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Editors
# Editorial

These days, it is fairly clear that we consider art to be a trans-disciplinary field in a position to nurture other disciplines, and to be nurtured by these other disciplines in turn. As promising as this might sound, the terms for this exchange become significant, because it remains unclear what exactly we presume art to offer to the world. When hard pressed, we usually prefer not to prequalify the nature of artistic contribution at all, because in fact artists reserve the right to offer nothing other than doing work on their own terms. This requires a delicate balance, and it becomes important to ask: how is it possible to engage other fields while still retaining the semi-autonomy that delineates the artistic field in the first place?

**Tom Holert**'s proposal for "Art in the Knowledge-based Polis" warns against the increasing use of the concepts of "knowledge production" and "research-based practice" within art institutions and academic departments. Though art may find radical new forms in certain approaches traditionally assigned to the social sciences, it should likewise avoid being subject to the qualitative, "results-oriented" economies of such practices as well. If art is to engage these notions, it must do so using its own approaches to knowledge and non-knowledge, research, and discursivity.

**Monika Szewczyk** notes a similar potential for non-knowledge in her essay, "Art of Conversation." When discursive forms are presented as an inclusive medium, she suggests that conversation may be even a step more radical in its acknowledgement of the unknown, consisting not only in seeing one another (sharing views), but in revealing one's own blindness—making one's blindness seen. For Szewczyk, "art and conversation share this space of invention, yet only conversation comes with the precondition of plurality that might totally undo the notion of the creative agent."

In the second and final installment of his essay "Maybe it would be better if we worked in groups of three," **Liam Gillick** looks to the experimental factory as a possible parallel to forms of art production that are deeply embedded in notions of work and life. As evidenced by the attraction of art exhibitions to industrial spaces, artistic production often enjoys its proximity to the model of an experimental factory. And yet, given the right circumstances, an experimental factory could surpass art's capacity for critical reflexivity by manifesting its promises in the form of a functional model.

**Simon Sheikh** reflects on Brian O'Doherty's seminal "Inside the White Cube" essay, which marked a shift in the perception of the white cube exhibition structure from a de facto neutral context to a highly loaded, culturally specific project—a shift from functional support to loaded gesture. Consequently, the space of art came to be seen as a necessary precondition for work to be considered as such, and thus a point for negotiation. By introducing a consciousness of this inclusion and exclusion, art's dynamic paradox grows richer. Though the white cube

remains a de facto standard for excluding non-art from the exhibition context, its use is at least to some extent mediated by a critical self-consciousness lacking in so many other disciplines.

In **Natascha Sadr Haghighian**'s conversation with Avery Gordon at a Whole Foods supermarket near the New Museum, the two discuss how, in the midst of an organic megastore, with its mix of vague, socially progressive slogans and opulent environmentalism, critical forms of resistance and agency remain buried even in the structures that appear to divert and quell their potency. With a bit of "digging" through time and space to uncover those original driving forces and their historical precedents, it may be possible to somehow unearth similar forms of agency from the very structures that appear to obscure them.

For **Luis Camnitzer**, the question is not what other disciplines can do for art, but rather what art—specifically art education—can do for literacy. According to Camnitzer, art has the capacity to radically transform the concept of literacy by reversing a core sequence in the system of education: that of reading and writing. Alongside the obvious need to learn how to read before being able to write, Camnitzer finds a parallel notion lodged in traditional pedagogy: in order to express oneself, one must first understand expression as a discrete system—one must be "alphabetized." In art, the inverse process is taken for granted, and if education can also find a way to write first, and find a system with which to understand what is written afterwards, far more polyvalent means of teaching and learning may become available.

Finally, in "Gaza—Beirut—Tel Aviv," **Bilal Khbeiz** reflects on the divide that separates those who experience war directly from those who express solidarity with the afflicted from a safe distance. Feelings of bravery and resolve are usually left to those who have the luxury of relating to the afflicted, but who are not themselves forced to experience the affliction. Meanwhile, those who are directly subject to catastrophe emerge with no such resolve, but with the selfishness and opportunism typical of unwitting victims. Problems arise when the afflicted discover a degree of agency in their position—an opportunity to justify any manner of atrocity as "self-defense," an aggression in the name of the victim.

——Julieta Aranda, Brian Kuan Wood, Anton Vidokle

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You teach a child to read, and he or her will be able to pass a literacy test.

—George W. Bush, in a speech given in *Townsend, Tennessee, February 21, 2001*

Luis Camnitzer
# Art and Literacy

Interestingly, at least in the languages I know, when one talks about alphabetization there is always the mention of reading and writing, in that order. Ideologically speaking, this prioritized order not only reflects the division between production and consumption, but subliminally emphasizes the latter: ignorance is shown more by the inability to read than by the inability to write. Further, this order suggests that alphabetization is more important for the reception of orders than for their emission.

Of course, this theory—that if one wants to be able to write something, one should know how it is written—has some logic to it. It forces one first to read, then to copy what one reads—to understand somebody else's presentation in order to then re-present it. In art terms, however, this is similar to saying that one has to first look at the model in order to then copy it. Now the logical construction becomes much less persuasive. This is not necessarily wrong, insofar as one really wants to copy the model, or the need to copy the model is well grounded. In essence, if there is no proven need, the logical construction ceases to be one—it becomes a dogma disguised as logic.

This theory establishes first that the model deserves to be copied, second that there is a merit in making a reasonably faithful copy, and third that this process is useful to prepare the artist to produce art. This idea is a leftover from the nineteenth century, and its relevance today is highly questionable. An artist then has to ask whether the problems posed today by alphabetization might not be in need of new and more contemporary approaches. Is there an analysis of these problems informed by the attitudes that removed art from the nineteenth century and brought it into the twentieth? In other words, is alphabetization a tool to help presentation or re-presentation? Where is power located? Is it granted to the literate-to-be or to be found in the system that wants him or her to be literate?

One tends to speak of art as a language. In some cases it is even described as a universal language, a kind of Esperanto capable of transcending all national borderlines. As a universal language, stressing *universal,* art serves the interests of colonization and the expansion of an art market. The notion of art as a plain language, however, underlines a notion of it as a form of

communication. In this case, power is not granted to the market, but to those who are communicating.

Educational institutions expect everybody to be able to learn how to read and write. It would follow that, if everybody has the potential to use reading and writing for expression, everybody should also have the potential to be an artist. Yet in art the assumption is different. Everybody may be able to appreciate art, but only a few are expected to produce it—not all readers are writers. Such inconsistent expectations overlook the fact that, just as alphabetization should not aim for Nobel Prizes in literature, art education should not aim for museum retrospectives. Nobel Prizes and retrospectives are more indicative of a kind of triumphal competitiveness than of good education. Put simply, good education exists to develop the ability to express and communicate. This is the importance of the concept of "language" here, the implication being that both art and alphabetization can be linked to nurture each other.



McGuffey's Eclectic Spelling Book, published in 1879. © Robin Dude on Flickr

### Reading, Writing, and the Rest

At this moment, we are in the precise middle of the decade that the United Nations has designated as the Decade for Alphabetization (alphabetization here used in the sense of education for literacy). UNESCO estimates that there are 39 million illiterates in Latin America and the Caribbean, roughly 11% of whom are adults. **1** 16 million of them are in Brazil. These statistics only include people who do not know how to read or write. If we add those who are functionally illiterate—people who have the techniques, but are not able to use them to understand or to develop ideas—these figures grow astronomically. In developing countries, one out of every five people older than 15 is considered illiterate. Among developed countries, nearly 5% of the population of Germany, for

example, is functionally illiterate. And among literate students in the US, it is estimated that 75% of those finishing high school do not have the reading skills required for college.

The teaching of reading and writing has been a major part of the schooling mission for over two centuries. It has also been on the minds of countless specialists who ponder gaps in formal education in both expected and unexpected sectors of the public. That everybody should know how to read and write is taken for granted. However, beyond vague truisms regarding its function, there is little discussion about how those abilities are used. And yet the problem of illiteracy persists even in countries claiming to have eradicated it.

Art has dealt with illiteracy on amazingly rare occasions, and when it did, it did so mostly of its own accord, keeping within its disciplinary identity and confusions, among them an idea that appreciating art is for everyone while making art is for the few. This means that art's main strengths—speculation, imagination, and its questions of "what if?"—have not really been explored on those occasions. Supposedly art is art and the rest is the rest. Art, however, happens to be the rest, too.

### My Imperialism

Forty years ago, I was invited to organize the art department in a US university. I refused on the grounds that art is not really "art," but a method to acquire and expand knowledge. Consequently, art should shape all academic activities within a university and not be confined to a discipline. I recognize that my position reflected a form of art-imperialism, and this is something I still adhere to. As in all imperialisms, my position was not necessarily based on solid information and I used aggression as a tool for persuasion. Predictably, I was defeated, and shortly after was condemned to solitary confinement in the art department I had so proudly rejected. Yet I am unrepentant: I continue to operate with poorly informed opinions, I continue to be aggressive, and, to be sure, I will continue to be defeated.

My imperialism is based on a generalist view of art in which everything (including the "rest") can be seen as art. I also believe that the social structures that divide us into producers and consumers—those that ensure that our lives conform to the laws of the market instead of seeking a collective well-being—should be demolished. These were the views we developed as students during the late 1950s while I was in art school in Uruguay. These views took for granted that such a broad definition of art, in which everybody could be a creator, would become a tool for improving society. We were defeated then, and today these beliefs are considered anachronistic and out of place.

Regardless of their feasibility, these perspectives had

some importance because they introduced an awareness of the role and distribution of power in matters of art and education that should not be ignored. They clarified claims surrounding the ownership of knowledge, how that ownership is distributed, and who benefits from it. Even if these issues are normally considered to be outside the scope of art, it is on their account that the use of language and the means of engaging illiteracy become interesting to art.

*Indoctrinating Subversion*

Both art education and alphabetization have in common the dual and often contradictory mission of facilitating individual and collective cultural affirmation and expression on the one hand, and of being necessary tools to cement and expand forms of consumption on the other. Consequently, education is not only an ideologically fractured field, but one in which each of its ideologies assumes its own particular pedagogical approach to apply to all fields of knowledge, overcoming all irresolvable contradictions. When reasonably progressive, such pedagogies assume that one can ensure the stability and smoothness of the existing society while at the same time forming critically questioning, non-submissive, creative individuals. This approach takes for granted that education will create good, accepting citizens who play by the rules, but who will also be subversive individuals attempting to change that society. In a conservative pedagogical approach, the latter part of the mission will simply be ignored.

As it is, the educational system emphasizes good citizenship during the early stages of formation and postpones any potential subversion until the postgraduate level. Speculation and imagination are allowed only after becoming a good citizen. In order for actual subversion to take place, it would first have to address the earlier parts of the educational process. This explains why alphabetization takes place at the beginning of the educational voyage while true art-making is placed at its end, or is indeed postponed until after formal education is over.

The tension that emerges from this built-in stability/instability contradiction creates two main divisions in how education is approached: between "integralism" and "fragmentalism," on the one hand; and between tutorial education and massive education, on the other. Although the two divisions are not necessarily aligned with each other, in traditional education, fragmentation tends to be coupled with massive education. Here information is reified, classified into disciplines, and simultaneously transmitted to large groups of people with the aim of achieving an efficient conformist stability. Knowledge travels from the outside to the inside. The elements are distinct, and their classification and order are presumed to be good and unchangeable. Power lies in the hands of somebody other than the student.

The second alignment is different. In more progressive education practices, integralism tends to be associated with a tutorial style of instruction in which there is more room for interdisciplinary research, encouragement of discovery, and an emphasis on individual processing. While not necessarily seeking either a flexible society or a critical analysis of one's connections to it, there is at the very least this emphasis on individuation. And inasmuch as it includes the possibility of a permanent critique, there is an empowerment of the individual in the form of an encouraged, self-aware perception of the world.

It is this notion of empowerment that creates ideological differences between the two alignments. As soon as empowerment is introduced, the politics around the distribution of power becomes an indissoluble part of the educational process. This can explain why the most paradigmatic pedagogical figures in Latin America sought to develop not only the basic process of alphabetization within the field of education, but also self- and social awareness. Both the Venezuelan Simón Rodríguez (1769–1854) and the Brazilian Paulo Freire (1921–1997) saw education as a form of building a progressive and just social community. In the 1820s, Rodríguez declared that education had to deal "first with things, and second with those who own them." **2** In the 1960s, Freire wrote that "before learning how to read words, one should learn how to read the world." **3** Both educators underlined the importance of decoding the social situation prior to decoding the disciplines of reading and writing.

It is not surprising that this form of social decoding is easier to achieve through individual exchanges rather than collective ones. Individual tutoring seems to be ideal. When the teacher can focus all his or her energy and attention on one person, it allows for immediate calibration and response to the most minimal signs of incomprehension. Done well, it takes the Socratic method to the level of extreme psychological therapy, making for a tailor-made education for each individual. If the teacher is a good one, this makes for perfection. Seen in terms of efficiency, however, individual tutoring is the least economical strategy. It is no coincidence that having a personal tutor is a symbol of wealth reserved for the upper classes, so it becomes paradoxical to expect this highly elitist mechanism to also be the most appropriate means of achieving a just and classless society.

On the other hand, massive education remains seductive for its apparent economic efficiency as well as its populist appeal. A teacher can form tens or hundreds of individuals with the same investment of time and energy that a tutor makes for one. As far as the empowerment of the individual is concerned, however, massive education has the tendency to disseminate information and indoctrinate rather than to promote investigation and self-consciousness. In other words, striving for efficiency favors cheap output at the expense of qualitative

evaluation. Quality becomes assessed within an economic frame of reference. Alarmingly, this distortion is accepted as the norm. Of course, there are tutors who inform and indoctrinate their students, just as there are teachers educating the masses who are able to raise awareness and empower them. In the first case, however, the tutor is betraying the teaching mission; in the second, the ideals are only reached by overcoming built-in obstacles.

