defying entropy and apocalypse. If one crate exits the loop, due to loss or damage, another simply takes its place. The loop is like a tide cycle or a whirlpool. Its indifference, its inwardness, the silence generated by its centripetal flows, should terrify us. It is monstrous in the way its energy absorbs all forms and meanings. As objects move in this flow, their contours, weights, surfaces, articulations, and inscribed data (date of production, type of plastic, percentages of recycled material, ownership markings) dissolve. It's as if they move under such pressure that they are rendered liquid-like and incorporated into a perpetual spiral of activity.

6.

Generic objects accommodate the temporal modes of the situations in which they find themselves, and two modes of time are in play here: our segmented, finite, and familiar one; and that of the flow. These two modes of time, in turn, make two scales of perception visible. Generic objects integrated into the cycles of the flow tend towards invisibility; the articulation of their qualities remains hostage to and stalled by a movement exceeding that of everyday life in scale, duration, and inflexibility. All the elements caught in this flow dissolve in a confluence of obscured characteristics. Typological markers melt into pure metrics. The possibility of holding on to a familiar trait is rendered impossible by the abstracting impulse of the flow.

As soon as this object exits the flow, however, it is transformed. If a truck takes too long to recover emptied milk crates, the crates are exposed to forces external to the cycle. Someone steals one to carry the mangoes he will sell on the side of the road to earn his rent money. Once outside its "natural" flow the object becomes visible, familiar, autonomous, gains an identity, reveals potentials that hadn't coalesced until then. Its time and ours synchronize. In such a situation, we can finally think of what to do with the generic object, how to manipulate it, make it serve new functions.

But these statements need to be qualified. They tie things up too neatly. The responses to the generic object extracted from its system are as varied as they are contingent on particular geographies and behaviors. The nature of the extractions and the places where the loop registers loss are not insignificant with regard to the way generic objects will be "re-drawn" away from their startling blankness.

7.

As a palpitating lattice of activity laid over the city's orthogonal spread, the flow moves with the ineluctability of a stampede. And as with a stampede, individual elements are picked off. The rear of a supermarket becomes a site where the herd suffers losses. But it's not the rear of every supermarket. It depends on the neighborhood. Geography and economics, specific demands and patterns of behavior, all matter. Where privation is greater, the voracity swells, the losses multiply. In affluent areas one instead usually finds the predator is satisfied. The flow itself, with its endless supply of replaceable parts, remains coldly indifferent and unaffected by these variations. It is indifferent because it reserves the right of reclamation, always threatening to pull stray elements back into its current.

The collection of points where individual specimens are extracted or expelled from the flow, diagrammed, produces a littoral—pockets of activity closely bound to their systems of circulation, both in terms of physical proximity and in the understanding of the object's function. When there, generic objects are suspended on a middle ground in which they are regarded as somewhat less abstract than when in the flow, yet neither are they regarded as elements inserted into rhetorical relationships with the broader culture or design disciplines. The object's alarming blankness is only slightly dissipated by the introduction of a calculus that links real needs to functional potentials.

8.

In the littoral, which usually materializes in economically depressed neighborhoods, the individual's engagement with the generic object is modulated by need. The pressure of hardship demands appeasement. A contextual strain takes on a constitutive role by exerting pressure on the potentials in objects. If rolls of toilet paper need to be transported, then surely the nesting potential of the buckets used for the task will remain invisible.

If generic objects are patterned information, then in the littoral that information is processed with the efficient satisfaction of a particular goal in mind. The processing is endowed with a discriminating filter that necessity provides. Objects are treated as pure resource. They retain an abject rawness. This inhibits deployment of the artifact in rhetorical terms. What the object or usage of the object may mean, what values it may embody, what criteria it may be judged by—these are matters sacrificed to the necessary resolution of an immediate predicament. It's almost as if the prerogatives are no longer those of the individual: the situation determines the possibilities for engagement. If there is something like a liberated sweep of the generic object's potentials in the littoral, it is rendered available and substantive only in relation to the range of hardships that it meets there. The object's set of freed potentials is an inverted diagram of the needs that structure its context.

Under these circumstances, objects are still not integrated in any fundamental sense, but remain in a condition of partial concealment. The individual's gaze is pressed too close to them to obtain a full picture. The field of vision is filled by one or a limited number of the objects' qualities or potentials. Need pushes the individual up against the objects' potential for satisfying it. If, after being laid off from the supermarket, a person has to urgently figure out how to carry all his cleaning supplies from parking lot to parking lot as he washes cars, the milk crate's metric precision in relation to the delivery truck will be relegated to a blurred edge of his field of vision, if not simply ignored altogether. Need determines what is useful or adequate at that moment. For an individual whose predicament is how to survive, a bucket is simply a body of condensed physical qualities, a bunch of physical "morphemes," a complex library of connections, information to be applied, and always in light of a problem demanding an immediate solution. Interpretation and consideration of the object as such is minimal. Hardship engenders urgent relationships based on functionality, it unbinds an ineluctability that—like the ineluctability that renders the crate-in-the-flow an indivisible assemblage of information—possesses the individual to drag generic objects to the ravine of survival. Impossible to plot within moral and rhetorical universes, the object's use is justified solely by its effectiveness in alleviating need—the very need that determined the scope of engagement that was possible with the object in the first place.

9.

Imagine two adjacent spheres—one the flow of generic objects; the other the realm of human activity in the city. Occasionally, their edges make contact and the flow releases elements. This is how we come to see, just

outside a bodega, a group of milk crates captured by human need and intuitive ingenuity. They've become chairs in a domino game, a display structure for a handful of sugarcanes, a base for the cooler of the water vendor at the stoplight, the "mobile unit" of a car washer working in the empty lot next door. The transient nature of these activities always threatens to return the object to urban drift along with the leaves blowing on the sidewalks. The abbreviation of the object in the littoral finds a counterpart in the provisional quality the object takes on as solution or appeasement of a need. If another object appears that provides a better solution, the original one will be discarded. The object is always recognized as a temporary substitute. A rock that serves as a doorstop finds a homologue in a bucket full of water. A kind of non-rhetorical analogy occurs. The preferred object is the result of a comparative operation that pivots on the *performance and potential of objects*, and not on their physical or conceptual similarities; that is, on typologies of use and not of form. In fact, since both rock and bucket are structured by abstract forces—natural processes in one case and super-optimized industry on the other—they find themselves in this context without any affective mnemonic dimension or symbolic baggage. It is their mobilization as pure information that allows them to be interchangeable.

10.

All this is not to say that solutions aren't repeated, that a bank of local knowledge doesn't accumulate and grow in the littoral. It is to say, rather, that the transfer of solutions out of their immediate moment, that of linking necessity to potential, is incidental, even if highly significant. Contingent relationships are stabilized as recurring solutions, folded into a common repertoire. Future users can draw on it. This is where experience, repetition, and habit enter the frame and fortify the temporary repertoires of new activities for generic objects.

11.

In summary, the generic object finds itself in at least three situations: first, in the flow for which it is manufactured; second, in the littoral where need determines use and the generic object, due to the very conditions in which it functions, escapes rhetorical manipulation; and third, in a space of symbolic production, for example, within culture or design disciplines. Different criteria are prominent in each situation. The first and second situations, flow and littoral, seem determined by a certain ineluctability—the flow by the autism that propels the avalanche of optimal production; the littoral by the forces that cut through the individual in precarious situations. In both cases, the milk crate is treated less as an object per se than as information. In a cultural environment the milk crate is understood as a sublimated representation of the other two situations.

A relation to the object is, then, to be determined by the situation in which it is encountered: a prohibitive and prohibited one in the flow; a performative one in the littoral, guided by need and survival; and a rhetorical one in cultural spaces.

12.

In the last of these situations, in cultural spaces and within design disciplines, when the question arises of what to do with generic objects, analogy (in a rhetorical sense) has proven the easiest answer. Turn the bucket over and it becomes the lampshade it always looked like. Cut holes out of the shipping container and it becomes the shed it always suggested. But these easy analogies (*easy* because they lack that *leap across deep divides and the magic of conjoining apparent incommensurables* that rich analogies thrive on) always attempt to extract the generic artifact from its condition as nondescript and anonymous. They project a designer's intention onto a thing that was circulating in the world fine without it. The appeal to the obvious, to what the object already suggested, is a thinly veiled pretense to rescue the generic from its dreadfully flat world of sameness by pulling it onto the lifeboat of differentiated artifacts.

13.

The easiest analogies treat the generic less as resource than as topic. The mundane artifact is infused with the designer's "intelligence." And the designer is celebrated for his or her resourcefulness, DIY ethics, poetics of the quotidian, critiques of the commodity system, imperative to recycle, and sympathy for the demands of sustainability. The rapport established by these analogies, however, while supposedly doing the opposite, narrows the view and hinders the object by subsuming its productive potential into a set of familiar typologies. It treats the object as *only* its meanings and manifested physical

traits. What is most interesting about the generic quality is that it clarifies objects as compressed and manipulable energy and information, free of the magical cloak of meaning and added value with which the fairy dust of sanctioned creativity wraps them.

14.

It may be more interesting to place these generic objects in scenarios in which they are confronted with "deformative" forces—forces that will "torque" them. These twisting forces can be perceived when unexpected protocols are applied to a situation, by plugging in a vector usually absent from the contexts in which generic objects function, or by plotting generic objects within the coordinates of a program that is alien to them. It's not, then, a matter of working against the traits inherent to generic objects, of making a bucket or a milk crate do the work of established furniture and architectural typologies as an ultimate horizon of productivity. On the contrary, it is the inherent capacities of the objects that give discipline to the experiment. What possibilities does the stackability of the bucket or the container open up when an unexpected demand is put to it, when a tiny catastrophe makes it swerve off course? What does its modularity permit beyond the functions and contexts it was designed for? What can be done with the object's portability, with the fact that it's structured to couple with a large array of other artifacts, just as the container couples with cranes in ports across the planet?

What are the unintended consequences of the artifact's design, and how does one smoke them out and allow them to reveal their potential? How can new options be inserted into the seemingly closed systems in which these objects function? How can these systems be rendered sites of potential and unexpected plasticity? How is topographical instability introduced into a flattened pattern of uses? What can be done about the fact that these objects are already being put to unexpected uses in which their function is less optimal than their original designed intended? Can additions, joints, inserts, or deformed clones be produced that enlarge the range of their functions and generate new systems for which they can become basic building blocks? One begins to look for ways to tap into these objects' pregnant infrazones for latent potentialities. One attempts to tease aberrant forms from the objects' "natural" tendencies through uncommon modulations. One feels for malleable segments or "holes" in the pattern of the original design processes, and applies pressure there.

15.

To consider the generic in this way, we may need to temporarily padlock the studio. We may need to turn a bucket over or bore a few windows into the walls of a

container. It is the work one is supposed to be doing. But it comes at the cost of ignoring what is truly amazing about the generic: that it functions in relation to a series of forces; that it is always part of a field of interconnecting vectors; that to think through it is to think in terms of large, nearly unfathomable landscapes. The generic is globalization's inevitable "aesthetic"—the quality that is dominant in the objects that seem most at home in it, most comfortably bound to massive and invisible materialities and networks.

The scuffed bucket in which we keep our clay-stained baseballs is like Calvino's suburban trash can: the mirage that it is a self-contained artifact, dumbly sitting there, independent from the world swirling around it, quickly evaporates.[1] The object begins to unfold as a pattern constructed of a series of relationships that bind it, irrevocably, to infrastructural circuits, economic pressures, and social contracts. In Calvino's trash can the city's entire system of garbage collection and management—not to mention the amounts of energy, accumulated knowledge, and economic demands that lead to its particular morphology—is inscribed. It was inscribed even when the object was still a shiny new waste receptacle on the vendor's shelf. Bound up in it, like virtual ribbons of data, have always been all the networks and vectors that it will course through—all the systems of design and production it results from, all the systems of distribution and storage it is made to lock into. Understanding how this is already so fantastically complex, so much better than producing a new lamp or a new shed, or turning out a new variant on a typology in the way it has been turned out so many times, one looks to apply new pressures and invent unexpected scenarios until "aberrant" and novel functions in generic objects are set free.

X

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

Ernesto Oroza lives and works in Aventura, USA. He earned a degree at the Havana Superior Institute of Design. Oroza is author of the book *Objets Réinventés. La création populaire à Cuba* (Paris, 2002). He was visiting professor in Les Ateliers, Ecole Nationale Supérieure de Création Industrielle (ENSCI) in Paris (1998), and professor at the Polytechnic Institute of Design of Havana from 1995 to 2000. His work has been exhibited in museums, galleries, and cultural spaces such as Haute Definition Gallery, in Paris, The Montreal Museum of Fine Arts, Montreal, The Museum of Modern Art (MoMA), in New York, and Laboral Centro de Arte, in Spain.

1
See Italo Calvino's essay dedicated to his trash can, "La poubelle agréée," in *The Road to San Giovanni* , trans. Tim Parks (New York: Vintage International, 1994), 91–126.

Hans Ulrich Obrist

In Conversation with Antonio Negri

Hans Ulrich Obrist: The last time we met was with Rem Koolhaas in 2001, and we spoke about what could be called your "city projects." What are you working on related to this subject at the moment?

Antonio Negri: I can start by saying that while discussing the concept of the multitude, Michael Hardt and I found ourselves facing the question of the city, which we brought up as part of the question of the territorialization of the multitude, the space in which the multitude deploys itself. To be honest, I think that while a number of problems started to clear up after we wrote *Multitude*, others remained in the shadow, like this fundamental question of space. For example, we are very interested in this problem of the multitude's temporality, that is, of transformative moments and raising consciousness, or the problems that arise the moment we think about what it means to "make" multitude, to construct it as a singularity that tends towards shared, common projects. But the big problem we have yet to consider concerns space. Because we still require a place in which this multitude will exist—not only a network through which it communicates, but also the power to decide its living conditions. This power to decide plays a role in developing a relationship between the multitude and state structures or institutions, and from a negative perspective this means an uproar; from a constructive perspective it means revolution. Now we could say that today this space is the contemporary metropolis. Half of the world's population, maybe more, now lives in cities. The population itself, we could say, is a refugee in these cities. In fact, we may now have one to two thirds of the world's population living in cities of over one million inhabitants.

HUO: And these numbers rise every year!

AN: That's right! And if the question of the metropolis is central, then in my opinion it is because there is a structure of the common that is specific to it. This structure could be described as the tension that exists between the demand for services on the one hand, and the withholding of these services, or the refusal to consent to this demand, on the other. The refusal endangers the demand, and the claims made to it. And this demand becomes more and more important. I actually believe that two processes are currently underway. The first is a definitive neutralization of the traditional working class, which has allowed for the distinct working-class space—the factory—to be destroyed. But it goes beyond this to something more general, because we could also say that this disqualification has marked the disappearance of the productive space as a clearly defined one. The second process concerns the illegal reconstruction of urban space, the spaces not controlled

by anyone, that are constituted by successive waves of immigration and by extremely profound cultural mixes. And all this produces two vast, enormous spaces, where all the energy of work, of construction, of sociality and solidarity, is centered.

HUO: So we could say that these are two parallel movements.

AN: Yes, because they are both intertwined with forms of biopolitical control. It is clear that they are not simply processes of controlling the conditions or the organization of work, but rather of transforming living conditions in such a way that only work and its organization become important. So when we look at the metropolis, we find ourselves facing a dialectical movement unique to our time. But it is dialectic in a unique sense, because, in truth, these are processes that lead nowhere. These changes are made regardless of any communal frame. Each time we arrive in places shaped by these processes, we experience a sort of vertigo. I was recently in Caracas, where in a city of about seven or eight million people you have between seven and nine hundred thousand living in what we could call neighborhoods, or "defined" spaces, whereas about six or seven million people live in totally chaotic conditions.

HUO: And it isn't even clear exactly how many people there are...

AN: Yes, we don't even have a precise figure! When flying over the city, I was absolutely struck by seeing the city everywhere, absolutely everywhere! Meaning that from about 1200 meters above the ground, you can see *only* the city, and nothing but the city! Everything is occupied! And what's more, the space is taken up by something that is totally wild, completely uncontrolled!

HUO: Could we describe this in terms of "self-organization"? Of a kind of development that evades all forms of planning?

AN: Yes, it's completely self-organized. And in Brazil it's the exact same thing.

HUO: You mentioned earlier that you have been traveling extensively in South America.

AN: Yes, I've traveled there especially often in the past couple of years. I must say that I completely agree with Niall Ferguson, who has said that the new political context the Bush administration was responding to was not one of large-scale terrorism engendered by the ongoing conflict in the Middle East—a situation that they themselves created—but the fact that, for the first time since the assertion of the Monroe Doctrine in 1823 Latin America was completely independent. And now, if Mexico votes Left, it will no longer be only Latin America, but Latin

Some coordinators of the landless worker's movement meet to discuss plans for the encampment, Pará, Brazil, 1999.

America *and* Mexico! I wrote a little book about this that was published in Brazil and in Argentina, called *Glob-AL*, where the A and L stand for *America Latina.* In this book, I consider the crisis of the ideologies of subordination and dependence, which were classic themes in the traditional theories of the Latin American Left, and I note that the goal has now become to theorize the interdependence, already constituted, of this new continental front. And all this goes hand in hand with the other emerging position, which considers Bush's or the United States' coup d'état to have failed. The next horizon we will have to prepare for is that of this continental pluralism—one that is extremely varied and passionate, but still poses a small problem for me, which is that we have yet to understand this problem in Europe. And I find this fact regrettable!

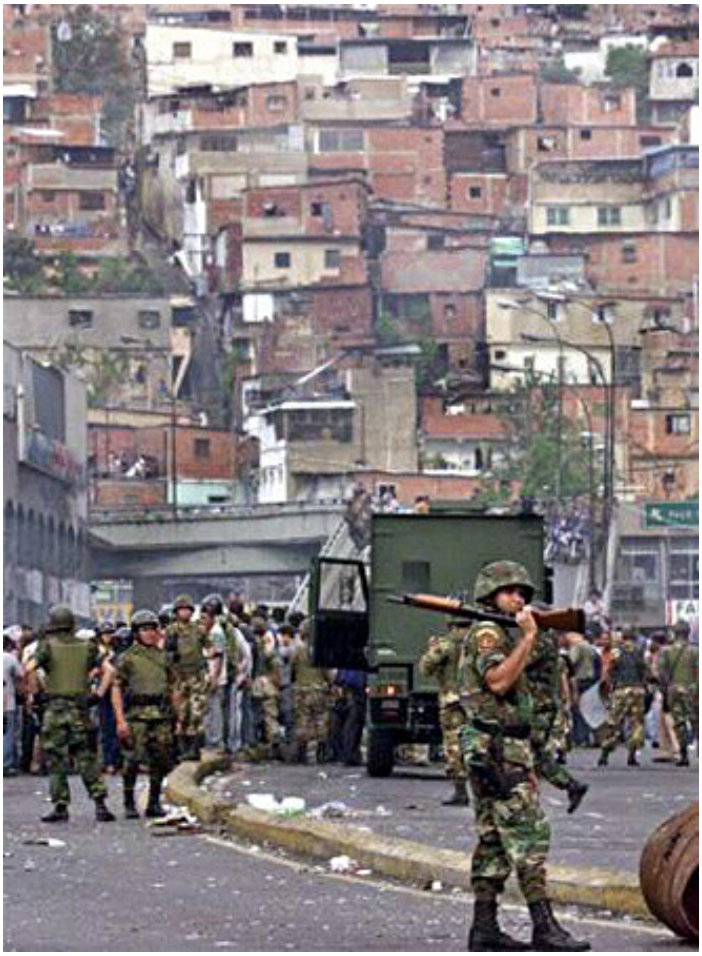
HUO: How do you see Europe in opposition?

AN: I don't know exactly—I'm still consumed by all that happens there, and I haven't reflected on this question properly. But if we return to this question of the metropolis, we can see that we'll have to start by defining it as the place where the transformation of capitalism has, in fact, ruined its own tradition, in the sense that there is no longer any difference between industrial profit, real estate surplus, and financial structures. At the same time, the city has become a full-fledged productive element—and the metropolis even more so. We see that even the most intelligent men have always considered the city to be a positive externality, meaning that we consider the city to have established conditions in which industrial operations and processes could be organized, developed, and extended. But today the city, and the metropolis in particular, have become *directly* productive. And what exactly does this production consist of? I would say that it consists of the movement of people—it is in the construction of urban cooperation, in the liberty and the

imagination of people who define and provoke it. Look at Brazil. They say "But there is so much misery..." And of course, it's true! But I would respond, "Then go look what is in that misery." Because there is an incredible capacity for creation in that misery, in those favelas. Music, human connections, and, of course, at times, deadly connections as well. But there is an enormous creativity that produces new things, and that creativity does not come without negative aspects. But the problem of murder and crime, and more generally the problem posed by the fact that certain expressions of this wild creativity are dangerous, is evidently the problem of order and disorder. And I never thought that this multitude could exist without order. Make no mistake: I have never been an anarchist.

HUO: Yes, we spoke about this the other day, when I mentioned certain urbanists who have reclaimed anarchist thought, and you said that you do not support anarchism in the cities under any terms.