### Coding and Decoding How and What

Sixty-five years ago, when I was learning how to write, I was forced to fill pages with the same letter, repeating it over and over again. I had to copy single letters before I was allowed to write words. I was given words before I could express other people's ideas, before I could express my own ideas, before I could even explore what my own ideas might be. It only occurred to me as an adult that, if I know how to write with a pencil, I also know how to draw with that pencil. **4**
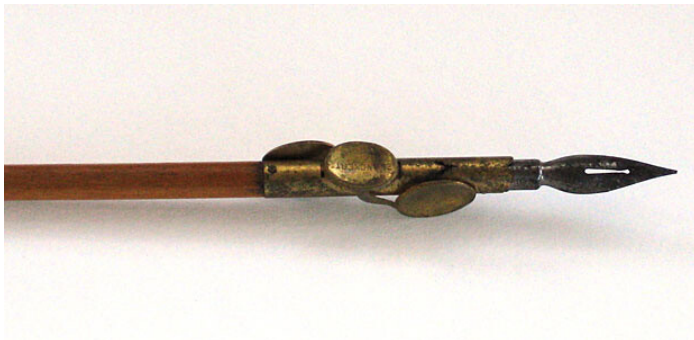


My mother's pen.

For my mother, educated in the Germany of World War I, matters were even worse. She had to use a pen designed specially—not for writing—but for learning how to write. The pen looked as if it had been designed for torture. Oval pieces of sharp tin forced the placement of the fingers into one particular position. If the fingers were not in the required position, they would be hurt. One could speculate that these pens were instrumental in preparing for Nazi Germany's ethos of obedience.

Art education has always been faced with a confusion between art and craft: in teaching  **how**  to do things, one often neglects the more important question of  **what**  to do with them. The conventional way of teaching how to write concentrates on readability and spelling, which only addresses the  **how**  of writing without regard to the  **what**. Exemplified by the practice of teaching someone how to write by concentrating on a frozen aesthetic feature such as calligraphy, this approach fails to first identify the need for a message, which would then open an approach to writing that concerns the structure and clarity of what is being written.

In an exaggerated form, the pen synthesizes everything I hated about my education: the fragmentation of knowledge into airtight compartments, the confusion between how-to-do and what-to-do, the development of communication without first establishing the need for it. It was like learning how to cook without first being hungry—without even identifying what hunger is. After all, education is less about being hungry than about awakening appetite to create the need for consumption. In fact, I believe that this is how cooking is taught.

Why can't one first identify and explore the need to communicate in order to then find a proper way of communicating? Languages themselves are generated in this manner, and this is how they evolve. Words are created to designate things that had hitherto been either unknown or unnamable. Today's spelling errors determine tomorrow's writing. Many of those errors are the simple product of an oral decoding that overlays written coding. Of course, errors should be acknowledged—but they should also be subject to critical evaluation. As a derogatory term, "error" reflects a particular code-centrism typical of our culture. Illiteracy is, after all, only a problem within a literacy-based culture. In general, codes are created by a need to translate a message into signs, and then decoded by a need to decipher the message. Through this coding and decoding, there is a process of feedback in which "improper" or misplaced codings produce evocations that change or enrich the message.

### Finding Discovery

When the reason to read and write is primarily to receive and give orders, it is understandable that the need for learning should not be identified by the person to be alphabetized, but by the same power structure that produces those needs. Knowledge becomes predetermined and closed when both definition and identification are performed within this restricted functional field, while a more open field would stimulate questioning and creation. In essence, one cannot educate properly without revealing the power structure within which education takes place. Without an awareness of this structure and the way it distributes power, indoctrination necessarily usurps the place of education.

While this is true for education in general, it becomes more insidious when applied to the teaching of reading and writing. In this case, indoctrination is not necessarily visible in the content, but instead seeps heavily into the process of transmission: if one is taught to repeat like a parrot, it doesn't really matter what is actually being repeated; only the desired automatic, internalized act of repetition will remain. If we only teach to recognize things by their forms without addressing concepts, it won't matter what generates these forms. Only the recognition of the packaging will remain, and worse, the acquisition of knowledge will stop there.

A real education for an artist consists of preparation for a pure research of the unknown. In a strong art education, this starts at the very beginning. But as institutional education in other areas is organized to convey only known information and to perpetuate conventional habits, these are two pedagogies in fundamental conflict. Where, then, should the fight against illiteracy be placed? Should alphabetization be handled as a subject for training or as a tool for discovery?

The question may be too schematic. In art, pure discovery leads to amateurism, while pure training leads to empty professionalism—good preparation ultimately seeks a balance between them. The question does not concern which activity should be eliminated, but rather which one should inform the other. Those in favor of training often defend it with the need to supply good scaffolding for the student. Yet if one ultimately hopes that discovery will be the main purpose of a student's life, whether for self-realization or for collective enrichment, it is clear that the student should not just learn to build scaffolds.

We now find ourselves in an age when the amount of available knowledge far exceeds our capabilities for codification. The imbalance is such that we must speculate on whether the concept of restricted alphabetization based on the re-presentation of known things may be an unforgivable anachronism. We may have arrived at a point where we need an education that goes far beyond all this: one that first makes the subject aware of the personal need for literacy and then identifies the coding systems already in use, so that they may be used as a reference; one that proceeds to activate translation processes as a primary tool for entering new codes; one that, from the very beginning, fosters the ability to reorder knowledge, to make unexpected connections that present rather than re-present. In other words, we need a pedagogy that includes speculation, analysis, and subversion of conventions, one that addresses literacy in the same way any good art education addresses art. This means putting literacy into the context of art. By forcing art to focus on these things, in turn, the art empire itself will also be enriched.

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This essay began as a paper presented at the 1st International Meeting on Education, Art and Functional Illiteracy, which took place in Rio de Janeiro, December 1–3, 2008. The meeting was sponsored by Daros Latin America and co-organized by Eugenio Valdés, Director of Casa Daros in Rio de Janeiro, and myself as Pedagogical Curator of the Iberê Camargo Foundation in Porto Alegre. After the meeting it was decided that we would pursue several objectives within a continuing project we named *Art-phabetization*: a) to study institutional dynamics in existing organizations like the Samba schools to fight illiteracy among their members; b) to blur the borderlines between schools and their neighborhoods and between schoolwork and leisure; c) to study the role of errors in the generation of metaphors and new knowledge; d) to create a literacy or alphabetization laboratory to explore methodologies to be tested in institutional settings; e) to study the possibility of the creation of mobile laboratories; f) to create a blog and an interactive databank of exercises and games that connects the laboratory with literacy teachers.

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*There is a doorman working at the entrance who is very good at recognizing people. He is also a judge of character based on facial appearance. However, he is blindfolded. The doorman is accompanied by a colleague who is unable to move. Tied to a chair. Incapable of physical activity. At the right time, when the music has finally stopped, people stream out past the doorman. After their activity and all their engagement with the party, the mood is subdued, people just leave normally. Not making any fuss, no rushing, just moving away. There are no lengthy periods spent milling around, talking and looking at cars. At the end of this party there's just a group of people quietly going on their way.*

—Philippe Parreno, *Snow Dancing*, 1995

Liam Gillick

# Maybe it would be better if we worked in groups of three? Part 2 of 2: The Experimental Factory

Maybe we're trying to catch a moment, maybe an earlier moment. Maybe it's a Volvo moment—June 17, 1974, when the view from the factory was of the trees, and the way to work together was as a team, and we know that the future is going to work out—that everything is a trajectory as long as we can keep things this way and Ford don't buy the company.

For those who grew up in postwar Europe, notions of group work were embedded in educational systems. From preschool "play-groups" through the organizing structures of management, with group discussion and teamwork, we find a set of social models that carry complex implications for people who think they can create something using a related, if semiautonomous, methodology.

The discursive is wedded to the notion of postwar social democracy. It is both a product of its education systems and subject to its critical potentials and collapses. The European context has surrounded itself with experiment-machines in the culture. The discursive framework's success or failure is connected to various postwar phenomena connected to identity politics and postcolonial theory. At the same time, the discursive is suspicious and resistant to the idea of a key protagonist. Without key protagonists, however, it is very hard to know what to do, when to occupy and when to function; however, the lack of leading voices does permit the discursive to evolve and include.

If we accept the postwar period as a closed one, we have to think harder about whether the discursive is merely a gesture towards recuperation of ideas, places, and values. The discursive frame may merely be playing out various recuperative projects that are tacitly encouraged within a terrain of closure and globalization simultaneously.

Production/manufacturing of the Volvo C30 at the Volvo Cars plant in Ghent, 2006. © Volvo Car Corporation



Production in the Kalmar plant, which produced cars for Volvo between 1974 to 1994. © Volvo Car Corporation

The decentered quality of critical art practices meets an anxiety about the combination of the localized and the internationalized. This contradictory quality is exemplified by the discursive frame, with its displays of the local to the international (and vice-versa) within the context of globalized cultural journeys. The discursive offers the potential for art to operate within smallish groupings out of sync with contemporary circumstances, yet deeply embedded within its values and flows. This has a lot to do with a coalescence of smallish groupings, which then play out a suspension of aims and results within a context of indifference and projected future meetings.

The potential of the discursive framework is to engage the "out of reach" and the "too close" simultaneously—art functioning as a structural parallel to contemporary working dilemmas. A dominant, visible feature of certain developed, late-modern art practices is the idea that prior to being manufactured, a product must be sold. The discursive makes use of theories of immaterial labor in order to account for the blurred factors that surround and produce commodity value—to understand the set of factors that produce the informational and cultural content of a commodity. The discursive becomes a negotiation and demonstration of immaterial labor used for other ends.

Marx described the idea of identifying the true value of a chair in opposition to the commodity value of a chair. It is one of the philosophically weakest parts of *Capital*. Marx's notion that a chair has an essential value prior to its commodification—a natural "chairness" before being corrupted and commodified by capitalism—is at the heart of classic understandings of post-Duchampian art. This idea is exceeded and abandoned by the discursive, in sync with recent critical texts on commodity value.

I have worked on the "Volvo question" for the last few years. Most of my research on Volvo has been done

through Brazilian academic papers concerning the legacy of 1970s production techniques in Scandinavia and models of flexibility, collaboration, and the idea of a better working environment in an ideally productive post-Fordist context. There has been a synchronization of desire and structure: in the last ten or fifteen years, discursive, fragmented, atomized, content-heavy art projects have somehow freed themselves from classical ideas concerning the problem of commodity culture. They have taken on the deep structure of work and life.

In the Volvo factory you can see trees while you are making the cars. But you are still making cars, never taking a walk in the woods. Where are the models for contemporary art production in the recent past? Is it Volvo, is it the collective, or is it the infinite display of the super-subjective? Do these factors share a similar cultural DNA? The idea of collective action and the idea of being able to determine the speed with which you produce a car, whether you produce it in a group or individually, at night, or very slowly, seems close to the question of how to make art over the last fifty years.

At Volvo, people ended up creating more and more free time, and during that free time they talked about ways to work faster. In both the cultural sphere and the traditional productive sphere, the trauma and attractiveness of infinite flexibility lead to the logic of redundancy. In the end, Ford bought the company and reintroduced the standard production line, not because it was more efficient in pure capitalist terms, but because it reinforced relations of production.

One of the reasons why I think the factory needs to be

Perhaps it is possible to explain the discursive cultural framework within a context of difference and collectivity—*difference* being the key word that defines our time, and *collectivity* being the thing that is so hard to achieve while frequently being so longed for. We have to negotiate and recognize difference and collectivity simultaneously. It is an aspect of social consciousness that is exemplified in the art context. As social definitions and processes of recognition, difference and collectivity feed from the examples of modern and contemporary art. Art is nurtured and encouraged in return by way of a cultural permission that grants a space for that which cannot be tolerated, but can be accommodated under the conditions of neoliberal globalization.



Production in the Kalmar plant, which produced cars for Volvo between 1974 to 1994. © Volvo Car Corporation

looked at again is that the factory, as a system, allows you to look at relationships in a totalizing way. In terms of productive potential, the struggle between speculation and planning has been one of the great struggles of the twentieth century. We can now say that speculation won, and the rhetoric of planning has become something we do for the people we do not know what to do with. We plan for them, but everyone else should speculate.

The factory model is of use here: the factory has a planned quality in spite of the fact that it is always the playing field of the speculative. The myth is that speculation lures production, lures industry, lures investment, and in this way the factory is always caught in a psychological and philosophical dilemma: in order to effectively activate speculation, you have to plan.

In the Soviet Union, every large city had an experimental factory. At Magdeburg today, they have an experimental factory. The experimental factory is a dynamic paradox: a model for the experimental, without experiments; the factory that exists but does not produce. The idea of the experimental factory or workshop remains a dynamic legacy within the notion of productive cultural work. The postwar social project activated compromised forms of earlier idealized modernisms, and created a mesh of alleviated working circumstances that left behind the experimental factory as an attractive model of potential. You can draw a parallel between the rise of the experimental factory as a functional promise and the way critical cultural exhibition structures developed alongside it. Without even considering the common phenomenon of occupying abandoned plants of the recent past as the site of art, these exhibition structures did so according to a program of regeneration within the mainstream contemporary art context.



Dresden car factory

The discursive thrives when we are increasingly alienated from sites of traditional production, owing to the displacing effects of globalization and the increasing tendency towards infinite subcontracting. Struggles over the site of production still exist, but they are constantly displaced and projected—the struggles are reported, but are sometimes resistant to identification across borders. They exist within a context that offers an excessive assertion of specificities, as well as tense arguments on the Left about how to accept difference and protect the local.

Difference and collectivity are semiautonomous concepts in an art context. The logic of their pursuit leads us to the conclusion that we should destroy all traditional relations of production in order to encourage a constant recognition of disagreement and profoundly different aims within a context of desire. The focus of the discursive is more on the aims and structural efficacy of the cultural exercise than on what is produced. In turn, what is produced operates in parallel—unfettered by the requirement to be the total story.

At work on the Volvo production floor lining the XC60 concept car in dark-brown saddle-quality leather. © Volvo Car Corporation



Neue Nationalgalerie, Berlin

But all of this is problematized by a nostalgia for the group. We are sometimes in thrall to structures from the recent past that were not supposed to be a model for anything. Some of the structures that we use, as cultural producers, echo a past that was part of a contingent set of accommodations and dynamic stresses within the postwar social project. Around this, there remain old relationships of production that still exist outside complex theories of the postindustrial that are at the heart of postwar "developed" societies.