AN: I am not an anarchist from any standpoint, regardless of the situation we find ourselves in. Based on forms of self-organization that are becoming more and more collective, I think there is a "common" that grows stronger and stronger. We always have to create institutions! But creating institutions also means creating forms of cities, because an institution is not a metaphysical representation or an ideal archetype! It is among other, concrete forms that the city has to be constructed, that the metropolis can constitute the common. And it goes without saying that I am not only speaking here of buildings! There are, of course, buildings, but there is also communication—the lines, the spaces, and so forth. Creating an institution means creating a public space.



Anti-riot police, Caracas.

HUO: Speaking of the nature of this public space, in *Multitude* you describe the ongoing obliteration of the notion of "exteriority," which also seems to hint at the disappearance of the idea of a single center. But how is this applied concretely in the city? It seems to me that it is no longer a question of center and periphery...

AN: Well, we need to pay attention to this problem. It's true that there is no longer a center, but it is also true that there is what we can call a "deviant" center. This, for example, is the American center that raises its head in times that are more and more aberrant. I have a lot of respect and sympathy for the democratic tradition of the United States, which is something very profound and something I am very fond of. Still, we can no longer ignore the harmful effects that the conservative and religious culture in the United States has brought about. It's a very dramatic change, and its disastrous effect has been to isolate the libertarian experience of American culture from any form of global consciousness and even from its own capacity to intervene in the world while respecting people's liberty. The export of democracy has been transformed into a new form of imperialism that has surpassed anything we could imagine! What's more, it has produced a kind of imperialism that has been revealed to work against the interests of capitalism, which it was supposed to serve. That is the absurdity of the situation. So the big question is not about what we can do in a world that no longer has a center, but about knowing how the struggles for liberation—the liberation of people, anti-colonialism, anti-capitalism—and how the movement of the multitude, as the fundamental thing to which all other forms of struggle subordinate themselves, can redirect the processes of communication and rebellion. From this point of view I remain a dedicated Zapatista! There are ways in which the claims—the forms of organization and the institutional forms—will build themselves. Today there are still campaigns around this, and we have to lead these campaigns! It's very clear, particularly here in France with the problem of the banlieues, and the problem of the European suburbs in general. These are problems that we are going to have to face very soon. Next year, I am thinking of transforming the seminar I teach at the Collège International de Philosophie into a sort of "nomad seminar" that will circulate among Parisian banlieues.

Women Zapatistas.

HUO: So the seminar will be delocalized to the suburbs...

AN: Yes, yes! To Saint-Denis, Evry, Nanterre, all those places. And it will respond to connections with the groups of people who work there. But it's not only there that the problem of the metropolis will become apparent, because as we speak of the metropolis and its problems, as we speak of the suburbs, the most surprising thing is the total lack of discourse. You saw what happened after the riots in France in 2006: once again, we talk a lot and say nothing. And I must say in particular that left-wing thought has not differed much from that on the Right. The right wing claims that it is not its role or aim to search for alternatives. It is there because it wants to maintain order, so we shouldn't expect anything else from it. Whereas the Left...

HUO: Yes, I was in Paris then, and like everyone, I think, I was amazed by the deafening silence of the Left...

AN: That's it, they are content to remain silent. But how will any connection between this multitude and the new democratic project be established without the idea that things need to be built from the bottom up? This movement has to come from the bottom. Because with the riots we really touched the soft underbelly of all the contradictions in our society—which is essentially Fordist, but as a model this is currently undergoing a serious crisis, because it did not succeed in allowing the new generations to play a role in democracy. They called people from around the world to work in their factories, but once the factories started to close down, they found themselves with ghettos on their hands. And they had neither the imagination nor the ability to place all these people into vibrant circulation; they did not know how to use all the potential creativity that was there. They constantly speak of a "decline," but the only decline I see is that of their own inventiveness and ability. It's the fact that they did not succeed or that they did not even want to take the elites from those countries and place them into real circulation. And now we need to think about how to use this metamorphosis that the political powers up to now have not known how to engage productively with. It's a metamorphosis that finds its outlet in racism, that now has to face the problem of violence, apartheid, and reactionary Islamists. But I believe that all these are secondary to the fundamental problem of how to find ways of recreating an authentic democratic circulation and free movement.

HUO: Which implies the question of the transformation of work...

AN: As always. I am a Marxist, you know. I always think that social activity is the most important thing! And I believe that all the people who talk about these problems without saying this are hypocrites. Because they know very well that social activity is the real problem, and yet they do not speak of it. After this the problem of poverty and wealth, meaning, the difference between those who work and those who exploit, will remain as Machiavelli, my patron and my master, described.

HUO: Yes, we see Machiavelli here on the table...

AN: There's a great piece here that I reread the other day, a text, Machiavelli says, "that is good to remember for all its arguments, which speak to the proclaimed equality of men." In it we read how one of the leaders of the 1300 revolt, a man of the plebs, "one of the most daring and experienced, in order to animate the rest," declared:

> Strip us naked, and we shall all be found alike. Dress us in their clothing, and they in ours, we shall appear noble, they ignoble—for poverty and riches make all the difference.

And it concludes with mistrust of the political game:

> Small crimes are chastised, but great and serious ones rewarded ... We have no business to think about conscience; for when, like us, men have to fear hunger, and imprisonment, or death, the fear of hell neither can nor ought to have any influence upon them. If you only notice human proceedings, you may observe that all who attain great power and riches, make use of either force or fraud; and what they have acquired either by deceit or violence, in order to conceal the disgraceful methods of attainment, they endeavor to sanctify with the false title of honest gains. Those who either from imprudence or want of sagacity avoid doing so, are always overwhelmed with servitude and poverty; for faithful servants are always servants, and honest men are always poor; nor do any ever escape from servitude but the bold and faithless, or from poverty, but the rapacious and fraudulent.[1]

You see, this is Marxism! And we find almost exactly the same thing in Spinoza, and with Nietzsche, and indeed in Marx! We actually find this in the writing of all intelligent writers, this understanding of the fact that it is poverty and wealth that make the world go round. Poverty more so, it is the key, it is the salt of the earth; poverty and love are the two most important things. We will have to construct a city on poverty and love. And, in the background is this question of how we can move from poverty to wealth by passing through love. In fact, this is a question we should pose to architects.

Bust of Machiavelli, Pallazo Vecchio, Florence.

HUO: That would be an idea for a future city. But to return a little to urbanism and art—

AN: You want to talk about utopia!

HUO: Yes, but before we go back to utopia, I'd first like to speak a little about this book titled *Art et Multitude.* One of the things that most interested me in this book is what you say about the transformation of work. You wrote that the transformation of work was your key to reading transformations that took place in art. I would love to hear more about this.

AN: I don't know—for me it's clear. All of Surrealism is linked to Fordization, as is all that "rationalist art." But I should explain what I mean by "rationalist art" such as that of the Bauhaus. Suppose that I recognize two fundamental processes: on the one hand, rationalization, and on the other, materialization. The latter gives us Picasso, and the former—Gropius! And I think the history of modern art is made like this, though I am aware that this sounds absolutely simplistic, but these are the two great foundations for my interpretation. Picasso marks the peak of a tradition of "excavation," of the heart, the soul, of modern reality—this reality characterized by the refusal of the image as it stands, by the desire to construct the image of reality or realize new representations. And on the other hand, we have this rationalization, and I think that these two things go together. Our political milieu is constructed in a similar way, born out of the intensification of the rational, out of humankind's capacity. The outcome of this, I think, is Beuys. He suggests the magnificent climax of a destroyed figurative vision on the one hand, and on the other, a material construction of a new world, along with all the dimensions of finitude and disillusion that this new world brings with it. It is an epic and heroic cooperation that exists in the dissolution of objects. But then what happens in their reconstruction? I know very well that this is better handled by a specialist, which I am not, so I cannot explain my joy to you here. I rely on nothing but the emotion that I feel when I find myself in an exhibition. I am not like you priests of art—priests who know all the sins of artists! That is my confession...!

HUO: Well, one fascinating aspect of *Art et Multitude* is the number of very concrete reviews of visits to exhibitions in the book. I remember that we ran into each other at the 2003 Venice Biennial when you went to see "Utopia Station," and in the book you also mention the preceding Biennial in 2001, and how you were amazed by the lack of formal innovation. You bring up notions of transcendence, of the "death of God"...

AN: Living in Venice, we are able to follow the Biennial quite regularly. From time to time there are ones that are truly extraordinary, even if at other times they're not as solid, and we cannot see why they are so necessary. To be honest, I believe that they should be held every ten years rather than every two, as they are now! But for me, following the developments of art has always been a matter of trying to anticipate a little of what happens, and I have to say that there is a rationality in this disappearance of, well, "rationality." Though this term came to me on its own, I shouldn't use it, as it's too similar to categories used in historicism: "There is a certain rationality," "There is a certain tendency..." I prefer not to use these terms, but how should I say it? I'm trying to direct us towards this idea that society expresses itself in art up to a point where a decision determines a form. I am particularly interested in the notion of *kunstwollen*—this capacity to transform the social and cultural content of a time into an image. But into one particular image, meaning, an image that

produces, or, in other words, into a style. This is a typically Viennese idea, associated with authors like Riegl and Dvorak. But what interests me in this is that there is something analogous to the idea of a political decision. This *kunstwollen* could be understood as something that illustrates in an exemplary fashion that which is the *real* political decision. I had old teachers who taught me this, old Byzantinists who identified with Riegl and Bettini! These are old traditions of schooling that were very vibrant in Padua when I was young. So I am convinced that all of this is very important, from the perspective of a need to reconstruct the phenomenon of the decision, which is what interests me most today. How do we reach a decision? The decision to begin is never something personal, it is never private and secret, which is to say that it's never something fascist. In this sense, it is never a man like Hitler who decides. Every decision is literally determined by the capacity to absorb a mass of decisions, a mass of impressions and reactions. It's a response to the great contradiction with which we are always faced, the question of how we can make the multitude into a singularity. We all agree on this point. And today we work in the singular, and there too we agree that there is a hiatus. But this does not mean that mediation is not possible or that the contradiction is by definition insurmountable. Because this mediation exists, it lies in the notion of the decision, in that which allows us to pose the pertinent question of how this ensemble of singularities constitutes the common, an ontological basis. But how do we move from that to the decision? Well, there is always this old idea of the party, the state, the "thing that unites," it's a real fetish and it's a horrible idea! In lieu of this, what we need is that which art has already done with the *kunstwollen*!

HUO: So art is a model for what we should try to do elsewhere...

AN: Yes! It's the model of a totality that builds, that arrives at having this capacity to concentrate all the forces that are already there on one point... You see that it's not this stupid idea of wanting to use aesthetics. It's like the mouse that the cat chases—we are the cat and we run after the decision. And this connects to the question you posed earlier about the relationship between art and modes of production. This also involves a rapport between these two things. Now that we are within these singularities that rationalism produced, we have to find a way out—the construction of these places like Le Corbusier's Ville Radieuse, and so forth, is no longer possible.