We can see how this developed and left traces in the culture. Consider the history of the French Groupe Medvedkin, which made films between 1967 and 1974 in the context of factories and other sites of production. They worked, filmed, and agitated at the Lipp watch factory in France and subsequently in the Peugeot factory in Sochaux. What you see very clearly in these films is a shift that is mirrored in the dominant art context. When looking today at one of their films shot in 1967, you do not see any superficial or linguistic differences between those who run the factory, those who work in the factory, and those who criticize the factory from outside—they are all from the same culture. Physically, they look the same. Though certain differences of detail can be determined, they are nuanced and require acute class consciousness. The effects of postcolonialism have not yet shifted the source of cheap labor from the various colonies to the neighborhood of the consumer. But Bruno Muel's 1974 film *Avec le sang des autres* opens with a group of longhaired activists wearing old military jackets, standing outside the factory gates. They are attempting to play as a brass band to a group of silent, clearly embarrassed immigrant car-workers primarily from North Africa.

Through this series of films you see a clarification and separation of aesthetics in terms of identification, language, and techniques of protest. Simultaneously, you see a conspicuous drop in easy communication. Modes of

address have separated. Different groupings are talking, but only within each group, and each group has developed a sophisticated role-playing function in relation to the others. They demonstrate "positions" to each other. This shift towards the notion of a public faced by a complex display of self-conscious role-playing is familiar within an art context. It does not lack insincerity, and it does not lack genuine political engagement—it is a functional parallel.

We have created the conditions for the experimental, but no actual experiments (or vice-versa). Micro-communities of redundancy have joined together to play with the difference between art time and work time. The question is how to develop a discursive project without becoming an experimental factory—without slipping into a set of conditions that lead to a certain redundancy. It is the attempt to hold the collective on this brink that energizes the discursive context.

The discursive is peopled by artists who increasingly accept a large number of permanently redundant citizens and who have come to terms with the notion of the permanently part-time worker in the face of the permanently educated artist. The notion of continual and permanent education is used in different cultures in order to escape what are actually clear political differences to do with class, situation, and power. It is the promise to the poor child of a way to escape bad conditions. But within the discursive, the notion of self-improvement is ideologically specific and accompanies a philosophy connected to postwar power structures.

My grandfather's questions always concerned what I would do with all the leisure time I would have in the future. The question now is: how do you know how much leisure time you have? We have to address the reduction of leisure as a promise, and as a marker within the postwar. The discursive is linked to the question of who is managing time. Control of time was traditionally the dominant managerial tool, and it was rightly challenged.

Car fire, unidentified, 6/24/2004

Self-management has subsequently become generalized in a postindustrial environment. It is the way even mundane jobs are advertised now.

The idea has become that it is essentially better to manage your own time within a framework that involves limitless amounts of work, with no concrete barrier between working and non-working. This is something that underscores the discursive frame—the potentially neurotic, anxiety-provoking situation within which we find cultural producers operating. It has superficial advantages and clear disadvantages. It is a notion of permanent soft pressure (which finds form via the computer and digital media) to manage your own time in relationship to broader networks.



The museum cafe.

The discursive demonstrates a neurotic relationship to the management of time as a negatively activated excess of discussion, discourse, and hanging around. The rise of teamwork and networks is linked to a denial of the location of complex and disturbing old-school production relationships that still exist as a phantom for progressive thinkers. The notion of flexibility within the workplace is a way to encourage people to rationalize their own disappearance or redundancy when necessary. Working situations are not changed—the idea is that YOU have to change.

Maybe we have to think about revised languages of production within the context of self-management. Via small, multiple, flexible groupings, the discursive art context intends to go beyond an echo or a mirroring of simple production relations, though they remain subject to the same complexities that afflict any self-managed environment even when they refuse to create a timetable. As a production cycle rather than a fixed performative moment in time, the discursive uses certain production analogies in relation to what "could be useful" instead of a permanent "association of free(d) time." It occupies the increasing gap between the trajectory of modernity (understood here as a flow of technologies and demographic developments) and the somewhat melancholic, imploded, self-conscious trajectory of modernism.

It is within this zone that we can explain the idea of no surprise, sudden returns, and acceptance of gains and losses as simultaneous symptoms and catalysts. It is here that we can build contingent critical structures that critique both modernity and its critical double.

**X**

**Liam Gillick** is an artist based in London and New York. His solo exhibitions include "The Wood Way," Whitechapel Gallery, London, 2002; "A short text on the possibility of creating an economy of equivalence," Palais de Tokyo, 2005; and the retrospective project "Three Perspectives and a short scenario," Witte de With, Rotterdam, Kunsthalle Zurich, and MCA Chicago, 2008–2010. In 2006 he was part of the free art school project unitednationsplaza in Berlin.

Gillick has published a number of texts that function in parallel to his artwork. *Proxemics: Selected Writing,*

*1988–2006* (JRP|Ringier, 2007) was published in 2007, and
the monograph *Factories in the Snow*, by Lilian Haberer
(JRP|Ringier, 2007), will soon be joined by an extensive
retrospective publication and critical reader. He has in
addition contributed to many art magazines and journals
including *Parkett*, *Frieze*, *Art Monthly*, *October*, and
*Artforum*. Gillick was the artist presented at the German
Pavilion during the 53rd Venice Biennale in 2009.

Natascha Sadr Haghighian

# Sleepwalking in a Dialectical Picture Puzzle, Part 1: A Conversation with Avery Gordon

*For my Night School seminar that took place at the New Museum in New York in October 2008, I invited Avery Gordon and Tom Keenan to have conversations in Whole Foods, a huge organic supermarket around the corner from the New Museum. The original plan had been to hold the entire seminar there instead of in the museum's auditorium, but this plan failed when the supermarket refused to grant us permission. Instead, we held our conversations there and documented them using wireless microphones and a spy camera attached to cameraperson Angela Anderson's shoulder.*

*The aisles and various spaces of the store served as a matrix for our conversations. Avery and I spoke about subjugated knowledges and the relationship between research and the ability to act. We considered the apparitional state of realities with no place in the politics of representation as a force of agency and change. As we wandered through sections of the store, a selection of objects and functions served as coordinates for our conversation.*

*The conversation lasted about forty-five minutes, after which the crew walked back to the museum, rewound the tape, and screened it in the New Museum auditorium for the seminar participants. The screening was then followed by a discussion.*

*This text is a transcript of my conversation with Avery. The* **conversation with Tom will follow in issue #5 of e-flux journal***.*

—Natascha Sadr Haghighian

**Natascha Sadr Haghighian:** Welcome, everybody, to the third part of this seminar. We are at Whole Foods on Bowery and Houston, and let me just briefly explain why we're here. I see this conversation held in a store, more precisely in a grass-roots-organic-movement-turned-major -corporation-type store, not only as representing an urgent question of how to relate knowledge and action in a way that makes sense—that creates agency—but also as a necessary shift away from the secure and isolated situation of an auditorium to a more challenging place that incorporates the contradictions and incompatibilities of theory in everyday life. I hope this makes sense. I experience Whole Foods as being very representative of everyday struggles, and its confusion with operational representations (ones that seem to repeat gestures of political agency) raise all the buzz words of being in the right, on the right side—consuming without shame. How do we deal with such distorted representations? How do we read them, and how do we interact?

So, today I'm very happy to be here with Avery Gordon. You are professor of sociology at the University of California, and you are the author of *Ghostly Matters: Haunting and the Sociological Imagination* and of *Keeping Good Time: Reflections on Knowledge, Power, and People*. You've been involved in the prison abolition movement and you have a weekly radio program on KCSB 91.9 FM Santa Barbara called "No Alibis." So Avery, before starting our conversation, you wanted to provide us with some basic statistics about where we are at the moment; maybe you could do that.

**Avery Gordon:** Thank you for inviting me, it's good to be here with you. I've just flown in from California where much of the organic produce in this store also came from. I feel like I'm following in the carbon footprints of the lettuce! Yes, I wanted to say a word about Whole Foods for those who don't know anything about the store. In 1980, Whole Foods was founded in Austin, Texas, by John Maki, who is still its primary CEO. Beginning with one small store, Whole Foods now has 270 stores in the United States and the UK, 54,000 employees, nine distribution centers, nine bakery centers, and five commissaries. Whole Foods is a 5.5-billion-dollar publicly traded stock enterprise. In 2006, Whole Foods made 200 million dollars just in local produce.

**NSH:** Avery, I was very much looking forward to this conversation. You have such a clear understanding of abstract concepts, but you never forget how they connect to life—to real people and their struggles—and how to talk about this connection. This is really important to me because your practice claims this link that should exist—or that I want to exist—between knowledge and action. Yesterday we were talking about the importance of contextualizing images. Maybe we could say it's also about contextualizing events. You mentioned that the history of events, also within political struggles, is very important to know about, to distribute, and to discuss as part of the struggle.

**AG:** One of the main questions you sent for me to think about in preparation for our conversation concerned the extent to which radical or subjugated knowledges tend to be re-appropriated from their guiding motivations towards other ends—in this case, for corporate profitability. Yesterday, with Tom Keenan, that question was centered on images and imaging in in-store marketing, and more broadly. It seems to me there are at least two different ways to approach this problem. One is to focus on what can be seen and what cannot be seen in the deeper meanings of the "ecological" and the "organic" while one is shopping in the megastore, sitting and having coffee or a meal, or just browsing—all of which are invited here. Another way is to focus on the history of struggles that have helped to shape the present moment, and that are also erased in the store, blinded almost by its bright lights.

You are asking about the extent to which the promises of the organic/sustainable food movement and the



Wayne County Public Library Community Peace Garden

environmental justice movement are used and/or abused by Whole Foods and others like them (although they are the biggest of their kind). As you've been discussing over the past couple of days, it's clear that you have many thoughts on how Whole Foods and the Whole Foods shopping experience convince people that they are doing something better than continuing a consumer capitalism lifestyle that benefits the few rather than the many.

For me, part of answering this big question is always to situate the images, signs, or stories offered in that shadowy social and historical context—in the subjugated knowledges that the dominant image, sign, or narrative occludes. As you've pointed out, Whole Foods is full of quite striking signs addressing the shopper, such as "Power to the People" or "Local Organic Sustainable." It is also an intensely narrativized place: everywhere there are placards with information and little tales giving you a story about how you should understand the source of the products on display (their mode of production and distribution), and how you should understand your consumption experience. Michael Pollan, in his wonderful book *The Omnivore's Dilemma: A Natural History of Four Meals*, called this elaborate interpellation and double fetishization of the commodity "supermarket pastoral." (I say "double" because it is not merely that the commodity mystifies or hides the social and labor relations that produced it—it still does that, and it also makes a fetish of the process by which the commodity is made to appear to us as a reflection of our desires.)

But Whole Foods co-exists alongside movements, activities, and everyday life practices that are far more radical than it—ones that are oriented not towards reproducing capitalist economic and ideological relations, but are oriented towards creating alternative ones. Whole Foods and "industrial organic" co-exist alongside, for example, my local farmer's market. The Santa Barbara

farmer's market has been around for a long time and is a highly valued local institution. The sellers are almost all local or small regional growers, and they have established strict controls over who can sell what there, especially around the prohibition of genetically modified seed. The market represents the local sustainable-scaled sector of the organic food "industry." In fact, it reflects the tradition and values of the organic farming movement of the 1960s. Most of its growers and sellers would not even like to be called an industry, with that word's connotations of big business, monopoly, and production for profit. In effect, however, their movement made possible industrial organic—the Whole Foods model—and what you increasingly see in large supermarkets.

My point is that industrial organic grows at the same time as explosive battles over seeds, for example, not only grow worldwide but also model new political formations and processes grounded in complex understandings of knowledge and culture (as with the farmers in India and the work of Vandana Shiva's research foundation and seed banks such as Navdanya). There exist today very profound and far-reaching movements for environmental justice and against environmental racism that link food production with the politics of waste and garbage. What is characteristic about these movements is an effort to immediately create and practice alternative ways of living and eating and cleaning up after ourselves that are outside capitalist economic relations.

You can see Whole Foods and Navdanya as contradictions—certainly Navdanya is a negation of much of what Whole Foods is and represents. I also think it's helpful to see them as distinct—part of multiple universes that exist on differential and proximate planes. The corporate model is far more dominant than that of indigenous seed banking, so the question then becomes: how do we shift the balance towards common seed banking and away from finance?

**NSH:** Munir Fasheh, a Palestinian professor of Mathematics, has spoken of a "pluralism of knowledges" ("knowledges," as opposed to a singular notion of knowledge). Maybe we could say that all the knowledges that come out of the different struggles and movements represent a pluralist diversity, and in places like Whole Foods, they are being appropriated, monopolized to serve only one purpose, one model. Then something else happens to knowledge and its agency—the struggle becomes also for formerly subjugated knowledges that were a successful part of a previous struggle or movement before being kidnapped and appropriated by corporate interests. If a sentence like "Power to the People" is used to advertise a big corporation, it can be very confusing. But again, the question is: how can the sentence be re-appropriated for the struggles it was once a part of? How can knowledge be re-contextualized and linked to action?

The question I always wonder about is: what exactly do people (and we should always specify which people) do with signs such as "Power to the People" when they see them, (if they even notice them)? Many people have become very sophisticated handlers of the constant solicitations that surround them, even as their historical consciousness shrinks. I think we know less than we think we do about how folks receive these signs and messages, and what they mean to them. At the least, I think it's important to remember that they are advertisements, and to not confuse them with something else—to treat them as what they are, a part of the production of consumer culture and particular kinds of consumers.

**NSH:** Right.

**AG:** The larger issue, it seems to me, is the extent to which the corporate organic supermarket and its signs and symbols and figures (such as "Rosie the Chicken") create a story, or a set of understandings that exclude more accurate and challenging ones. There is a sign that says "Power to the People," but no sign or placard that also says that Whole Foods owes its existence to those individuals who, in 1969, occupied an abandoned plot of land in Berkeley, California, that had been the subject of stalled development plans, called it "People's Park," and then starting growing food and vegetables to give away for free. The popularization of organic food and healthy eating did not trickle down—it trickled up. For example, the central argument of Frances Moore Lappé's best-selling and vegetarian *Diet for a Small Planet*, published in 1971, was that hunger was not caused by overpopulation (which was the reigning eugenicist argument), but by food production and distribution methods that benefit the few in the First World. It was her argument that we lacked (and still do) economic and political democracy that captured people's attention, which she brought forward as she continued her work. The story behind People's Park and its failure is too long and complicated to tell here—and today it is mostly the daytime residence for people without homes—but it's worth noting that it is not so far from the Whole Foods Berkeley store.

One prominent sign in the store here is "We pay 100% of our health benefits to our employees." Indeed, in 2007, *Fortune* magazine voted Whole Foods one of the 100 best companies to work for in the United States. The Whole Foods Web site has considerable information describing its corporate management values and how well the company treats its employees—Whole Foods considers itself a model of the "socially responsible business." What you're not told is that John Maki is avowedly anti-union. Whole Foods has been seriously criticized for the variety of ways its aggressive monopolization, anti-unionism, public misinformation, and profiteering have contravened its claims of being a company dedicated to community development and planetary sustainability. (See " Whole Foods Market: What's Wrong with Whole Foods" on Michael Bluejay's site, and Mark T. Harris, " Welcome to 'Whole-Mart': Rotten Apples in the Social Responsibility Industry"). It's not just that Whole Foods doesn't advertise

Whole Foods aisles

its critics—it would be surprising if they did. It's that what's hidden behind the "Power to the People" sign and the lifestyle politics is the far more radical critique of what Vandana Shiva calls the "Lifelords": those companies and individuals whose aim is to privatize and sell the common means of life, including food and water. Behind the lifestyle politics and the signs that announce it, is why the Mayor of Philadelphia authorized the bombing of the revolutionary group MOVE in 1978 (killing 7 adults and 4 children) and why the United States government has declared Earth First! a terrorist organization.

**NSH:** Yes. Does that mean that what is to be done here is to reveal the hidden structures or hidden facts of the place—dig out the dirt behind the silky smooth facade? That would be a really traditional approach to criticism, to action. Yesterday, in the conversation with Tom Keenan we found that—at least concerning images—the act of revealing the truth often doesn't have any effect any more.

**AG:** Well, it's interesting that you'd use the word "digging," because I wanted to talk about the Diggers today. But to first address the question you're asking: I suppose you're right to describe finding out the things behind the things—identifying what's present and what's absent in a given situation or place—as a traditional method of critical engagement. How one chooses to go about encountering and identifying the things behind the things (what you're calling the structure) and what one makes of the encounter is, in my opinion, what really matters. Nothing is automatically changed by traditional methods of exposure or by untraditional methods either. What to do—which includes what you will or won't think in the next moment—must be dug up as well. No outcomes are, alas, given in advance. I am interested in and drawn to old forms of struggle that repeat over time because I am interested in time itself, in the continuities of the abuse of power and in the somewhat remarkable repetition of the struggle against its varied forms. Even if these memories of resistance and struggle and knowing otherwise are

intensely constructed and staged, they nonetheless create a force field that connects us through time and space to others, and to a power we are constantly denied and told we do not possess: the power to create life on our own terms and to sustain that creation over the long term.

You've heard me on this point before, but I think it's crucial to see beyond the constraints of these constructions to a place where they're there and powerful, but where they are only one condition of our being and not entirely in control of what we are and what our capabilities are. This kind of (in)sight (or second sight) is a real capacity, and it also changes one's perceptual boundaries and political compass at the same time. You talked about this in a related way yesterday when you described the conscious act of not looking at the photographs of the torture at the Abu Ghraib prison in Baghdad. There's a tremendous power that comes from your decision to not need to look—to reject the claim on you that you must look because the photographs show how things "really are." This power is what I've called being in-difference, which is not an absence of caring, but is rather the presence of a modality of engagement that is autonomous and creative with regard to what you are aiming to achieve, and not derivative of what you're aiming to replace.

**NSH:**  I'm thinking of another thing that Munir Fasheh has suggested, which is the notion of co-authorship. Maybe it relates to what you're saying. He described how, in his homeland of Palestine, colonization and occupation also happened on the level of language and knowledge. He explains how the definition of what is to be known—and what the language for that knowledge should be—was defined by certain institutions that were installed by the colonial power. He suggests that in order to decolonize oneself, one should only use words that one has a personal experience with. It's quite a radical approach to language. I thought it was interesting in the sense that, to do this, one would have to find out first what a word actually means within one's own context, then ask how one might appropriate it for one's own purposes, all in order to finally start using it. And then, just step by step, one's vocabulary expands. I imagine feeling speechless at first—what are the words that one has personal experience with? If you consider it as an approach to all kinds of colonizations, you notice how hard it must be at first, especially in a time when everything that we encounter seems to be taken care of in one way or another, prepared for us—not only food. When we go down to the other part of the store, we will see all this produce that has been processed and prepared for us on so many levels. It's all taken care of for us, even the narrative that comes with the product. You don't have to do anything other than select and consume. Decolonizing oneself here would probably mean not using any of these offerings—just eating what you can grow or find yourself. Maybe that makes it clear how hard it is. To relate this back to other practices, I think a key question concerns how to understand and decide what words one wants to use, what kinds of actions one wants to take, what kinds of

places to go, et cetera. I wonder if you can relate to the idea of co-authorship at all and what would it mean for you?

**AG:**  Do you remember when I first met you and you described a number of your projects to me, including the one at the Berlin Zoo and at the bus stop, with the art funders and curators? I thought they were so interesting and wonderful and asked you if you'd heard of Harold Garfinkel and his ethnomethodological experiments, because your projects reminded me of what he'd done. Those experiments engaged a question you brought to those projects, and which you're asking now. That is: what is the moment at which institutional decorum and the taken-for-granted reproducibility or sensibility of a given institution breaks down? At what point can it be broken? The point cannot be predicted in advance, but we know it when it happens. At its breaking point, as you and Garfinkel have both shown, people become extremely unsettled because the mechanisms they've relied on to keep things running smoothly without having to know or think too much about how that actually happens fail. The rigging begins to show and the decorum is broken. You're asking me now: what are the points at which our language fails? At what point do we have to learn how to construct a new language for being decolonized? I think you're right: we start with speechlessness, and then a degree of self-consciousness of speaking that, characteristically (one hopes in this case as well), disappears with fluency.

Let me connect back to the Diggers before we go downstairs. The Diggers, or the "True Levellers," as they called themselves, were anarchistic, communistic, radically self-governing commoners who appeared among a series of radical groups, including the original Levellers and the Ranters who were active during the English Civil War in the 1640s and 1650s. You sent me a quotation by Michael Taussig that described the person who lives sovereignty beyond utility results in being branded a hysteric. Certainly, to call sexual libertarians "Ranters" (the Diggers were found guilty of being Ranters as well, even though they did not favor sexual liberty) is to brand them as hysterical. But the idea of living sovereignty beyond utility expresses well what the Diggers aimed to achieve. The activities and views of radical seventeenth-century popular groups during the English Civil War may seem an obscure reference for us today, but perhaps not! Christopher Hill wrote:

> There were ... two revolutions in mid-seventeenth-century England. The one which succeeded established the sacred rights of property ... gave political power to the propertied (sovereignty of Parliament and common law, abolition of prerogative courts), and removed all impediments to the triumph of the ideology of the men of property—the protestant ethic. There was, however, another revolution which never happened, though from time to time it threatened. This might have established communal
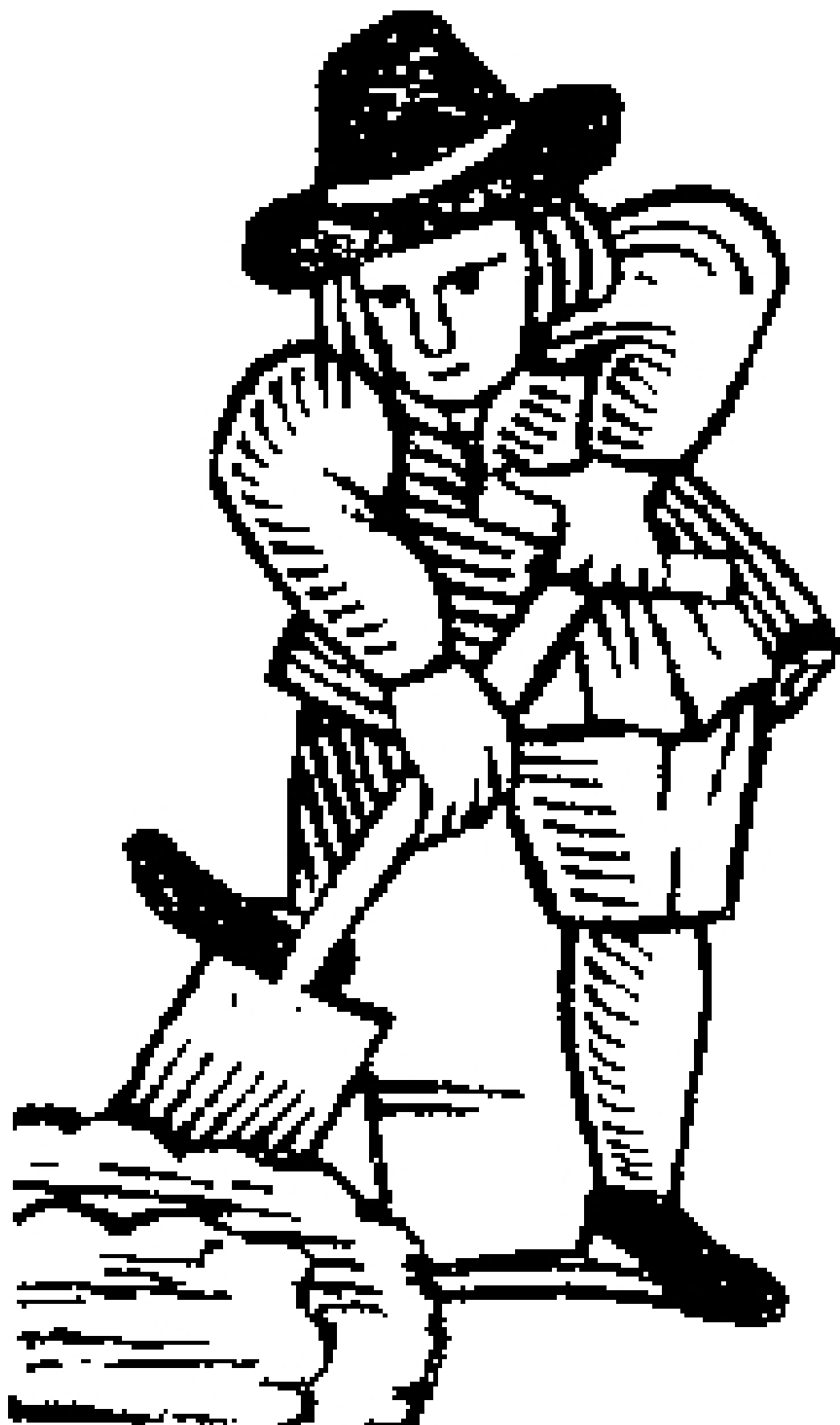
property, a far wider democracy in political and legal institutions, might have disestablished the state church and rejected the protestant ethic.[1]

The Diggers were part of this second revolution, part of a fork opened in the historical road, which has been erased from an official history that celebrates the benefits of capitalist parliamentary democracy over monarchical absolutism. The Diggers were called by that name because they not only believed in equality of persons—in the leveling of inequalities and indignities between rich and poor and between the powerful and the powerless—but they also formed radical cooperative communities to prevent the enclosure of common land, and the further privatization of property in England. They would literally dig up common lands to create growing fields, the produce of which they would give away for free, inviting others to join them. They were set upon by the police and the state and the local landowners, and eventually their movement was destroyed. The ideas that guided them never disappeared, of course, finding expression today in the strong movements to stop the privatization of water, air, and the little public land that's left and among those who seek a "true" economic and political equality. The Diggers produced a number of declarations and manifestos, and I thought it might make a certain point to read from one of them in Whole Foods, where only a faint trace of them can be seen. Do we have time?

**NSH:** Yes, sure, but let me add a comment while we go down to the food court. Hearing you talk about the erasure of history in the case of these struggles or transformatory processes, I have to think back to your involvement with ghostly matters. In your book by the same name, you vividly describe how things, entities, events that are deprived of a status in the system of recognized history or the acknowledged world become apparitions. It seems to me that it is important to talk to these apparitions, and to hear what they have to say …

**AG:** Yes—to talk to them and to listen as well, because in the listening one figures out how to deal with the impact of people and events and possibilities that have been violently suppressed and then return to haunt. It's not merely a matter of telling you the story of the Diggers and about how they were murdered and politically repressed and what the implications of the theft of common lands for private gain have been. The telling of the story is neither for information per se, nor is it for entertainment—the storytelling creates a connection across time and space so that we who are living now can work to put an end to the conditions that repeat, and thus continue to haunt us.

**NSH:** The telling of their story is empowering.

**AG:** Yes, it's empowering, and it's also a way of moving backwards and forwards in time in something of the way

Walter Benjamin described the movement of a certain kind of historical agency or even divinity, protecting past and future generations, and also catching the liens that make putting that "Power for the People" sign up in a megastore even possible. Shall I read from one of the Digger Manifestoes?

**NSH:** Yes, please.

**AG:** "A Declaration from the poor oppressed People of England directed to all that call themselves, or are called Lords of Manors, through this Nation; that have begun to cut, or that through fear and covetousness, do intend to cut down the Woods and Trees that grow upon the Commons and Waste Land" was written by Gerrard Winstanley and published in 1649. Gerrard Winstanley called himself a True Leveller, distinguishing himself from John Lilburne and other more moderate Leveller leaders. The Diggers were a much smaller group than the not-very-unified Leveller movement, which historians now understand to have consisted of at least two wings: a moderate constitutional wing led by John Lilburne and John Wildman, and a more radical wing situated in the (New Model) Army and among the general population, especially in London. Among the more radical Levellers and the Diggers, the fight had been—and continued to be—for the eradication of private property and tyranny of political rule by the wealthy and the powerful. Parliament and the Army and the disposition of the country's property were all to be fundamentally leveled, with no status distinction between rich and poor, noble and commoner.