HUO: Yes, this old model of the "master plan" where the space for self-organization does not exist. But this question of the revolution becomes interesting. It's a question that art students ask themselves a lot, and it bothers young artists too: one asks oneself whether there is still a space for resistance.

Phillippe Halsman, Jump Book, 1959. Portrait of Walter Gropius.

AN: Today the elements around which we can create points of reference—even points of resistance to the market—are the ones built on the land of the common. Because the common basically signifies that which costs nothing, that which is necessary, that which is participatory, that which is productive, and that which is free! And I believe that there are new use values already present in our common, and that these values can be easily spotted. Just think of the metropolis, where ninety percent of what we do are common things that cost us nothing—or at least could cost nothing if we made the effort to make them so...

HUO: Starting with the air...

AN: Air, of course, but water too. Generally, there are museums, libraries, cinemas, these are all things that cost money, but in ninety percent of the cases they do not generate direct profit, they are "free of charge." This is becoming an increasingly fundamental element in what we call the "salary" or the "revenue" of citizenship. I don't know whether the Left will win in Italy, but I know that half of the Italian regions have already established welfare programs with the intention of lowering the "universal revenues of citizenship." It's a process that has begun and needs to grow in scale. Our battleground has increasingly become concerned with the biopolitical reproduction of

populations. All these "free" things are on offer in the metropolis because, fundamentally, it is the place where the multitude recognizes itself and starts to struggle. It starts to gain consciousness.

HUO: Which brings me to the notion of utopia. In *Art et Multitude*, I found a very interesting passage in a letter dated December 24, 1988, addressed to a certain "Silvano," in which you discuss two equally illusory possibilities that constitute, according to you, the two dead ends in which an artist could find him- or herself. The first is that of utopia, and the second that of terrorism. You say that neither one of these two possibilities is sufficient, and that the only possibility for one who has traversed the "desert of abstraction" is that of "constituent power." I would love to hear you speak more about this. You wrote this almost twenty years ago, and I wonder whether your point of view on the notion of utopia has stayed the same. Or has it has changed?

AN: You know, my book on constituent power became a "classic" in South America, whereas books like *Empire* receive far less attention, and are even opposed by the Left, which in South America is mainly composed of patriots who favor the idea of the nation state. What reaches them the most—and I'm speaking of people like Hugo Chavez or Evo Morales—is the constituent dimension of power, which I try to deal with in that book.[2]

HUO: And these are, in any case, the people you are in dialogue with, no?

AN: Yes. These are very important people in many respects. They are foreign to our own experience, to our own culture, and that makes it all the more important and more interesting to speak to them. This idea of spotting constitutive processes that span multitudes—which are not "masses" or "crowds," but a complex articulation of a poor social fabric—is something that touches them enormously. Now that I've said this, I'll go back to the question of utopia. Utopia is first and foremost an extremely realist thing. There is utopia when there is construction, or a revelation of the common. To follow up on what we've already discussed, an example would be to give the favelas' inhabitants property rights over the land they already inhabit.

HUO: And these are very concrete actions.

AN: I became quite close with Gilberto Gil In Brazil after we met in the context of very concrete government projects trying to create open access to computers and the internet. It's the same process, though it may not be immediately apparent. These communication networks are also a sort of favela.

HUO: A virtual favela!

AN: Yes, virtual! And an extremely important one. The other utopian domain is that which concerns how we can transform the redistribution of wealth into something active, a form of production. For example, both in Brazil and here, when you assume power, you immediately find yourself with wealth that you can redistribute. In Brazil or Venezuela, it's the revenues from oil, but doing that does not create a new society—it's simply handing out money! The problem with doing that is that it neglects other forms of cooperation that these funds could go towards. What are these forms? For rural communities, for example, such funds could allow for the establishment of literacy initiatives or stable and systematic medical assistance—things that already exist, but most often in backwards or marginalized ways. In Venezuela, for example, there are thirty thousand Cuban doctors who have been educated in Cuba's medical schools, and they are some of the best doctors in the world. All the NGOs in the world go to Cuba to prepare themselves for anything involving tropical illnesses and other illnesses associated with these climates. All this is very important, of course, but what we still need here are *places*—if we implemented universities, hospitals, and cultural centers in these areas, if the value of people's lives was placed directly into economic circulation, it would totally alter the equation. But this has been an irresolvable problem: how can the enormous investments that have taken the form of direct aid be translated into dynamics that are productive and transformative? I think it can be useful to compare the situation in Venezuela to the one in Iran.

HUO: In Iran?

AN: Yes. In Iran they continue to practice this form of redistribution that seems close to charity, while the same people remain in power. Because the priests stay priests, no matter what the religion! And as they are actually the patrons, there is no way for this to change. In Venezuela, it is not priests who are in power, though there is obviously an oligarchy that may perhaps get what it wants, namely for the United States to intervene and restore the previous order. But today, the enormous difference between Iran and Venezuela is that in Iran the mullahs have "the weapons and the money," as Machiavelli said, whereas in Venezuela the people hold the weapons. This is not to say that the situation in Venezuela could not give rise to a new form of fascism or a particularly virulent populism, just that for the moment this is not the case and the institution remains open. The other thing is that in Iran, though the arms are held by those in power in order to uphold the revolution, the money is distributed without utopia. On the other hand, in Venezuela this is the decisive element—the money is full of utopia.

HUO: And if the money is "full of utopia," and is, as we said, part of a concrete utopia, could we talk about a utopia that produces reality?

AN: Oh, yes! And also in relation to the production of

Nakagin Capsule Tower, Tokyo, designed by Kisho Kurokawa, 1972.

subjectivity.

HUO: I would like to consider the question of groups and movements in which these utopias can be proposed. This year, we did an interesting project with Rem Koolhaas in which we tried to create a "portrait of a movement." In the 1960s, there was a very important architectural movement in Japan called Metabolism, unique for having tried to establish a link between urbanism and biology—they wanted to create "metabolic cities" on the water...

AN: Metabolist organisms?

HUO: Yes, exactly. And so Rem Koolhaas and I found and interviewed each of the members of this movement and assembled accounts by critics, architects, industrial designers, and others, which together make up a sort of portrait of this movement, which we will publish as a book. The interesting thing is that even if they say that they were not exactly a coherent movement—there were never any concrete organized activities like those of Surrealism or Dada, for example, with manifestos, conditions for membership, or anything of the sort—the fact remains that there was a kind of pragmatic convergence of points of view that met spontaneously in a given moment. And meanwhile, we realize that in art or architecture today, movements have become very rare.

AN: But as you know, I'm neither an art historian nor an architectural historian! I don't know what I could tell you about this...

HUO: Yes, but I think there is a certain link to your work. We talk often about Operaismo, and I would be curious to know how you see the movement that your work brings about, whether you imagine something organized and structured enough to express itself in a certain moment through a manifesto. Or is it something a bit more like Metabolism, based on a convergence of views that is more spontaneous and less concrete? And, just briefly, how do you see Operaismo today? I know that in his preface to *Grammar of the Multitude*, Sylvère Lotringer says that none of it would have been possible without Russia's invasion of Hungary in 1956, and he mentions you and Mario Tronti as the originators of the movement, but I would love to have your personal viewpoint.

AN: Actually, we have to be careful about what we say with regard to "Operaismo," because it was first and foremost a sort of political activism—but an activism conducted by intellectuals. It was intellectuals who, at the moment they became activists, began to produce.

HUO: Yes, they did both things at once.

AN: Yes, and it is exactly what we were in Italy, the generation of—how can I say this? Take the current editor of *Corriere della Sera*. Like many other individuals who work in the media, he comes from this generation of the rupture at the end of the 1950s and the beginning of the '60s. And Hungary was important for this generation, because it marked the moment of crisis for the Communist Party in Italy.

HUO: Lotringer later talks about 1961 as a very important year as well, but what happened between 1956 and 1961?

AN: There was Renato Panzieri, who was the secretary general of the Italian Socialist Party a little bit before that. When he left his post there he became editor in chief of *Quaderni Rossi.* He went to Turin, where we could say that he was essential to organizing the intervention groups at Fiat.

HUO: And that was in the late 1950s?

AN: Yes. Tronti was then the secretary of the Communist Party in Rome, and I was the secretary of the Socialist Federation in Padua. We found ourselves working with Panzieri at *Quaderni Rossi*, a journal aiming to revive political discourse with the question of the factories and the workers, shifting the struggle from the network between parties and syndicates to those who worked on the assembly line, also with an attempt to reveal the contradictions embedded in forms of struggle. At the time there was no sociology in Italy, and no sociology of the worker's world in general. Sociology was one of the things that the Fascist Party had categorically rejected, and as a result there was no teaching of it, no Italian school of sociology. And we wanted to introduce both sociology and struggle at the same time; we needed the sociology in order to struggle. And the most amazing thing is that we succeeded! It was very impressive. I always return to the experience of the artist, because that's what it was—to succeed in understanding the language of the workers, to make a leaflet and find that is has a direct effect on them, there was something miraculous about it—you cannot imagine! It wasn't the creation of merchandise with a price, but the creation of a war machine that destroyed every notion of price! It was really impressive. I also remember that in 1963, my wife at the time and I spent the summer in a village where there were petrochemical factories employing thirty thousand workers, and there too we made leaflets and distributed them, and the workers announced: "tomorrow we will not work." That was the very first time that the factory went on strike, they had never done it before.

HUO: That was the magic of beginnings, in a way.

AN: And I was convinced that it was impossible—I didn't even wake up to go to the factory that morning! But my wife did, and she came back fifteen minutes later—we lived there with the workers about fifty meters away from the factory—to tell me that they were all outside. Impossible! I went to see it, and saw that everyone was afraid. It was their first time, and no one knew how the factory would react once it was left to its own devices. There were about thirty chimneys, and at one point, a real "atomic bomb" erupted...

HUO: An explosion!

AN: Yes, a dreadful explosion from the accumulation of all this gas that they did not evacuate. I remember it as if it were yesterday... it was dawn, six in the morning—that's utopia!

X

Translated from the French by Orit Gat.

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.