The declaration is signed with about twenty names, but there were about 200 people who occupied St. George's Hill immediately before this declaration in Surrey was given:

> We whose names are subscribed, do in the name of all the poor oppressed people in *England*, declare unto you that call your selves lords of Manors, and Lords of the Land … That the Earth was not made purposefully for you, to be Lords of it, and we to be your Slaves, Servants, and Beggers; but it was made to be a common Livelihood to all, without respect of persons: And that your buying and selling of Land and the Fruits of it, one to another is *The cursed thing*, and was brought in by War; which hath, and still does establish murder and theft, In the hands of some branches of Mankinde over others, which is the greatest outward burden and unrighteous power … For the power of inclosing land, [privatizing public or common land] and owning Propriety, was brought into the Creation by your Ancestors by the Sword; which first did murther their fellow Creatures, Men, and after plunder or steal away their Land, and left this Land successively to you, their children. And therefore though you did not kill or theeve [although they did!] yet you hold that cursed thing in your hand by the power of the Sword; and so you justifie the wicked

deeds of your Fathers; and that sin of your Fathers should be visited upon the Head of you, and your Children, to the third and fourth Generation and longer too, till your bloody and theeving power be rooted out of the Land ... And to prevent your scrupulous Objections, know this, That we Must neither buy nor sell; Money must not any longer ... be the great god, that hedges in some, and hedges out others; for Money is but part of the Earth; And surely, the Righteous Creator ... did never ordain That unless some of Mankinde, do not bring that Mineral (Silver and Gold) into their hands, to others of their own kinde, that they should neither be fed, nor clothed; no surely, For this was the project of Tyrant-flesh (which Land-lords are branches of) to set his Image upon Money. And they make this unrighteous Law that none should buy or sell, eat or be clothed, or have any comfortable Livelihood ... unless they bring this Image stamped upon Gold or Silver onto their hands.[2]

In 1649, the Diggers denounce concentrated power, private property, and the capitalist money economy, which is not yet dominant, but is in the process of becoming so. They see clearly that violence and war establishes so-called free capitalist economies and they will shortly denounce, equally vigorously, the police power of the state and its right to hold to itself a monopoly over the use of force, which Cromwell will establish as the defining feature of parliamentary democracy. (There is another very contemporary lesson of a different sort in the history of the New Model Army and the remarkable agitation and ferment of democratic ideas from its "masterless men," to use Christopher Hill's expression, but another time for that!)

**NSH:** It is very interesting that one of the representations of power is an image printed on a piece of metal, right? It never occurred to me that a coin is actually a very powerful combination of a valuable material carrying an icon.

**AG:** It's the turning of that graven image—money—into a deity or a god that they're trying to warn us against. And so they call first for the common land to be named what it is: a commons, property to be used and shared, not available for private appropriation and use. They lost this fight, and by the nineteenth century, England had enclosed or privatized virtually all its older public common lands. They also called for true equality—the leveling of all status. They say: "Therefore we are resolved to be cheated no longer, nor be held under the slavish fear of you ... seeing the Earth was made for us as well as for you. And if the Common Land belongs to us who are poor oppressed, surely the woods that grow upon the Commons belong to us likewise: therefore we are resolved to try the utmost ... to know whether we shall be free men, or slaves."[3]

**NSH:** It's all there.

**AG:** It's all there, including the analytic core of what's become the re-emergence of the commons as a social goal and political watchword for a profoundly radical environmentalism that links a critique of private property, consumerism, and money worship to self-organized democratic governance without war, without policing, and without the tyrannical state. Peter Linebaugh's most recent book, *The Magna Carta Manifesto: Liberties and Commons for All* is a brief for this new communing—or perhaps we should even call it communism—that is connected, but not bound to the old.

**NSH:** Reading this declaration here is quite an intense experience and it shows that a connection across time and space not only creates consciousness about the history of these struggles, but immediately changes the perception of the present. It's all there—you just have to listen to it. Especially in situations when a serious financial crisis weakens the system to the degree that a lot of things can happen, this connection can be very useful. The newspapers in Europe, at least for a couple of days, were talking about the end of capitalism. Their comments actually became more moderate after a bit, but for at least a few days, mainstream German newspapers were discussing Socialism as a possible alternative. Should we slowly head towards the exit?

**AG:** Yes.

**NSH:** I wonder whether, if we are able to connect more to the apparitional history of struggle we might actually be able to react to situations of crisis in a much more profound and meaningful way—to use them for the things that we fight for, and that we think are necessary changes in this society.

**AG:** I think so. We reach back to honor and bring that struggle forward. As we go forward, we have to make it ours, and it will differ from the Diggers. The forks in the road are always there, it's a matter of whether we take them or not. And in order to take them we have to accurately recognize our capabilities—ones that, as I mentioned before, are always denied and discouraged. It's not as if nobody knows how to live without property—lots of people know how to live that way! Many people—most of us, in fact—know how to build and maintain social relationships that are not based on exchange value. When I remember this, I am optimistic, because even though most of the people who live without property are poor and really need some, and even though exchange value is the dominant value guiding the organization of much of public life, it's not a closed situation and we have far more power to change the situation than we often presume. The really crucial question is: how invested are you in the perpetuation of what we've got? Being "critical" is no guarantee that you are in-different, divested of the system's lures and promises and rewards. The question I always ask myself is: if all that I can criticize disappeared

tomorrow, can I imagine a worthwhile and better existence? I always answer Yes without qualification to that question—even though I can imagine things

becoming worse, too!

**NSH:** I guess this leads us back to the notion of the

sovereign individual and life beyond utility that Michael Taussig described in *Defacement: Public Secrecy and the Labor of the Negative*. The sovereign in this sense is the hysteric, the defacer, the masked revolutionary who is questioning the name of the event: "why is this the name of the event and not something else?" As a response to received notions of reality and truth, the hysteric defamiliarizes those notions by repeatedly questioning the name of the event—by not accepting the naturalized rule of the things that are put into place and that appear to be the only way to do things. Defacement of the given names of events deconstructs representations of power and takes them to a domain of life beyond utility.

**AG:** Yes, I agree.


**X**


[figure fullpage
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This conversation took place on October 25, 2008 as part of  Night School, an artist project by Anton Vidokle in the form of a temporary school. A yearlong program of monthly seminars and workshops, Night School draws upon a group of local and international artists, writers, and theorists to conceptualize and conduct the program.


**Avery Gordon**  is professor of sociology and law and society at the University of California, Santa Barbara, and on the guest faculty at the Centre for Research Architecture, Goldsmiths College, University of London. She is the author of  *Keeping Good Time: Reflections on Knowledge, Power and People*  and  *Ghostly Matters: Haunting and the Sociological Imagination*, and the editor (with Christopher Newfield) of  *Mapping Multiculturalism* and (with Michael Ryan)  *Body Politics: Disease, Desire, and the Family*, among other works. Her most recent articles on imprisonment and the War on Terror were published in  *Race & Class*  and  *Le Monde Diplomatique*. Her current writing aims to comparatively understand the nature of captivity and confinement today, its means of dispossession, and what is required to abolish it. Since 1997, she has co-hosted No Alibis, a weekly public affairs radio program on KCSB 91.9 FM, Santa Barbara.

**Natascha Sadr Haghighian**  works in the fields of video, performance, computer, and sound, primarily concerned with the sociopolitical implications of constructions of vision from a central perspective and with abstract events within the structure of industrial society, as well as with the strategies and returning circulations that become apparent in them. Rather than offer highlights from a CV, Haghighian asks readers to go to  www.bioswop.net, a CV-exchange platform where artists and other cultural

practitioners can borrow and lend CVs for various purposes.

1
Christopher Hill, *The World
 Turned Upside Down:
RadicalIdeas During the English
Revolution*  (London: Temple
Smith, 1972), 15.

2
See http://www.bilderberg.org/la
nd/poor.htm .

3
Ibid.

Tom Holert

# Art in the Knowledge-based Polis

Lately, the concept of "knowledge production" has drawn new attention and prompted strong criticism within art discourse. One reason for the current conflictual status of this concept is the way it can be linked to the ideologies and practices of neoliberal educational policies. In an open letter entitled "To the Knowledge Producers," a student from the Academy of Fine Arts Vienna has eloquently criticized the way education and knowledge are being "commodified, industrialized, economized and being made subject to free trade."[1]

In a similar fashion, critic Simon Sheikh has addressed the issue by stating that "the notion of knowledge production implies a certain placement of thinking, of ideas, within the present knowledge economy, i.e. the dematerialized production of current post-Fordist capitalism"; the repercussions of such a placement within art and art education can be described as an increase in "standardization," "measurability," and "the molding of artistic work into the formats of learning and research."[2] Objections of this kind become even more pertinent when one considers the suggestive rhetoric of the major European art educational network ELIA (European League of Institutes of the Arts), which, in a strategy paper published in May 2008, linked "artistic research" to the EU policy of the generation of "'New Knowledge' in a Creative Europe."[3]

I am particularly interested in how issues concerning the actual situations and meanings of art, artistic practice, and art production relate to questions touching on the particular kind of *knowledge* that can be produced within the artistic realm (or the artistic *field*, as Pierre Bourdieu prefers it) by the practitioners or actors who operate in its various places and spaces. The multifarious combinations of artists, teachers, students, critics, curators, editors, educators, funders, policymakers, technicians, historians, dealers, auctioneers, caterers, gallery assistants, and so on, embody specific skills and competences, highly unique ways and styles of knowing and operating in the flexibilized, networked sphere of production and consumption. This variety and diversity has to be taken into account in order for these epistemes to be *recognized* as such and to obtain at least a slim notion of what is at stake when one speaks of *knowledge* in relation to art—an idea that is, in the best of cases, more nuanced and differentiated than the usual accounts of this relation.

"Far from preventing knowledge, power produces it," as Foucault famously wrote.[4] Being *based on* knowledge, truth claims, and belief systems, power likewise *deploys* knowledge—it exerts power *through* knowledge, reproducing it and shaping it in accordance with its anonymous and distributed intentions. This is what articulates the conditions of its scope and depth. Foucault understood power and knowledge to be interdependent, naming this mutual inherence "power-knowledge." Power not only supports, but also applies or exploits knowledge. There is no power relation without the constitution of a

field of knowledge, and no knowledge that does not presuppose power relations. These relations therefore cannot be analyzed from the standpoint of a knowing subject. Subjects and objects of knowledge, as well as the modes of acquiring and distributing knowledges, are effects of the fundamental, deeply imbricated power/knowledge complex and its historical transformations.

and signs of a rare kind of enthusiasm within an art-educational environment that was not considered at the time to be the most prestigious in England. Located just below Highgate, it was described by one of the participants as being "squeezed into crumbling old schools and tottering sheds miles apart, making due with a society's cast-offs like a colony of refugees."[6] One lecturer even called it "a collection of public lavatories spread over North London."[7]



Kim Howells (speaking) and Alex Roberts during a sit-in meeting.
Photograph © John Rae

### 1. The Hornsey Revolution

On May 28, 1968, students occupied Hornsey College of Art in the inner-suburban area of North London. The occupation originated in a dispute over control of the Student Union funds. However, "a planned programme of films and speakers expanded into a critique of all aspects of art education, the social role of art and the politics of design. It led to six weeks of intense debate, the production of more than seventy documents, a short-lived Movement for Rethinking Art and Design Education (MORADE), a three-day conference at the Roundhouse in Camden Town, an exhibition at the Institute of Contemporary Arts, prolonged confrontation with the local authority, and extensive representations to the Parliamentary Select Committee on Student Relations."[5]

Art historian Lisa Tickner, who studied at Hornsey College of Art until 1967, has published a detailed account of these events and discussions forty years after the fact. As early as 1969, however (only a few months after the occupation of Hornsey College of Art had been brought to an end by pressure from the above-mentioned local authority in July 1968), Penguin released a book on what had already gained fame as "The Hornsey Affair," edited by students and staff of the college. This paperback is a most interesting collection of writings and visuals produced during the weeks of occupation and sit-ins, discussions, lectures, and screenings. The book documents the traces
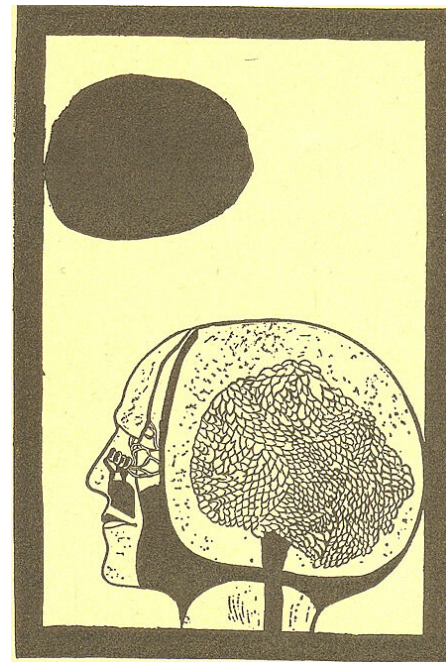


Poster from Hornsey Occupation, 1968, artist anonymous.

But this modernist nightmare of a school became the physical context of one of the most radical confrontations and revolutions of the existing system of art education to take place in the wake of the events of May '68. Not only did dissenting students and staff gather to discuss new terms and models of a networked, self-empowering, and politically relevant education within the arts, the events and their media coverage also drew to Hornsey prominent members of the increasingly global alternative-utopian scene, such as Buckminster Fuller.

However, not only large-scale events were remembered. One student wrote of the smaller meetings and self-organized seminars:

> It was in the small seminars of not more than twenty people that ideas could be thrashed out. Each person felt personally involved in the dialogue and felt the responsibility to respond vociferously to anything that was said. These discussions often went on to the small hours of the morning. If only such a situation were possible under 'normal' conditions. Never had people en masse participated so fully before. Never

before had such energy been created within the college. People's faces were alight with excitement, as they talked more than they had ever talked before. At least we had found something which was real to all of us. We were not, after all, the complacent receivers of an inadequate educational system. We were actively concerned about our education and we wanted to participate.[8]

From today's standpoint, the discovery of talking as a medium of agency, exchange, and self-empowerment within an art school or the art world no longer seems to be a big deal, though it is still far from being conventional practice. I believe that the simple-sounding discovery of talking as a medium within the context of a larger, historical event such as the "Hornsey Affair" constitutes one of those underrated moments of knowledge production in the arts—one that I would like to shift towards the center of a manner of attention that may be (but should not necessarily be) labeled as "research." With a twist of this otherwise over-determined term, I am seeking to tentatively address a mode of understanding and rendering the institutional, social, epistemological, and political contexts and conditions of knowledge being generated and disseminated within the arts and beyond.