Antonio Negri, born in Padua in 1933, is a philosopher

and an Italian politician. In the 60s he was involved in Marxist movements, and participates in the development of "operaismo," which focuses on the concept of the "social worker." He has translated Hegel's *Philosophy of Law*, and specializes in legal formalism as seen in the works of Descartes, Kant, Spinoza, Leopardi, Marx, or Dilthey. He has taught at Padua, at the Ecole Normale Supérieure at Rue d'Ulm, University of Paris VII, and Paris VIII, International College of Philosophy and the European University in philosophy. In 1979 he was accused of involvement in an armed insurrection against the state and complicity in the assassination of Aldo Moro. He spent four and a half years awaiting trial in a maximum security prison before being elected into parliament as a member of Marco Pannella's Italian Radical Party. When his parliamentary immunity was revoked, he fled to France, where he remained in political exile for fourteen years before returning to Italy in 1997. Among his recent books are *Empire*, *Multitude. War and Democracy in the Age of Empire*, and *Commonwealth* (all with Michael Hardt), as well as *Insurgencies: Constituent Power and the Modern State* and *Time for Revolution*.

1
Niccolò Machiavelli, *History of Florence and of the Affairs of Italy* (Middlesex: Echo Library, 2006), 97–98.

2
See Antonio Negri, *Insurgencies: Constituent Power and the Modern State* , trans. Maurizia Boscagli (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1999).

Letters to the Editors: Eleven Responses to Anton Vidokle's "Art Without Artists?"

Published in issue no. 16 of *e-flux journal* in May 2010, Anton Vidokle's polemical **"Art Without Artists"** essay stimulated a number of heated responses, primarily from curators. Over the summer we asked some of these respondents to put their thoughts in writing, and invited a few others to also register their positions with regard to the problems, if any, in dissolving boundaries between artistic and curatorial work.

This is the first in an ongoing series of letters to the editors featuring reader responses to issues or individual essays published in *e-flux journal*. To offer your own response, write to **journal@e-flux.com**.

Maria Rus Bojan *Beatrice von Bismarck* *Liam Gillick*
Jens Hoffmann *Adam Kleinman* *Sohrab Mohebbi*
Nato Thompson *Vivian Rehberg* *Dorothee Richter*
Jacopo Crivelli Visconti *Tirdad Zolghadr*

Maria Rus Bojan

In my opinion, the argument made by Anton Vidokle in "Art without Artists" is a very rare, and sharp, critique of curatorial meaning production and its side effects on the art world. Indeed, as Vidokle observes, there is a certain lack of critical questioning with regard to the validity of the actual curatorial-cultural model. And furthermore, there is a lack of critical distance necessary for properly investigating whether the challenges of these new modes of curatorial practice are indeed useful in contributing to a substantial re-thinking of the triadic relation of artist/curator/audience.

But however important the question of whether the curatorial job should remain a service or be perceived instead as a creative process, it remains a secondary issue in my opinion. We now find ourselves in the unprecedented situation of creating a huge infrastructure for art, while art itself has almost disappeared from the process altogether. An acknowledgement that the current establishment and capitalist preconditions for artistic work suffocate and undermine the core function of art should come first and foremost, and should provoke serious reflection and concern.

An ethical crisis and a lack of critique within the art world have certainly contributed to this situation, but on a more pragmatic level, the lack of criteria and defined rules that could better protect the art world, combined with the feeling of inferiority experienced by art practitioners in relation to PR specialists, have led to this paradoxical situation. It is not my intention to criticize the role of public relations or the advertising industry in general, however. Rather, I wish to underline the effects of publicity's

invasion of our specific field, and consider how an increasing demand for image production has exerted itself on both artists and on those who work in the service of art.

PR agents have justified an infiltration of all levels of the institutional art world by emphasizing the compulsory degree of recognition and celebrity required to participate in the field of art. And they have reached their goal of becoming a supreme arbitrator of attention. Now, the artist's production can no longer be presented and promoted without first being filtered through various teams of experts, and in this way, without knowing, artists have tacitly subjected their work to a new form of censorship.

Sure, it is risky to pronounce this word, "censorship," precisely because these experts are primarily curators and art historians; but let's be sincere and accept that the power relations are inherent and that artists are the ones who bear its burden. Let's acknowledge that the field unfortunately will never have enough resources to please everybody. In almost all cases, institutional programming must follow economic interests, and naturally only those artists whose works fit the specific requirements are selected for presentation in the end. Even if it is truly appreciated, artistic value and the actual artistic message count for very little when the institution's primary interest lies in generating profit. In fact, the entire machinery of the institution is employed to attract larger audiences, by conceiving an ever-increasing number of creative projects. And in most cases this happens with the full consent of the artists. And if there is some conflict between artists and curators at the moment, it is not necessarily generated by power games within the field, but are mainly the results of society's pressure and its need for fame at any price.

The Austrian economist Joseph Schumpeter was one of the first to observe that a surplus of creativity will lead to a crisis for capitalist society. Synthesizing the very substance of modern times, "creative destruction" is a key concept for explaining a "process of industrial mutation that incessantly revolutionizes the economic structure *from within*, incessantly destroying the old one, incessantly creating a new one," warning of the dangers that accompany such changes.[1] To unite the terms *destruction* and *creation* in one expression is in fact to generate the most perverse combination possible, precisely because real creation should, rather than destroy anything, contribute to the consolidation, continuation, and completion of innovation. But when creativity is cynically and incessantly exploited, not out of necessity but for profit, then we are no longer talking about the natural process of replacing old forms with new ones, but about a process of subduing creation, of subjecting it by all means to the capitalist order.

Unfortunately, all sectors of life have been corrupted by this negative creativity, and this is the reason why, with regard to the internal dynamics of the art field, one should immediately distinguish between the individual act of creation, which is positive and affirmative because it is born from a sense of urgency, and the negative internalized creativity that has more to do with the political, economic, and power-related dimension, than with the real meaning of creation as such.

Under the pressures of this new form of capitalism, and in the name of so-called social solidarity, contemporary society has allowed too many people to lay claim to the real act of creation, and has left too much space for mediocrity to take its toll on the real artists. Only mediocrity needs brands and aggressive creative marketing strategies for launching its products. Good art does not. Because good art will market itself, it requires no other creative input, and will therefore always reject this kind of collectivism in creation, which to me seems very close to the communist concept of cooperativization.

The good news is that despite this creatively disguised, corrupted capitalism, art has resisted and it will continue to survive in any circumstances.

And thank God there is no such thing as democracy in art! In the world's pantheon of values there is only room for the real creators, for artists who express the inconvenient truths of their time in unique and radical ways. So we should not concern ourselves too much with those who forget who they are and what their real mission is. Their punishment will come in the form of a serene forgetfulness.

Maria Rus Bojan is an art critic and curator based in Amsterdam. She is the director of the international program of Art Rotterdam and is co-director of Project Foundation, a platform for contemporary art and new formats of exhibiting.

Beatrice von Bismarck

Considering the current popularity of independent curators, the increasing number of curatorial studies programs, and the density of discourse concerning curating at conferences and in publications, the questioning of the role of the curator in relation to that of other participants in the cultural field, above all in relation to artists, doesn't come as a surprise. The debate concerns nothing less than the terms for participation in meaning production and its processes, of inclusion in and exclusion from the field of art. From which position should this power be exercised, and what are its techniques and strategies? Has the curator come to occupy the single most powerful position in the field, amalgamating and emulating all others—those of artists, critics, and theoreticians alike? This is the assumption underlying Anton Vidokle's argument. Has the curator thus become a meta-artist with exceptional designating and legitimizing

capabilities who can consecrate his or her own work as art?

While this debate has appeared and reappeared since the late 1960s, enhanced by two parallel developments—conceptual critical approaches in the arts on the one hand, and the rise of the freelance curator on the other—it doesn't seem to have lost any of its unquestioned assumptions regarding how artists and their work are to be distinguished from other practitioners in the field or members of society at large. In order to avoid any mythical undertones related to creativity, freedom, or self-realization, I would like to shift the argument to a differentiation between the notions of "curator," "curating," and the "curatorial." Instead of comparing professional positions (curators vs. artists, critics, and so forth) and tasks (curating vs. making art, critique, etc.) with their respectively assigned privileges, powers, and status, I would suggest to shift the focus to the specific condition in which these positions and tasks appear as part of the constellations constituting the "curatorial."

The status of the "curatorial" reflects a long history of challenges posed to the conventions of the curator's profession and to the activity of curating. Over the course of the twentieth century the "curator"—in its inception, an institutional position connected to museums—was increasingly professionalized while being simultaneously challenged by de-professionalizing tendencies following the rise of the "freelance curator," who was understood in terms of a commitment to individual projects rather than to a single institution. In accordance with this development, the original tasks formulated by the museum—collecting, preserving, presenting, and mediating—became more wide-ranging and complex. While administrating and organizing, selecting and contextualizing, acquiring and allocating funds, publicizing and social networking are all understood now to be part of the job, the most fundamental definition of "curating" is the making of connections: between works or art, artifacts, or informational materials, but also between them and different sites (such as studios, collections, or museums), people (artists, collectors, sponsors, curators, gallerists, critics, or theoreticians), as well as discursive, social, cultural, economic, or political contexts.

At no time were these tasks exclusively reserved for "curators," even when artists claimed the right to participate actively in making their own work public and perceptible as a precondition for the art to be presented as such.[2] What's more, in recent years different arts, disciplines, and professions have adopted parts of the "curating" task—film, dance, theatre, architecture, and their related studies are involved in curatorial activities, as are philosophers, sociologists, anthropologists, and cultural theorists. These overlappings, synergies, and competing interests render the curatorial a self-reflexive constellation, itself involved in making constellations and dealing with them.[3] The curatorial designates conventions against one another, takes analogies between making constellations and immaterial work into account, and intentionally reveals how precariousness and the privileges of an exceptional social status characterize working conditions in the curatorial field. The conditions of certain positions and professions in the field are as much a part of negotiations within the realm of the "curatorial" as are its various tasks, techniques, and strategies. They form flexible and ephemeral combinations in much the same way as "curated" objects, spaces, persons, or discourses. Within this structure of dynamic constellations, the "curatorial" allows itself to assume, mirror, and expose the existing relations of public address, economy, and subjectivization in the artistic field. It is through that it may visualize potential modifications, alternatives, and changes, and ultimately gain its aesthetic as well as political relevance. The debate concerning the status of curated artworks and the role of the artist her/himself is thus less about disconnecting art from artists than about how they are to be embedded in the public realm. Up for negotiation are the conditions under which artists are to be responsible for the specific means by which their work becomes public.

Based in Leipzig and Berlin, Beatrice von Bismarck teaches art history and visual culture at the Academy of Visual Arts in Leipzig, where in 2009 she initiated the MA program Cultures of the Curatorial.