Buckminster Fuller speaking at Hornsey College of Art, June 29, 1968.
Photograph © Steve Ehrlicher

The participants in the Hornsey revolution of forty years ago had very strong ideas about what it meant to be an artist or an art student, about what was actually at stake in being called a designer or a painter. They were convinced that knowledge and knowledge communication within art education contained enormous flaws that had to be swept away:

Only such sweeping reforms can solve the problems . . . In Hornsey language, this was described as the replacement of the old "linear" (specialized) structure by a new "network" (open, non-specialized) structure . . . It would give the kind of flexible training in generalized, basic creative design that is needed to adapt to rapidly changing circumstances—be a *real* training for work, in fact . . . the qualities needed for such a real training are no different from the ideal ones required to produce maximal individual development. In art and design, the choice between good workmen and geniuses is spurious. Any system worthy of being called "education," any system worthy of the emerging new world, must be both at once. It must produce people whose work or 'vocation' is the creative, general transformation of the environment.[9]

To achieve this "worthy" system, it was considered necessary to do away with the "disastrous consequence" of the "split between practice and theory, between intellect and the non-intellectual sources of creativity."[10] Process held sway over output, and open-endedness and free organization of education permeated every aspect of the Hornsey debates.[11] It was also clear that one of the most important trends of the mid-1960s was the increasing interaction and interpenetration of creative disciplines. "Art and Design," the Hornsey documents argued, "have become more unified, and moved towards the idea of total architecture of sensory experience"; England underwent "a total revolution of sensibility."[12]

The consequences of the intersecting developments within the rebelling body of students and staff at Hornsey (and elsewhere), as well as the general changes within society and culture, had to become manifest in the very conceptual framework not only of art education, but of art discourse as such. Hence, there was a widespread recognition that in future all higher education in art and design should incorporate a permanent debate within itself. "Research," in this sense, came to appear an indispensable element in education:

We regard it as absolutely basic that research should be an organic part of art and design education. No system devoted to the fostering of creativity can function properly unless original work and thought are constantly going on within it, unless it remains on an opening frontier of development. As well as being on general problems of art and design (techniques, aesthetics, history, etc.) such research activity must also deal with the *educational process itself* . . . It must be the critical self-consciousness of the system, continuing permanently the work started here in the last weeks [June, July 1968]. Nothing condemns the old regime more radically than the minor, precarious part research played in it. It is intolerable that research should be seen as a luxury, or a rare privilege.[13]

Though this emphatic plea for "research" was written in a historical situation apparently much different than our own, it nonetheless helps us to apprehend our present situation. Many of the terms and categories have become increasingly prominent in the current debates on artistic research, albeit with widely differing intentions and agendas. It seems to be of the utmost importance to understand the genealogy of conflicts and commitments that have led to contemporary debates on art, knowledge, and science.



6137 McKeldin Library at the University of Maryland

### 2. An Art Department as a Site of Research in a University System

Becoming institutionalized as an academic discipline at the interface of artistic and scientific practices at an increasing number of art universities throughout Europe, artistic research (sometimes synonymous with notions such as "practice-led research," "practice-based research," or "practice-as-research") has various histories, some being rather short, others spanning centuries. The reasons for establishing programs and departments fostering the practice-research nexus are certainly manifold, and differ from one institutional setting to the next. When art schools are explicitly displaced into the university system to become sites of research, the demands and expectations of the scientific community and institutional sponsorship vis-à-vis the research outcomes of art schools change accordingly.

Entitled "Development and Research of the Arts," a new program of the Austrian funding body FWF aims at generating the conceptual and material environment for interdisciplinary art-related research within, between, and beyond art universities. Thus far, however, the conceptual

parameters of the FWF appear to be the subject of debate and potential revision and extension. One should be particularly careful of any hasty grafting of a conventional image of a "scientific" model or mode of research (whatever it may be) onto the institutional context of an art academy. This is not only a matter of epistemological concern, but of education policies and of political debate as well.

One only has to look at the history of the implementation of practice-led research in Art and Design in Great Britain. In 1992 the Research Assessment Exercise (RAE) of the Higher Education Founding Council for England (HEFCE) began to formulate criteria for so-called practice-based/practice-led research, particularly in the field of performance, design, and media. By 1996 the RAE had reached a point where it defined research as

> original investigation undertaken in order to gain knowledge and understanding. It includes work of direct relevance to the needs of commerce and industry, as well as to the public and voluntary sectors; scholarship; the invention and generation of ideas, images, performances and artifacts including design, where these lead to new or substantially improved insights; and the use of existing knowledge in experimental development to produce new or substantially improved materials, devices, products and processes, including design and construction.[14]

The visual or fine arts of that time had yet to be included in this structure of validation, though in the following years various PhD programs in the UK and elsewhere did try to shift them to an output-oriented system of assessment close to those already established for design, media, and performance arts. "New or substantially improved insights" as well as "substantially improved materials, devices, products and processes" are the desired outcomes of research, and the Research Assessment Exercise could not be more explicit about the compulsory "direct relevance to the needs of commerce and industry."

PARIP (Practice as Research in Performance) is a research group that supervises, assesses, and discusses the ongoing research in the new art and design environment initiated by the RAE and other organizations concerned with higher arts education in the UK. A 2002 report by Angela Piccini repeatedly focuses on the relation between research and (artistic) practice, and on the subjects and subjectivities, competencies, and knowledges produced and required by this development. After having interviewed various groups of researchers and students from the field of performance arts and studies, it became clear that both concepts assume specific meanings and functions demanded by the configuration of their new settings. One of the groups Piccini interviewed pondered the consequences of the institutional speech act that

transforms an *artistic practice* into an *artistic practice-as-research*:

> Making the decision that something is practice as research imposes on the practitioner-researcher a set of protocols that fall into: 1) the point that the practitioner-researcher must necessarily have a set of separable, demonstrable, research findings that are abstractable, not simply locked into the experience of performing it; and 2) it has to be such an abstract, which is supplied with the piece of practice, which would set out the originality of the piece, set it in an appropriate context, and make it useful to the wider research community.[15]

It was further argued that "such protocols are not fixed," that "they are institutionalized (therefore subject to critique and revision) and the practitioner-researcher communities must recognize that." The report also expressed concern about "excluded practices, those that are not framed as research and are not addressing current academic trends and fashion," and it asked, "what about practices that are dealing with cultures not represented within the academy?"[16]

When articulated in terms of such a regime of academic supervision, evaluation, and control (as it increasingly operates in the Euroscapes of art education), the reciprocal inflection of the terms "practice" and "research" appears rather obvious, though they are seldom explicated. The urge among institutions of art and design education to rush the process of laying down validating and legitimating criteria to purportedly render intelligible the quality of art and design's "new knowledge" results in sometimes bizarre and ahistorical variations on the semantics of practice and research, knowledge and knowledge production.

For applications and project proposals to be steered through university research committees, they have to be upgraded and shaped in such a way that their claims to the originality of knowledge (and thus their academic legitimacy) become transparent, accountable, and justified. However, to "establish a workable consensus about the value and limits of practice as research both within and beyond the community of those directly involved" seems to be an almost irresolvable task.[17] At the least, it *ought to* be a task that continues to be open-ended and inevitably unresolved.

The problem is, once you enter the academic power-knowledge system of accountability checks and evaluative supervision, you have either explicitly or implicitly accepted the parameters of this system. Though acceptance does not necessarily imply submission or surrender to these parameters, a fundamental acknowledgment of the ideological principles inscribed in

them remains a prerequisite for any form of access, even if one copes with them, contests them, negotiates them, and revises them. Admittedly, it is somewhat contradictory to claim a critical stance with regard to the transformation of art education through an artistic research paradigm while simultaneously operating at the heart of that same system. I do not have a solution for this. Nonetheless, I venture that addressing the power relations that inform and produce the kind of institutional legitimacy/consecration sought by such research endeavors could go beyond mere lip service and be effective in changing the situation.



Board Room at the African Leadership Academy

*3. Art in the Knowledge-Based Polis*

I would like to propose, with the support and drive of a group of colleagues working inside and outside the Academy of Fine Arts Vienna, a research project bearing the title "Art in the Knowledge-based Polis ." The conceptual launch pad for this project is a far-reaching question about how art might be comprehended and described as a specific mode of generating and disseminating knowledge. How might it be possible to understand the very genealogy of significant changes that have taken place in the status, function, and articulation of the visual arts within contemporary globalizing societies?

With reference to the work of French sociologist Luc Boltanski, the term *polis* has been chosen deliberately to render the deep imbrications of both the material (urbanist-spatial, architectural, infrastructural, etc.) and immaterial (cognitive, psychic, social, aesthetic, cultural, legal, ethical, etc.) dimensions of urbanity. [18] Moreover, the knowledge-based polis is a conflictual space of political contestation concerning the allocation, availability and exploitation of "knowledge" and "human capital."

As a consequence, it is also a matter of investigating how the "knowledge spaces" within the visual arts and between the protagonists of the artistic field are organized and designed.[19] What are the modes of exchange and

encounter and what kind of communicative and thinking "styles" guide the flow of what kind of knowledge? How are artistic archives of the present and the recent past configured (technologically, cognition-wise, socially)? In what ways has artistic production (in terms of the deployment and feeding of distributed knowledge networks in the age of "relational aesthetics") changed, and what are the critical effects of such changes on the principle of individualized authorship?[20]

The implications of this proposal are manifold, and they are certainly open to contestation. What, for instance, is the qualifier enabling it to neatly distinguish between artistic and non-artistic modes of knowledge production? Most likely, there isn't one. From (neo-)avant-garde claims of bridging the gap between art and life (or those modernist claims which insist on the very maintenance of this gap) to issues of academic discipline in the age of the Bologna process and outcome-based education, it seems that the problem of the art/non-art dichotomy has been displaced. Today, this dichotomy seems largely to have devolved into a question of how to establish a discursive field capable of rendering an epistemological and ontological realm of artistic/studio practice as a scientifically valid research endeavor.

As art historian James Elkins puts it, concepts concerning the programmatic generation of "new knowledge" or "research" may indeed be "too diffuse and too distant from art practice to be much use."[21] Elkins may have a point here. His skepticism regarding the practice-based research paradigm in the fine arts derives from how institutions (i.e., university and funding bodies) measure research and PhD programs' discursive value according to standards of scientific, disciplinary research. For Elkins, "words like research and knowledge should be confined to administrative documents, and kept out of serious literature."[22] In a manner most likely informed by science and technology studies and Bruno Latour, he argues instead that the focus should turn toward the "specificity of charcoal, digital video, the cluttered look of studio classrooms (so different from science labs, and yet so similar), the intricacies of Photoshop . . . the chaos of the foundry, the heat of under-ventilated computer labs."[23] I think this point is well taken.

However useless the deployment of terms such as "research" and "knowledge" may seem, such uselessness is bound to a reading and deployment of the terms in a way that remains detached from the particular modes of discourse formation in art discourse itself. The moment one enters the archives of writing, criticism, interviews, syllabi, and other discursive articulations produced and distributed within the artistic field, the use of terms such as "research" and discussion about the politics and production of "knowledge" are revealed as fundamental to twentieth-century art—particularly since the inception of Conceptual Art in the late 1960s. After all, the modernists, neo- and post-avant-gardists aimed repeatedly at forms and protocols relating to academic and intellectual work—of research and publication, the iconography of the laboratory, scientific research, or think tanks.

Administrative, information, or service aesthetics, introduced at various moments of modernist and post-modernist art, emulated, mimicked, caricaturized and endorsed the aesthetics and rhetoric of scientific communities. They created representations and methodologies for intellectual labor on and off-display, and founded migrating and flexible archives that aimed to transform the knowledge spaces of galleries and museums according to what were often feminist agendas.

Within the art world today, the discursive formats of the extended library-cum-seminar-cum-workshop-cum-sympo sium-cum-exhibition have become preeminent modes of address and forms of knowledge production. In a recent article in this journal on "the educational turn in curating," theorist Irit Rogoff addresses the various "slippages that currently exist between notions of 'knowledge production,' 'research,' 'education,' 'open-ended production,' and 'self-organized pedagogies,'" particularly as "each of these approaches seem to have converged into a set of parameters for some renewed facet of production." Rogoff continues, "Although quite different in their genesis, methodology, and protocols, it appears that some perceived proximity to 'knowledge economies' has rendered all of these terms part and parcel of a certain liberalizing shift within the world of contemporary art practices." However, Rogoff is afraid that "these initiatives are in danger of being cut off from their original impetus and threaten to harden into a recognizable 'style.'" As the art world "became the site of extensive talking," which entailed certain new modes of gathering and increased access to knowledge, Rogoff rightly wonders whether "we put any value on what was actually being said."[24]

Thus, if James Elkins is questioning the possibility of shaping studio-based research and knowledge production into something that might receive "interest on the part of the wider university" and be acknowledged as a "position—and, finally, a discipline—that speaks to existing concerns,"[25] Rogoff seems to be far more interested in how alternative practices of communality and knowledge generation/distribution might provide an empowering capacity.

*4. Artistic Knowledge and Knowledge-based Economies*

Since the neo-avant-gardes of the 1960s (at the latest), knowledge generation within the visual arts has expanded through the constitutive dissolution (or suspension) of its subjects and media. Meanwhile, however, its specific aesthetic dimension has continued to be marked by elusiveness and unavailability—by doing things, "of which we don't know what they are" (Adorno).[26] A guiding hypothesis of the "Art in the Knowledge-based Polis" conceit is that this peculiar relationship between the availability and unavailability of artistic knowledge

Art Classroom at The Calhoun School

production assigns a central task to contemporary cultural theory, as such. This not only concerns issues of aesthetics and epistemology, but also its relation to other (allegedly non-artistic) spaces of knowledge production.