Liam Gillick

> In one of the Marx Brothers' films, Groucho Marx, when caught in a lie, answers angrily: "Whom do you believe, your eyes or my words?" This apparently absurd logic renders perfectly the functioning of the symbolic order, in which the symbolic mask-mandate matters more than the direct reality of the individual who wears this mask and/or assumes this mandate.[4]

What Anton Vidokle points out in "Art Without Artists" is not a new observation—and he would be the first to admit this. Yet what has changed this time is the source of the argument. For Vidokle is at the center of many collapses and redefinitions. He is not an artist who makes large claims for the autonomy of his praxis—on the contrary his work is often completely misinterpreted as being a conference, a series of discussions, or a transfer of information. The crucial issue here is that these misinterpretations of his work are also completely accurate insofar as the misunderstandings are part of a sequence of maneuvers invoked through a progression of side-steps in and out of institutional and neo-institutional terrain—between autonomy and the zone within which one becomes implicated.

The question here is not whether or not an artist is a good human being or whether a curator is a controlling art operator; there is no doubt that both are equally semi-true and patently false, and that they are produced and validated only by pledging allegiance to the old order of conceptual art, with its accusations of hypocrisy, tokenism, and its love of the idea over and above gestures of radicality and the rejection of the commodity. But questions of authorship and instrumentalization will not suffice to realign and redesignate roles in the contemporary arena. And questions that circulate around the curatorial do not prevent the potential of cultural work that yearns for autonomy.

What we really face when these doubled categories of instrumentalization and a desire for transparency are pitted against a more Trotskyesque desire for embeddedness, constant skepticism, and semi-autonomous engagement, is a battle of ideas that echoes deeply seated left-wing disagreements. The validation of cultural work through mediation by those who have been identified as "good" presents an audience with the task of verifying the roots of what is presented because it has already been presented before, and leads to a shutting down of potential and places a relative of the neo-Lacanian big other into operation. This process within cultural studies, curatorial education, institutional presentation, and the "curatorial" links with forms of moralistic coding used within language and the law in ways that cannot be represented or acknowledged regardless of how hard we try to see through the transparent screen of the didactic and the completely sourced. However hard one attempts to account for everything, that very desire alienates its subjects completely in the end. The question here concerns authority and the claim to cultural validity. Many practices today cannot be consolidated within any singular overarching curatorial perspective. To then abandon the contradictory subject altogether in favor of language and the law would be an act of cowardice in the face of the irresolvable. That is the technique employed by the dominant culture. That is the American way—from the town hall meeting to the workings of the Supreme Court. Not a perfect role model for all its apparent democracy and belief in the rule of law.

It is this dilemma of an apparent radicality framed only through didactic language and a plea for commonly understood enlightenment legalistic structures that Vidokle is questioning. The solution does not reside within self-conscious post-authorship in the face of excessive curatorial instrumentalization even if that is what he suggests in his text. The crisis is one of power, language, and the law. The prospect of operating under the regime of a big other, even if it does not exist, is the only thing that might suffice to account for the determined drive to create art without artists or even art.

Years ago in the UK there was an old barroom test that the left would use to speculate on who would need to be eliminated once the revolution came. And we can find a parallel in the possibility of projecting artists and curators into positions of real power and speculating on what might take place if they were ever to get hold of a Ministry of Information. But it is this absence of real world projection that haunts the terrain in the thrall of the big other where the artistic and the curatorial still struggle to animate roles and potentials—in spite of the fact that they are already reconciled with the fact that material that has not been already validated can have little function within a critical structure. This is concerned less with criticality than with sustaining an isolated critical super-self-consciousness—the neo-institutional analogue to the ironic clowns and the painter of unicorns.

Liam Gillick is an artist based in London and New York.

Jens Hoffmann

"Art Without Artists?" inspires a variety of ruminations: on the relationship between artists and curators, the position of institutions, the bureaucratization of curatorial work, and much more. But first and foremost—though this was not the main objective of his essay—it reflects the current confusion regarding the practice of curating.

Perhaps this response may seem to come from left field. While I passionately advocate strong curatorial voices and the idea of the curator as author, I also care deeply about art, artists, the creative process, and most importantly the display of art. I agree that some curators have taken on a far more active role in the art system—at times to the point of becoming overbearing—yet the majority of curators working in hundreds of museums across the globe have not assumed such a role, and most of them work on a rather less prominent platform. I also do not share the author's fear that the sovereignty of artists is in danger. As Vidokle himself says: Artists can continue making work without curators, whereas curators cannot curate without artworks.

The aforementioned "confusion" is a result of a number of developments in the art world over the last twenty to forty years. The changes we are witnessing today in the field of curatorial practice follow from critically engaged artistic practices that emerged in the late 1960s—especially those associated with institutional critique—which have been appropriated by curators, and in particular independent curators. This may initially seem like a contradiction, as institutional critique set out to examine, question, and criticize institutional power and its hierarchies, including the relationship between artists and curators. Yet many of the independent curators who have emerged over the last twenty years, mostly in Europe and to a somewhat lesser extent in the United States, have been looking for ways to open up rigid exhibition protocols and stiff institutional structures, and to propose

unorthodox exhibition formats that can be highly critical of the art system itself. With the rise of the independent curator in the late 1990s, academic programs focused on curating, as well as theoretical discourses around exhibition making, began to flourish. The current concept of curatorial practice as one that transcends the mere organization or display of artworks in gallery spaces owes much to these developments.

It might sound strange coming from someone who seems so deeply entrenched in the art world, and who has championed the apparently progressive idea of the curator as author for some time, but I often feel that I am sitting on the sidelines of most curatorial debates today. While this has a lot to do with my fundamental love of art, which fewer and fewer curators seem to share, it is even more strongly related to my sense of the debate around curating as being ultimately not very interesting or meaningful. My desire to focus on exhibitions as the main platform for the mediation and dissemination of artistic and intellectual concepts, the production of knowledge, and our experience of art and culture is perhaps unfashionable. Yet I have no investment in the idea of "the curatorial" as a strategy for bypassing art, or for the exhibition.

I am also not necessarily wedded to the notion that curating must strictly revolve around art, but I am deeply concerned that leaving the exhibition behind would mean leaving behind a crucial tool for the examination of social, cultural, and political issues. The potential of what an exhibition can be, and how deeply it is entrenched as a social ritual in society, has not yet been fully explored. It still offers many untapped possibilities for artists and curators to mediate content, whether artistic, political, cultural, or something else. The "curatorial" will be interesting as a concept when we realize its value as a methodology for engaging with the world as it opens doors to new forms of mediation. And in some way, Vidokle himself is a perfect example of how non-curators can utilize the "curatorial; his practice as an artist is indeed very curatorial, yet it is also decisively artistic.

Jens Hoffmann is a writer and curator of exhibitions based in San Francisco where he is director of the CCA Wattis Institute for Contemporary Arts.

Adam Kleinman

Thank you Anton for your thoughtful text, "Art Without Artists." I am concerned, however, that it misses a larger concern by narrowly defining a curator as a figure who works solely with artists. Look at the Metropolitan Museum of Art, with curators of education who present symposia in fields far beyond art—in sociology, psychology, economics, as well as art history and theory. As such, and as a corollary to your text, I would like to ask, rather than why Ferran Adrià was included in an exhibition at all, but why he could not have been included in the exhibition *simply as a cook*?

On a similar note, look at the YouTube Biennial to be presented at the Guggenheim this fall. While a major social phenomenon is worth considering, the method of simply restaging an already existing infrastructure strikes me as lazy. But more importantly, rather than bringing individuals directly involved in social media such as bloggers, web designers, entrepreneurs, YouTube celebrities, or even sociologists; artists have been invited to serve as a jury that will decide which "works" are to be included or excluded, presumably to add some sheen of criticality or authenticity to the event.

I wholeheartedly agree with your sentiment that today it is no longer enough "to take on a challenging job, do it well, with real dedication and engagement, and take pride in that." In fact, if we consider many curators and institutions to act as authors in order to create new forms of authority, then the situation is probably even worse when their exhibitions are delivered, slapdash, to a public. Why is this happening? What is at stake? Since you brought up both disciplinary colonization and transparency—really the clearing of an existing authority so as to set up new rule—I would like to quote Homi Bhabha on the subject:

> Transparency is the action of the distribution and arrangement of differential spaces, positions, knowledges in relation to each other, relative to a discriminatory, not inherent, sense of order. This effects a regulation of spaces and places that is authoritatively assigned; it puts the addressee into the proper frame or condition for some action or result.[5]

Could curatorial laziness in fact be more nefarious? That is, do steps to gather other fields into the art machine represent an attempted coup by curators and institutions to create the grounds to become the public intellectual distributors *par excellence*? Furthermore, so as not to pick on curators solely, I have to ask whether artists are implicated as well? Can an artist honestly bemoan curatorial overstepping while simultaneously using "appropriation," whereby "objects" of culture are "acquired" by usurping authorship from a primary producer? Is it not true that acts of appropriation are considered to add a layer of *criticality* to the work? Here we find an age-old tension, not between different cultural producers, but between artist and craftsman, as you suggested with Tiravanija's average cooking skills. Artists as well as curators promote a state of exception wherein their work is "sovereign" because they have taken sovereign control of the distribution of a given discourse—which now marks the self-reflexive stance that distinguishes "high" culture. Although labor relations are certainly at stake, the real questions concern what type of culture we live in, and to what extent it is shared globally

or is simply that of a quasi-mythic class.

Adam Kleinman is a writer who lives in New York.

Sohrab Mohebbi

This is a simple proposition, or rather an observation regarding the position of the curator of contemporary art spaces in relation to the position of the artist: if the artist—post-Duchamp—decides what is art, then the curator is the one who decides the status of non-art within the art space, of everything in the exhibition space that is not a work of art.

Traditionally, the curator was the caretaker of the work of art. The curator identified and rewarded artistic genius and was the mediator between the artwork and the public, bringing the work to the public space and making it accessible to the audience. However, the autonomous modern art object, free from royal patronage and religious significance, demanded increasingly to be interpreted and explained. Thus over time the curator came to not only present the artwork, but also explained why and how it is art.

The blurring of the boundaries between art and life and the readymade gesture on the one hand, and the disputed futility of avant-garde committed art and its social promise on the other, increasingly generated the need for curatorial contextualization and interpretation. Thus, from wall labels to press releases, from African masks to newspapers, from archival material to advertisement packages, and from industrial artifacts to lectures and seminars, the curator became a sovereign overseer of non-art within the art space, to the extent that the art spaces at times had no art at all.

In Man Without Content, Giorgio Agamben touched upon a particular crisis in contemporary art criticism when he suggested that, while art was always defined and situated in relation to its shadow (non-art), the art that has been made and exhibited following Duchamp has not only embraced, but has become, this shadow. In the contemporary art space, through various forms of curatorial intervention, what used to be a simple wall label has now expanded into an inventory of objects and discourses that further complicates the already complicated problem of simultaneously exhibiting both art and its shadow. The question concerns what distinguishes non-art deemed art by the artist as such from the non-art presented by the curator as curatorial intervention. One is art and the other is context; but when placed side by side, does one become the other or vice versa?