To advance this line of reasoning, the various reconfigurations of knowledge, its social function, and its distribution (reflected within late modernist and post-modernist epistemological discourse) have to be considered. From the invocation of the post-industrial information society[27] to the critique of modernist "metanarratives"[28] and the theorization of new epistemological paradigms such as reflexivity, transdisciplinarity, and heterogeneity,[29] the structure, status and shape of knowledge has changed significantly. Amongst other consequences, this has given rise to a number of specific innovative policies concerning knowledge (and its production) on national and transnational levels.[30]

A point of tension that can become productive here is the traditional claim that artists almost constitutively work on the hind side of rationalist, explicated knowledge—in the realms of non-knowledge (or emergent knowledge). As a response to the prohibition and marginalization of certain other knowledges by the powers that be, the apparent incompatibility of non-knowledge with values and maxims of knowledge-based economies (efficiency, innovation, and transferability) may provide strategies for escaping such dominant regimes.

Michel Foucault's epistemology offers a hardly noticed reasoning on artistic knowledge that appears to contradict this emphasis on non-knowledge, while simultaneously providing a methodological answer to the conundrum. In his 1969 *L'Archéologie du savoir* ( *The Archaeology of Knowledge*), Foucault argues that the technical, material,

formal, and conceptual decisions in painting are traversed by a "positivity of knowledge" which could be "named, uttered, and conceptualized" in a "discursive practice."[31] This very "positivity of knowledge" (of the individual artwork, a specific artistic practice, or a mode of publication, communication, and display) should not be confused with a rationalist transparency of knowledge. This "discursive practice" might even refuse any such discursivity. Nonetheless, the works and practices do show a "positivity of knowledge"—the signature of a specific (and probably secret) knowledge.

At the heart of "Art in the Knowledge-based Polis" would be a recognition, description, and analysis of such "positivity"—as much as an exploration of the epistemological conditions in which such positivity appears. Just as the forms and discourses through which artists inform, equip, frame, and communicate their production have become manifold and dispersed, so has a new and continuously expanding field of research opened up as a result.

In many ways, the recent history of methodologies and modes of articulation in the visual arts is seen to be co-evolutionary with such developments as participate in the complex transition from an industrial to a postindustrial (or in terms of regulation theory: from a Fordist to a post-Fordist) regime. However, the relationship between art and society cannot be grasped in terms of a one-sided, sociological-type causality. Rather, the relationship must be seen as highly reciprocal and interdependent. Hence it is possible to claim that in those societies for which "knowledge" has been aligned with "property" and "labor" as a "steering mechanism," the visual arts dwell in an isolated position.[32] "Immaterial labor" (a concept that originated in the vocabulary of post-operaismo where it is supposed to embrace the entire field of "knowledge, information, communications, relations or even affects") has become one of the most important sources of social and economic value production.[33] Hence, it is crucial for the visual arts and their various (producing, communicating, educating, etc.) actors to fit themselves into this reality, or oppose the very logic and constraints of its "cognitive capitalism."[34]

Amongst such approaches is an informal, ephemeral, and implicit "practical wisdom" that informs individual and collective habits, attitudes, and dialects. Moreover, the influence of feminist, queer, subaltern, or post-colonial epistemologies and "situated knowledges" is of great importance in relation to the visual arts.[35] Thus, for the purposes of inquiring into "Art in the Knowledge-based Polis," the array of artistic articulations (both discursive and those deemed non-discursive) will be conceived as reaching far beyond common art/science and theory/practice dichotomies, while a careful analysis of the marks left on artistic epistemologies will be pursued throughout.

The relocation and re-contextualization of the knowledge

issue create room-for-play absent in traditional research designs. The socio-spatial dimension of knowledge production within the visual arts should constitute another essential interest. Urban spaces are understood today as infrastructures of networked, digital architectures of knowledge as much as material, built environments. The contemporary knowledge-based city is structured and managed by information technology and databases, and the new technologies of power and modes of governance they engender (from surveillance strategies to intellectual property regulations to the legal control of network access) demand an adapted set of methodologies and critical approaches. Much of the work to be done might deploy updated versions of regime analysis and Foucauldian governmentality studies (which would by no means exclude other approaches). This urban "network society" displays features of a complex "politics of knowledge" that cannot be limited to stately and corporate management of biotechnological knowledge, because it is also actively involved in sponsoring the so-called creative industries, universities, museums, etc.[36] By this token, it also becomes important to investigate and explore the social, political, and economic shares held by the visual arts in the knowledge-based polis.

What is needed is a multifocal, multidisciplinary perspective with a fresh look at the interactions and constitutive relations between knowledge and the visual arts. The specific, historically informed relations between artistic and scientific methodologies (their epistemologies, knowledge claims, and legitimating discourses) should play a major role. However, as deliberately distinguished from comparable research programs, research will be guided onto an expanded epistemic terrain on which "scientific" knowledge is no longer a privileged reference. Internal exchanges and communications between the social/cultural worlds of the visual arts and their transdisciplinary relationalities will be structured and shaped by those very forms of knowledge whose legitimacy and visibility are the subject of highly contested epistemological struggles.

An adequate research methodology has to be developed in order to allow the researchers positions on multiple social-material time-spaces of actual making and doing—positions that permit and actually encourage active involvement in the artistic processes in the stages of production *before* publication, exhibition, and critical reception. I would suggest that notions of "research" motivated by a sense of political urgency and upheaval are of great importance here. As can be seen in what took place at Hornsey in 1968, positions that are criticized (and desired) as an economic and systemic privilege should be contested as well as (re)claimed. Otherwise, I am afraid that the implementation of practice-based research programs and PhDs in art universities will turn out to be just another bureaucratic maneuver to stabilize hegemonic power/knowledge constellations, disavowing the very potentialities and histories at the heart of concepts such as "practice" and "research."

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Bilal Khbeiz

# Gaza–Beirut–Tel Aviv: In Praise of Selfishness and Opportunism

In 2006, the Lebanese novelist Hassan Daoud reflected on how some friends, visiting Lebanon in the aftermath of the July war, insisted on inspecting the destruction in Beirut's southern suburb.[1] He declared that he was not capable of accompanying them on these visits—he had experienced the destruction firsthand and saw no need to inspect the damage himself. Such inspection would only complicate an already troubled existence.

In all probability, Daoud was not expressing sentiments unique to him. During those dark days in Beirut, it appeared that comprehending the meaning of the war and coming to terms with its material and cultural consequences rendered the act of inspecting the destruction unbearable. Such inspection would only serve to document a catastrophe that one had already lived through and experienced fully.

To me, this suggests a disparity between the concerns of those of us who live in our part of the world and those of others enthusiastic to our causes. We, in Lebanon and Palestine, in Iraq and Iran, shoulder the burden of dealing with the aftermath of our catastrophes. This disparity is primarily geographic in nature and manifests itself on two different levels.

Witnessing the full impact of the 2006 July War in Beirut, or the 2008–2009 Israeli invasion in Gaza, is a very different sensory experience to that of following it from afar in New York or London. The edited scenes that are broadcast in New York or London are replays of the protracted events to which war subjected Beirut and Gaza. The reverberation of shelling is evidence in itself of death and destruction, yet the lengthy process of establishing the extent of the damage and the identities of the victims delays the broadcast of that event by several hours. Because of this interval, the residents of Beirut–Gaza experience the attacks as two distinct events, one vague and obscure and the other clear and documented. Of the two, the obscure event is undoubtedly the one experienced more sorrowfully.

Emerging from the terrifying experience of the shelling brings about the realization of survival and subsequent delight in knowing that the bombs have chosen others and spared us and our loved ones—an outcome that is palpably illustrated by the sight of the victims. The viewer in New York–London, by contrast, is gripped by a pure form of sorrow for the fallen—a sorrow untarnished by any of the selfish feelings that typically characterize survivors. This pure sorrow allows one to relate to the cause with a clear conscience, and with a courage and an honesty that those experiencing the shelling lack.

Contemplating the nature of these qualities brings to mind Hannah Arendt's *Eichmann in Jerusalem.* Arendt, herself a Jewish survivor, identified the qualities of selfishness and opportunism that survivors display. These sentiments merit reconsideration, for the courage of the survivor is more akin to surrender than to intrepidness. To possess

courage under these circumstances requires complete detachment from the victims. Both Ismail Haniyeh and Patrick Seale embody this detachment despite the differences in their positions.[2] Haniyeh remains resolute and holds steadfast under the shelling as long as he does not see himself as a victim. He is firstly a fighter and a defender—a potential victor. He is willing to pay the costly price of such a war, unlike the victims who never sought to die or lose their loved ones. Patrick Seale, on the other hand, can choose to be courageous and feel sorrow for the victims, as he has no reason to be selfish and opportunistic like the survivors. Given this unjust choice, I willingly opt for being opportunistic and selfish—these are qualities that I require far more than courage and pure sorrow.

Pure sorrow needs to be reconsidered as well. It appears to me, perhaps at Nietzsche's suggestion, to be a form of taking pleasure in a superiority over those less fortunate. This creates an insurmountable barrier between the afflicted and those who feel sorrow for them.

So far, I have dealt with the first level of how the disparity between watching war in New York–London and experiencing it in Beirut–Gaza manifests itself. The second level is much deeper and far more complex. Perhaps it emanates from the conceits of journalism, how it exercises its powers of selection and derision. The catastrophe tourist's experience of observing flattened neighborhoods is radically different from that of the Beirut resident. The tourist and the local are worlds apart. They are incapable of relating to each other's experiences—unless we invest the rubble left by the shelling, and the remains in general, with the power of bridging this existential gap.

The neighborhoods that have been shelled and leveled hold remnants of lives under the ruins: pillows and beds, secrets and inner thoughts, books and pictures and scents. The survivors have left parts of themselves under the ruins and are left with the remains of invisible and undocumented lives. Whole chapters of their existence are no longer available to cameras and archives and are out of the reach of any possible authority, even that of inquisitive excavations. These buried episodes now elude the grasp both of *National Geographic* and of artworks as well. It is as if people have been transformed into rats, the creatures that live closest to us humans, yet the most secretive and protective of their affairs. Rats lead un-documented, un-observable lives and relate to human beings only through our refuse.

The war created a subterranean world for the residents of Beirut–Gaza that is also un-observable, and is consequently beyond the reach of conservationists and "Leftists" who live in secure lands. It is impossible to equate those surveying the devastation with those who have buried parts of their existence under the wreckage. Visitors observe general and superficial scenes and reach conclusions blindly. Ruins encourage guesswork and speculation, and those visitors are incapable of close scrutiny. Any documentation in a situation like this remains as cold as United Nations figures and statistics. The inspector can only estimate the cost of reconstruction and count the number of families that have been displaced. At most, he can imagine happy times that the former residents must have experienced, and unhappy times that they must have been through before the war machine brought the houses down. In any case, he will not go so far as to guess that someone who collected souvenirs from around the world had once lived in one of these flats, and that the personal museum collected from all those cities is now irreplaceable.

A life that resists documentation has been buried, and what remains is the wreckage upon which the visitors construct their ideas and their positions. All that those well-intentioned visitors can do is reward the survivors with the peace that follows destruction as a form of consolation. In other words, they are inviting the survivors to resume their lives without their past, henceforth inscribing it on a clean sheet.

The wreckage conceals secrets that are far more telling than what the surface manifests. In art, the techniques that we use to decipher images insist on the image itself as the ultimate reference—everything we need resides within its frame. A crumbling house prompts us to assume that life once ran its course between its walls, and that this life generally resembled another. The image of a nude model in a painting obliges us to contemplate the lust and desires of the reclining body but does not refer to the old age and demise of that body. The nudes in the paintings of Rubens, Renoir, and Goya have all died. Their bones must have decayed by now, but they remain there in the paintings without names and biographies. The subject of art constantly appears to be mortal and transient, far less durable than the artwork that seeks immortality.

With time, nothing remains of the identities of those models except the brief moments spent posing for the painters. Art is a forceful interruption of a narrative that both precedes and follows the moment of depiction, and thus it asks us to read the stories of the models at that precise moment. In a similar vein, the visitor inspecting the damage in solidarity with the afflicted, prepared to feel sorrow for them and take a courageous position in supporting them, wishes for the survivors to commence their lives from the precise moment that catastrophe befell them. That sympathizer wants to force the victims into their grief-stricken roles in order to defend their cause at the moment of its most blunt and cruel manifestation.

In this way, the Holocaust became the ultimate courageous and sorrowful stand of the world, after which the Jews were rewarded with the Promised Land—a reward intended to repress all that preceded the Holocaust for Jews and Europeans alike. The Holocaust ultimately assumes the responsibility of erasing what preceded it by way of persecution and discrimination

against the Jews at the hands of Europeans. It represents the end of the Jews' sorrows. Consequently, any attack on the Jews in Palestine after the Holocaust is unforgivable. This allows the Jews themselves to persecute and displace others on the pretext that their holocaust has not taken place yet. The right of those others to also become archetypal victims, living without their pre-holocaust history, has hitherto not been granted.

The courageous and sorrowful proponents of the International Left realize the necessity of exposing those with whom they sympathize to minor holocausts in order to adequately defend them. In *Notre Musique*, Jean-Luc Godard re-stages a real interview between the Palestinian poet Mahmoud Darwish and an Israeli journalist in which Darwish proclaims that the Palestinians have the fortune and the misfortune of having Israel as an enemy. The world's attention is drawn to the Palestinians only because of the interest in Israel and its history. Nonetheless, Palestinians find it very hard to be recognized as victims precisely because their struggle is with Israel. The moral debates that ensued from the Holocaust made archetypal victims out of the Jews, and enabled them to persecute their enemies on the pretext of self-defense, not least because of the unique position they were granted in modern history (consider the irony of the most powerful army in the Middle East being called the Israeli Defense Forces).

However, citing the Holocaust in this context is not specifically related to what Israel chooses to name its army or the right of Israeli Jews there to defend themselves. It concerns first and foremost the right of the Jewish people not to bear the responsibility for the atrocities committed by their army on the pretext of self-defense. The same logic extends to those resisting Israel and its provocations: no one has the right to hold us responsible for terrorism by claiming that it is a form of self-defense or by considering it a logical consequence of globalization (a form of fate or compulsion, as Jean Baudrillard maintains).