The curator as author solidifies his or her position by creating what could be called a curatorial gap, something similar to the pedagogical gap of the explicative order as described by Rancière/Jacotot in The Ignorant Schoolmaster. Seen from this angle, in order to maintain curatorial specificity and authority, there should be a gap between the artwork and what it means, and the curator is the person who helps the ignorant viewer cross the gap, step by step, via curatorial mediation, through the context/knowledge that the curator provides. As Rancière shows, a form of gap is necessary in maintaining any kind of authority, and he shows how the hierarchical structure of society is preserved by sustaining such gaps. And for the curatorial position to gain and maintain its specificity within the cultural sector, the curatorial gap needs to be preserved.

The curator is the one who has decided to not produce, to be a non-author. While artistic work demands authorship, the curatorial defies it. Therefore, in most instances, curatorial authorship is at odds with the ethos of the profession. The curator needs to destroy the gap, not to preserve it, and needs to allow the will of the audience to follow the will of the art, and not the intellect of the curator. If this could at times be achieved by the introduction of a recent edition of the Yellow Pages, or of a model of a new hybrid car, then there should be a place for it on the margins of the white cube.

Sohrab Mohebbi is a writer/curator currently based in Brooklyn. He received his MA from Center for Curatorial Studies, and was a founding member of 127 band, Tehran.

Nato Thompson

Anton Vidokle's essay "Art Without Artists" certainly tackles an important shift not only in the field of curating, but also in the field of artistic production writ large. To distill the argument, Vidokle makes a case for the increased autonomy of artists and for the reduction of the legislative and creative control of curators, whom he feels often overstep their bounds. His argument is that the expanded curatorial field simply shrinks the realm of possibilities for artists, that "curatorial and institutional attempts to recontextualize their own activities as artistic—or generalize art into a form of cultural production—has the opposite effect: they shrink the space of art and reduce the agency of artists."

Certainly, Vidokle's text is polemical and for that reason, it must dig deep into clear-cut categories and stark oppositions. The curator and the artist must be considered as somehow fixed identities. Yet in the age of a flexible economy in which individuals must often wear numerous hats in order to survive, it is strange to find such strict typologies. When does an artist become a curator? When does an artist become an institution? When does a curator become an artist? When does an institution become an artist?

Vidokle makes us feel as though these categories were quite apparent, but certainly it is in this confusion that we

find the argumentation begin to slip. While Vidokle adequately addresses certain arrangements of curatorial power in institutions over the authority of the artist, he does not acknowledge the complexity of production that occurs outside these categories. While the sovereignty of the artist is of critical importance, its primacy is less apparent if we do not consider the larger perspective of everyday life.

Vidokle separates the roles of artist and curator via an economic framework in which the curator serves as management and the artist as worker. While this breakdown certainly serves the purposes of argumentation, it is only approximately accurate. The dynamics of power and labor in the current economic climate are absolutely critical to understanding the modes of cultural production at work today, and it is extremely important to not misrepresent them. For, certainly, there are relationships between artists and curators that operate according to this industrialist model of labor. Certainly, some curators have jobs at institutions and some of those institutions stand in direct relation to power. And, certainly, many artists work under precarious labor conditions. But, of course, we are also aware of numerous artists whose financial position within galleries vastly exceeds those of any curator. Do these exceptions (which unsurprisingly enough tend to be the artists in the bigger exhibitions) count as "artists" if we are to continue with the dichotomy of management versus worker? How far should we go with an economic breakdown of their roles? What happens when the curator works for the artist? Does this shift in the economic relationship change their identities?

This linguistic game might feel silly, but such is what happens when one follows an argument to its logical conclusion. In an age of flexible labor conditions, strict labor categories will always find contradictions. If artists are workers, then what is their relationship to other workers? Are all workers artists? In an age of neoliberal capitalism, wouldn't it be accurate to state that most of the infrastructure of the arts is based on workers? Where do gallerists, installers, and receptionists fit in? What is the role of the schools at which some of the artists teach? What is the role of the granting organizations that hand out funds? And this is only the art world. Where does the creative power of those caught outside the gears of the art community fit in? Where do all workers fit in?

Certainly, this might be an obvious point, but my intention is simply to remind us that the world of cultural production is vast and open-ended. To talk about the autonomy of artists, without consideration of the greater battles facing workers, means continuing to operate in cahoots with an antiquated logic of the artist as genius. Certainly, many of the most regressive forms of criticism are built upon the de-linking of artistic actions from the very conditions of labor that surround them. And, certainly, the market will forever praise the myth of the artist-genius separated from his or her conditions of labor.

I want to be careful in unpacking this because any quick assumptions can lead to terrible tropes that we must certainly be tired of seeing over and over again. Vidokle is right in his suspicion of the overreaching curatorial role. In an age in which the author has supposedly died, we find the social capital gained by authorship all the more tempting. As artists gain power through authorship (and those invested in that authorship, like their dealers), they simultaneously find curators trying to catch a ride. But, at the same time, we must understand that while curators may be guilty of this, so too are many artists who do not credit their studio assistants, the workers at museums, and the entire enterprise of people who work to make dreams happen. In the film industry, it is worth noting, there are lengthy credits at the end of the show that evidence the complexity of making cultural projects happen. Strange times indeed when the film world is more progressive than art.

Vidokle mentions Paul Chan working as a producer on Waiting for Godot in New Orleans as a form of art. In this example we find some of the problems that can accompany this constant emphasis on the artist. Chan himself denies this kind of authorship when it comes to such a vastly complicated public project, for certainly one must acknowledge the theater company that produced the play. Did Paul's credit as artist supersede that of the Classical Theater of Harlem? Or what about the people from New Orleans that assisted in the production? Or how about the production crew that worked so many hours to get the play off the ground? I must admit equal culpability. Creative Time also foregrounded Paul's role at the expense of other contributors. The project was often referred to as "Waiting for Godot in New Orleans: a project by Paul Chan." It is my experience that most art organizations feel they must maintain a sole author in order to make the project more legible to funders and audiences, and to cater to a prejudice for the mission of serving individual authorship. I bring this example forward to warn against the hazards of reinforcing antiquated notions of authorship. How perversely bizarre, and revealing, that the art world continues to cling to the economic privilege that comes with authorship by leaving one name on complex cultural projects.

Certainly, the backstory to these tensions involves that ghost that haunts all cultural actions in these times: social capital. This strange transactional form of power only goes to those credited with authorship, and thus the battle begins. For without social capital, these squabbles over crediting wouldn't feel so intense. But, of course, this has little to do with creating possibility or making art, and rather more with the ability to leverage the power of authorship. Because many curators operate from institutional positions we find they use the creative power of artists for the purposes of garnering social capital. So when Roger Buergel includes the chef Ferran Adrià in the

last Documenta, he does so with a tacit understanding of what this manipulation of the social capital of a high-profile chef might do for him in the field of art. But, of course, the same goes for artists, who will often borrow from everyday life and use it for the purposes of their own career. Commercially successful artists might cull from the treasure trove of political movements in order to leverage the street cred or social capital it affords them. Or social based artists might use everyday cooking skills in order to create what would typically be considered a fundraising cocktail party. How can the conservative ambitions of much of what passed for relational aesthetics be considered much else?

Taking a step back, we indentify an even more tenuous position. For, certainly, in an information age in which the production of culture is one part of a massive service sector, we find the nitpicking between artists and curators to be just a petty squabble in a much larger neoliberal market of precarity. In some instances, the battle between artist and curator is a battle between management and management. While the nuances might resonate with us, the overall social impact is extremely limited. Until we identify the concerns of artists and curators (as well as those of the other people tied to the art infrastructure such as teachers, art-world bureaucrats, security guards, installers, gallery receptionists, grant writers, marketing directors, the unemployed), we are missing the real onus of what Vidokle argues. For his point, if expanded, could lead to a much more aggressive call to arms.

Ultimately, the question can be distilled into an equation between power and the possibility of producing new worlds. In most instances curators stand in the way, working as a buffer against the critical potentiality of artists. The power equation comes into focus when it is recognized that the person with power often acts in accordance with power and their expressions result in the production of consistently alienating situations. But the mistake is to think that all artists are somehow immune to such conditions. There are far too many successful artists whose work continues to prop up conservative ideologies, and their practice garners far more power than any curator. There are many examples where the artist's role vis-à-vis the non-art-world workers could be considered that of management as well. So, the question of who is management and who is worker can only be case by case. The important thing to ask is in what way do these relationships unleash new conditions that resist the conservative logic of capital and power.

Nato Thompson is Chief Curator at New York-based public arts institution Creative Time.

Vivian Rehberg

It has been quite some time since I voluntarily stopped curating exhibitions, so my curatorial experience is limited and my brief remarks on Anton Vidokle's text, "Art Without Artists," come from the margins, from my position as spectator/art historian and critic. Although it is very refreshing to read an artist's perspective on this topic and I admire Vidokle's sincerity, I am not quite sure how seriously to take his characterization of the relationship between artists, curators, and critics as almost exclusively one of tyrannical interference. Once I finished luxuriating in a good, honest dose of schadenfreude with respect to my curator friends, I thought, surely the situation is not as bleak as he makes it sound. For this important conversation to move forward, beyond polemic, one has to admit exceptions.

Vidokle adopts the laudable position of artist advocate, which puts curators and critics willing to take the bait on the defensive. He makes a persuasive argument for a radical revision of the skewed hierarchical division of labor between curator and artist, in order to restore a notion of artistic sovereignty, or creative autonomy. However, I cannot envisage conditions of artistic production freed from the diktats of "institutions, critics, curators, academics, collectors, dealers, the public, and so forth." The mere existence of the artwork produces these relations, which are social, economic, and political, and capitalism thrives on them.

These days almost anything can be curated—daily news cycles, book and music selections, fashion shows, boutiques, gym equipment, online marketplaces, and posh-restaurant cheese trays (I'm not kidding). I suppose some would much rather eat from an especially well-curated cheese selection than one that has not been curated at all, though I prefer both knowing my options and making my own choices. The broader cultural use of this term "curate," which has become increasingly widespread in the Anglophone media, and its meaning and significance consequently diluted, may have an unexpected impact on the more specialized art curator. In the most banal sense, curating implies that an expert or team of experts has selected items of a specific quality or worth that will appeal to the greater public or a quite targeted audience. "To curate" is not simply an action verb (from the Latin curare, to care for, as every curator has heard ad nauseam), it is an action verb that adds a specific kind of value. Curating adds the symbolic value of caring, of carefulness. But it also imposes layers of interpretation on the experience of art that Vidokle believes are "not necessary to produce meaning." I agree. However, if exhibitions are thankfully not "the singular context through which art can be made visible as art," they are still the conduit via which the greatest majority of us can be granted access to art. Wouldn't it be just a matter of time before an artist could lodge similar complaints against any new networks, or educational and publication efforts, that might arise to counteract curatorial power?

The influence of curators is undeniably pervasive. That the role of the curator has subsumed that of the critic is an

unfortunate outcome of the perceived porosity between two activities I personally find quite significantly distinct, and to an extent, incompatible, but which the art world accepts as interchangeable. I'm not complaining; I find this situation unfortunate for reasons that have nothing to do with legitimacy or visibility and everything to do with criticality. However, just as I'm not convinced that written texts and exhibitions are similar propositions or occupy the same critical terrain, I'm also not convinced that all of the actors in the art world accept that curators and artists, or exhibitions and artworks, are interchangeable. Some of us do not. My evidence for this, however, is purely anecdotal.

Vivian Rehberg is an art historian and critic, and a contributing editor at Frieze, based in Paris.

Dorothee Richter

Anton Vidokle has selected the Curating Degree Zero Archive as an example of the curatorial practice of exhibiting ones own archives as a kind of artwork. I wish to set forth some arguments to contradict this assumption. In this connection, I should like to point out that the practice of artists and of organizers has changed since the sixties; artists like George Maciunas, Claes Oldenburg, Joe Jones, and Addi Köpcke, to mention only a few of those involved, began at the time to pay increased attention both to the relation to the public and to methods of distribution. These new aspects of cultural production corresponded to new forms of post-Fordist commodity production, to a shift in the organization of work processes throughout society. Such a shift in shared areas of action culminated in new meta-levels, for instance, they brought about networks and transfers of know-how. In consequence, the avant-garde among those engaged in cultural work became aware at an early stage of these changes, criticizing them while at the same time acknowledging that the framework for new cultural production must be regarded as being wider than hitherto imagined; for cultural production, they realized, ought to cross the borders of traditional culture and insist on playing a role in society as a whole.

Whether this is possible and under which assumptions this should take place opens up another set of questions. I would therefore argue that cultural production today cannot clearly distinguish between artistic and curatorial aspects, both of which combine a great variety of signs and media to create a meaningful message. However, and on this point I would certainly agree with Anton, in some respects curating involves a new hegemony; you only have to see Harald Szeemann in the midst of artists at documenta 5, which unmistakably presents a hierarchy that reminds one of the power relations between a king and his knights. However, with the Curating Degree Zero Archive we wished to provide the possibility of gaining an insight into the practices adopted by curators and by artists that are currently described as curatorial practices. (And in this sense the Postgraduate Program in Curating in Zurich also reflects upon the field.) Moreover, we are interested in how these practices convey a meaning, since every cultural production communicates a certain message to the public, the wider implications of which are important. Its aim is to create a new public and to trigger unexpected discussions and debates that are centered around power relations and political articulation in the field of vision/visibility within and far beyond the art field.

Dorothee Richter is head of the Postgraduate Program in Curating at Zurich University of the Arts, a Fluxus researcher, co-initiator of the Curating Degree Zero Archive, and editor of www.on-curating.org.

Jacopo Crivelli Visconti

In 1961, as his contribution to a group exhibition to be held at Galerie Iris Clert in Paris, Robert Rauschenberg sent a telegram to the gallery with the text: "This is a portrait of Iris Clert if I say so." Turning a telegram into an artwork was a foundational act with regard to what would later be defined the dematerialization of the art object, and, to what is probably more relevant here, the sole responsibility of the artist: the "I" who decided what was a portrait, and therefore an artwork, was an artist, not a curator.

In his text "Art Without Artists?" Anton Vidokle seems to long for those happy times when artworks, even conceptual ones such as Rauschenberg's, could be created without the annoying involvement of curators eager to discuss its meaning or the best way of displaying it. It could be argued that Iris Clert was in fact acting as a curator, by accepting Rauschenberg's proposal (which allegedly had to be rescued from the garbage, as it was thrown away at first) and, even more radically, conceiving of a show that consisted solely of portraits of herself. But arguing all that would be to sustain that Vidokle's position is wrong, and that "some kind of curator" is in fact always needed, and, as a curator, this is not really the way I see things. Not unlike the literary editor, the translator, or the referee, the curator plays a fundamental role, but should be prepared and willing to be invisible, if required. Though it is quite a consensual proposition that a curator today could legitimately decide that a telegram is an artwork or that it can be displayed alongside artworks, if this is done blatantly, something is wrong.

I believe, on the other hand, that curators play a key role as "intermediaries," to borrow Vidokle's expression, in allowing for artworks to be seen, or even produced, in the best possible way, or in any way at all. This might be true anywhere, but it certainly is especially true in a country like Brazil, where museums and cultural institutions in general are constantly struggling with a shortage of funds, lack of long-term planning, and political or even more undecipherable agendas. In such a context, a curator's

humble, practical, and often frustrating job of raising funds, or struggling to convince whatever committee or institution of the value of an artistic project, can quite simply make the difference between a good idea and a tangible, visible artwork.

In such a context, the curator's task is akin to the one Vidokle considers most urgent: "to further expand the space of art by developing new circulation networks through which art can encounter its publics—through education, publication, dissemination, and so forth." In Brazil, and most likely in many somewhat developing countries, the art context is still shaping up, and the "new circulation networks" are often the only networks available at all. The fact that curators can and will play an important role in those contexts doesn't mean that artists will be excluded, but, quite the contrary, that they will be represented by curators in institutional and even bureaucratic arenas, and can thus concentrate on more interesting issues, such as producing art. It should be clear that this has nothing to do with a latent desire to be considered co-author, which Vidokle seems to identify in many curators. More often than not, however, it does take the two (the artist and the curator) to be able to make things happen.

In this sense, I have always had the impression that the relation between artist and curator is, or at least should be, deeply different from the one Vidokle describes: it is not about defending one's territory, but about building a common ground. Personally, I find there is hardly anything more rewarding than seeing impressive, beautiful, touching, thought-provoking works produced by artists I know and whose work I respect, and whom I might even have had the honor and pleasure of working with. And I truly believe that at least some of them are sincere when they tell me they were touched by reading something I wrote, or intrigued by an exhibition I organized, even if they were not the subject of my writing or did not have their work in the exhibition. I guess we have the feeling of being in this together, and what we share is an ongoing conversation. Or, to put it differently, this small text might be a portrait of Anton Vidokle if I say so, or it might be another narcissistic self-portrait of a curator, if he says so. But if we want to have an open-minded and fertile discussion about the whole issue, it is well beyond doubt that it takes, at least, the two of us.

Jacopo Crivelli Visconti is a writer and curator, based in São Paulo.

Tirdad Zolghadr

In 1972, artists reacted to documenta 5 with boycotts and open letters, protesting against Harald Szeemann "using artists like paint on canvas" and otherwise "overreaching," to use Vidokle's term. It's unfortunate such an uproar is unimaginable today. Which is to say I agree with many of Vidokle's points. The thick oral history of curators abusing their prerogatives is growing thicker by the biennial, while art is widely employed to boost curatorial reputations for multi-knowledgeability and to ennoble semi-academic careers. And the idea of a happy level playing field between artists and curators is indeed far too pastoral.

However, even more startling is the idea that curators getting-out-of-the-artist's-way will remedy the situation. I don't have the space to go into this, but please do realize that curators posing as mere butlers before the corridors of power—the custom Vidokle appears to advocate, one which still dominates 95% of curatorial practice—are all the happier to pursue their agendas behind smokescreens of modesty. "Don't mind me. Artists first." What's more, the old tradition of seeing artists as intrinsically harmless is no longer enough. It's worth mentioning that Daniel Buren's 1972 tough-talk negotiations with Szeemann allowed him to run his stripes across the documenta like some madcap Atari game—to the chagrin of many artists.

In Vidokle's essay, a Catalan cook and a Brazilian courtroom prove the follies of curatorship, and, ipso facto, artists engaging with practices that are not part of the "vocabulary of art" serve to "open up the space of art," while curators do the contrary. Even the freelance curator, famously and pathetically powerless, becomes just another heaving Minotaur in this seamless narrative of victimization. And the irony of e-flux wielding more influence than most curators I know—freelance and institutional combined—will not be lost on many readers. But e-flux is an outstandingly productive model, and for each of Vidokle's examples of artistic agency I can give you one or two in which the spaces of artists are regularly "opened up" to the despair of those around them, with audiences, interns, political minorities, pop cultures, painful local histories being cutesified, tokenized, plagiarized, instrumentalized, and condescended to, in one venue after another. This impunity doesn't stop at curators, and the notion of "opening up" the space of artists as if they were caged tropical parakeets is deeply misleading.

The impunity in our field, so proudly bereft of the most basic checks and balances, is second to none, reminiscent perhaps of the "Benefit of Clergy." Medieval clergymen were not under the jurisdiction of civil courts, and could escape imprisonment or execution by simply reading the "Neck Verse." Miserere mei, Deus, secundum misericordiam tuam. A practice that was gradually banished once enough people had memorized the verse. Consider the class privileges, the institutionalized fraud, the mystical exceptionalism before the law. It's an acceptable comparison. If art is being used to warrant critical karaoke and brute exploitation, and if a conversation on ethics is really a priority, then a Call To Order should be a little more comprehensive.

Tirdad Zolghadr is an independent writer and curator based in Berlin.

1
See Joseph A. Schumpeter, *Capitalism, Socialism, and Democracy* (New York: Harper Perennial, 1962), 83.

2
For further elaborations of my argument see also Beatrice von Bismarck, "Unfounded Exhibiting: Policies of Artistic Curating," in *The Artist as ...* , ed. Matthias Michalka (Vienna: Museum of Modern Art, 2007), 31–44; "Curatorial Criticality: On the Role of Freelance Curators in the Field of Contemporary Art," in *Curating Critique* , ed. Marianne Eigenheer (Frankfurt am Main: Revolver, 2007), 62–78; "Curatorial Acting: Art, Work and Education," in *Creating Knowledge: Innovation Strategies for Designing Urban Landscapes* , ed. Hille von Seggern, Julia Werner, and Lucia Grosse-Bächle (Berlin: Jovis Verlag, 2008), 166–193.

3
The MA program Cultures of the Curatorial as well as the conference of the same name in Leipzig (for which Vidokle's paper was originally written) reflect the transdisciplinary and transprofessional character of the "curatorial," including as participants, guest artists, mediators, and theoreticians from different professional, artistic, and disciplinary fields. For more information, see http://www.kdk-leipzig.de/programm.html .

4
Slavoj Zižek, *The Big Other Doesn't Exist* , *Journal of European Psychoanalysis* Spring - Fall 1997

5
Homi Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (London and New York: Routledge, 1994), 109.