Nowadays, resistance against imperialism, the Israeli occupation, and the American presence in the region is both cumbersome and catastrophic. We are left to suffer the consequences of the unjustifiable murders committed in the name of resistance. Living in this part of the world makes us either the objects of suspicion or the deranged sufferers of unbearable injustice. Our protectors abroad, then, are those who understand our problems and diagnose our disorders, and they exercise this guardianship by placing us in laboratories and asylums. The injustices that we suffer, according to those protectors, transform us from humans into laboratory mice, similarly to how the transgressions of our enemies changes us from humans into plague-bearing rats. At any rate, holding a Middle Eastern nationality is sufficient to place us under the suspicion of transmitting the modern plague.

The restrictive quarantine in which we find ourselves presents us with only two options. Some declare that they have escaped the epidemic that afflicts their compatriots and go on to write and produce artworks as survivors who witnessed the plague, but avoided it. Others write and produce as convalescents, seeking the help of the world to cure them of their affliction. In this way, we either renounce or repent our pestilence.

It has been observed that merely residing in Beirut–Gaza need not implicate us in its affairs. Immigration here takes many forms. There are at least three different resident-immigrants here: the first observes a demonstration by a million Hezbollah supporters and sees an awesome and captivating spectacle, like a scene in a Kurosawa film. The second is terrified by the crowd, considering it barbarian (in the Foucauldian sense of the term), and consequently seeks cultural asylum in the civilized West on the pretext of not belonging to this multitude. The third chooses to reside here out of adventurousness, not unlike those who live in a jungle amidst rapacious beasts. Those adventurers demand rewards for their excessive courage.

There is a fourth type, a citizen that only feels at home in this city, knowing full well that Hezbollah–Hamas' peaceful demonstrations can easily turn violent, sensing that there will be no cure for the plague if the sane continue to migrate to non-afflicted lands. This citizen glimpses the future of Paris in Beirut's present, a prospect that persists as long as the meaning of citizenship continues to be constructed on top of the wreckage that ensues from the catastrophe, and not from the lives that have been buried underneath.

The actions of the supporters of the Palestinian people, of the Third World in general, rely on this theoretical framework. During the demonstrations against the Israeli invasion in Gaza, there were many well-intentioned representatives of this persuasion, some of whom defended at length their twisted affiliation to the Third World and their support of its causes and struggles. This affiliation would not have manifested itself in such a manner had there not been a renewed interest in the affairs of the Third World that followed a period of abandonment. Those supporters returned to that cause fully capable of being courageous, sorrowful, and outraged, much unlike their counterparts who remain selfish and opportunistic.


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Translated from the Arabic by Karl Sharro.


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1
Hassan Daoud is a Lebanese
novelist living and working in
Beirut. He made this admission in
an international panel discussion
organized by *Documenta* 12 in
Vienna on November 19, 2006.

2
Ismail Haniyeh is the disputed
Prime Minister of the Palestinian
National Authority and a senior
political leader of Hamas. Partick
Seale is a British writer on the
Middle East.

## Simon Sheikh
# Positively White Cube Revisited

Few essays have garnered as much immediate response as Brian O'Doherty's " Inside the White Cube," originally published as a series of three articles in *Artforum* in 1976, and subsequently collected in a book of the same name.[1] According to myth, the issues of *Artforum* containing O'Doherty's texts sold out very quickly, and as he himself has remarked, many artists he spoke to at the time told him that they themselves had been thinking about writing something similar. This is to say that the main concern of the essay—how to deal with the white cube convention for gallery design—was shared by many of his contemporaries. Naturally, O'Doherty was writing not only within the specific context of post-minimalism and conceptual art of the 1970s, but also from the point of view of artistic practice. Aside from being a prominent critic, O'Doherty was also an installation artist, having worked since 1972 under the name of Patrick Ireland (in protest against the British Army's involvement in Ulster). As both theorist and practitioner, insider and outsider, he was not in a bad position to examine the ideology of something as peculiar as the modern gallery space, the much loved and maligned "white cube."

In many ways, O'Doherty's point is as simple as it is radical: the gallery space is not a neutral container, but a historical construct. Furthermore, it is an aesthetic object in and of itself. The ideal form of the white cube that modernism developed for the gallery space is inseparable from the artworks exhibited inside it. Indeed, the white cube not only conditions, but also overpowers the artworks themselves in its shift from placing content *within* a context to making the context *itself* the content. However, this emergence of context is enabled primarily through its attempted disappearance. The white cube is conceived as a place free of context, where time and social space are thought to be excluded from the experience of artworks. It is only through the apparent neutrality of appearing outside of daily life and politics that the works within the white cube can appear to be self-contained—only by being freed from historical time can they attain their aura of timelessness.

Enter the white cube, with its even walls and its unobtrusive artificial lighting—a sacred space that (despite its modern design) resembles an ancient tomb, undisturbed by time and containing infinite riches. O'Doherty uses this analogy of the tomb and the treasury to illuminate how the white cube was constructed in order to give the artworks a timeless quality (and thus, lasting value) in both an economic and a political sense. It was a space for the immortality of a certain class or caste's cultural values, as well as a staging ground for objects of sound economic investment for possible buyers. O'Doherty thus reminds us that galleries are shops—spaces for producing surplus value, not use value—and as such, the modern gallery employs the formula of the white cube for an architectonics of transcendence in which the specificities of time and of place are replaced by the eternal. In other words, the white cube establishes a crucial dichotomy between that which

is to be kept outside (the social and the political) and that which is inside (the staying value of art).

Inside of an igloo.

O'Doherty's book offers a critique of this distinction, and his essays have often been seen as a turning point in artistic-theoretical perception—from plane to space, and from work to context. His critique can be seen as part and parcel of a general artistic method—that of spatial critique, so prevalent in post-minimalism—and also as a method applied in O'Doherty's own installation work. In this sense, O'Doherty's writings are not art history (though they involve elements thereof), but are rather artist's texts. There is an almost practical aspect to how they instruct an installation artist to deal with space. Indeed, O'Doherty had planned further chapters on the problem of corners and how they interrupt the perfect white walls, as well as a commentary on how to deal with ceilings. O'Doherty's tone is not academic, but humorous and often quite sarcastic (he doesn't shy away from the occasional dig or even dis). As he recasts and rewrites modern art history vis-à-vis various art practices' relationship to the exhibition space, pragmatic answers alternate with theory and references to popular culture. With O'Doherty's position being at once inside and outside, art's histories and practices come to the fore as a strategy for writing. Just as in the cinematic example offered in the first essay's opening passage, it is as if the essays formed a Hollywood movie in which we observe everything from the outside, while simultaneously identifying with the main characters within the narrative.

Not only in the context of art institutions and gallery spaces, but also in broader territorial and political senses, the dichotomy between inside and outside has become a cornerstone of what we would now call installation art. Thus, we should not only read "Inside the White Cube" as the vital document of the 1970s post-studio art scene that it undoubtedly is, but also as a nodal point that connects in two directions: backwards to the modern history of art, and forwards to contemporary spatial practices. It connects to history in that it can be re-interpreted in terms of its issues of space, as already mentioned, and to the contemporary and the recent histories of institutional critique, spatial production and politics. If the gallery space is saturated with ideology (as O'Doherty claims), and if it can be analyzed spatially and politically through artistic practices (such as the ones O'Doherty mentions in his fourth installment in the series "The Gallery as Gesture"), then this method can also be transferred onto other spaces and non-spaces (to reference the work of Michel Foucault and Marc Augé, among others).[2] This can lead to a comparative analysis of space: an analysis of territories, states, institutions, and their contingent mechanisms of inclusion and exclusion, representation and de- presentation—an analysis that not only

determines what is shown and what is not shown, but also what must be eradicated in order for one spatial formation to take precedence over another.

As O'Doherty concludes, the spatial arrangement overdetermines—consumes—the works (or, if you will, statements placed within them) to the degree that context becomes content. The task of critical art then becomes one of reflecting and restaging this space. Of course, this is exactly what happened in the 1970s, as well as in the so-called expanded field of art today. As such, O'Doherty's texts attest to the epistemological shift from the modern to the postmodern era of art and politics. In spite of these changes, however, the text not only marks a beginning, an end, or a part of a history, but is equally relevant today as part of a continuous debate—an ongoing struggle, if you will. After all, most galleries, museums, and alternative spaces still employ the white cube as the favored modus operandi for exhibition-making—as the dominant model for the showing of art. Gallery spaces and museums are still white cubes, and their ideology remains one of commodity fetishism and eternal value(s)...

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1
See Brian O'Doherty, *Inside the White Cube: The Ideology of the Gallery Space* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999).

2
See Michel Foucault, "Of Other Spaces," trans. Jay Miskowiec, *Diacritics* 16, no. 1 (Spring 1986): 22-27: Marc Augé, *Non-Places: Introduction to an Anthropology of Supermodernity*, trans. John Howe (New York: Verso, 1995).

Much has been said of late about "the conversational" or "the discursive" in and around the field of contemporary art.[1] And yet we seem reluctant to talk about an *art of* conversation in the same breath. Maybe it is the all-too-powdery whiff of seventeenth-century aristocratic ladies and gentlemen, fanning themselves amidst idle chatter, whose connections to our own aspirations we would rather sweep under the shaggy carpet?[2] Or perhaps it is because we are desperately hoping to talk ourselves out of stale notions of art as a cultural practice that to suggest an *art of* conversation might at first seem utterly oxymoronic?

*Binaries*

My attempt to resuscitate this term in all its discomforts stems from its potential to unhinge a particular binary concept, which might be summarized in the title of a recent exhibition curated by Nicolaus Schafhausen and Florian Waldvogel as part of the Brussels Biennial— *Show me, don't tell me*.[3] Why not show *and* tell? The same question might be posed to the proponents of the discursive as a way out of a *mere* looking at art. Why do we so rarely hear of doing or thinking two things at once? A dialectical intertwining of positions might demand that we ask of art (as makers, viewers, critics, students, teachers) to suspend, boggle, or otherwise challenge available discourses *and* that we in turn develop a discourse to elaborate evasions, deferrals, or misunderstandings of its available notions. Or, we could remain actively neutral with respect to this binary—however dialectically complex it may be, something seems to be missing from the equation.

With this in mind, I have been thinking about certain staged or filmed conversations, with an eye to how conversation is forged and what it forges. At stake are productive notions of how thought can move through conversation and how conversation can move thought that probably have very little to do with clichés of conversation operating in the art world. This may be understood as an aesthetic point of view insofar as aesthetics is the attention to ways of appearing, perceiving, sensing. Conversation is often understood as an equal, rational, democratic exchange that builds bridges, communities, understandings, and is thus a way for people to recognize each other. The thorny issue of whether or not one should talk to dictators (with or without pre-conditions) that continually flared up in the run-up to the recent American presidential elections points to a particular concern in the political culture with regard to how, when, and with whom one should engage in dialogue. To converse with dictators is to forestall their annihilation, to see—in the sense of acknowledging—them somehow.

Yet this *a priori* recognition confuses the matter. What if conversation is understood not as the space of seeing, but of coming to terms with certain forms of blindness? In

Monika Szewczyk
# Art of Conversation, Part I

other words, what I think is not being articulated, but what drives the reticence for conversation, is the acknowledgement of non-knowledge rather than recognition. To have a conversation with Chavez or Ahmadinejad is to recognize that one does not know them and wants to. In this way, conversation is always political and aesthetic because it shows who we want to see, who or what we admit into a world order. To put it somewhat differently: if, as an art, conversation is the creation of worlds, we could say that to choose to have a conversation with someone is to admit them into the field where worlds are constructed. And this ultimately runs the risk of redefining not only the "other," but us as well. Art and conversation share this space of invention, yet only conversation comes with the precondition of plurality that might totally undo the notion of the creative agent.

### Plurals

One can develop a discourse about the conversation, but at least two must have a conversation about discourse (which in turn might become plural). In *The Infinite Conversation*, Maurice Blanchot creates a plural discourse on conversation as plurality, attempting to disrupt his own writing, often making it sound like a conversation (with an unnamed interlocutor who may be Georges Bataille)—all this to extend thought infinitely. Common sense and manuals on the art of conversation may tell us that it is rude to interrupt; Blanchot thinks differently:

> The definition of conversation (that is, the most simple description of the most simple conversation) might be the following: when two people speak together, they speak not together, but each in turn: one says something, then stops, the other something else (or the same thing), then stops. The coherent discourse they carry on is composed of sequences that are interrupted when the conversation moves from partner to partner, even if adjustments are made so that they correspond to one another. The fact that speech needs to pass from one interlocutor to another in order to be confirmed, contradicted, or developed shows the necessity of interval. The power of speaking interrupts itself, and this interruption plays a role that appears to be minor—precisely the role of a subordinated alteration. This role, nonetheless, is so enigmatic that it can be interpreted as bearing the very enigma of language: pause between sentences, pause from one interlocutor to another, and pause of attention, the hearing that doubles the force of locution.[4]

I'd almost like to stop here—to pause indefinitely and allow myself and everyone reading this to think about Blanchot's sense of the conversation, especially the force it accords to hearing.

To resume, with this in mind, is to attempt a conversation with Blanchot (or more specifically, with this particular text). So then, how can we consider a conversation through its interruptions?

A recent film that resonates with these questions is Steve McQueen's first feature film, *Hunger* (2008), which concerns the 1981 hunger strike led by Bobby Sands inside Belfast's Maze Prison. The film is virtually without speech. It proceeds through a war of gestures: the coldly administered abuse of prisoners (in scenes that evoke the inhuman conditions of Abu Ghraib and Guantanamo Bay) and the prisoners' retaliation with acts that perversely aestheticize their abject conditions, under which they are refused political status, and people are reduced to bodies for silent administration. The sublime swirl of shit painted on the walls of one grimy cell in all the deliberate blankness of a Jasper Johns (shown half-washed-off in the poster for the film) is one emblem of the prisoners' mute tactics. The other, of course, is the hunger strike itself, wherein Bobby Sands' emaciated body slowly approximates the figure of Christ on the cross.

Roughly in the middle of the film, between the two moving images, speechlessness is interrupted with a conversation between Sands and a priest. Their exchange is captured (almost) entirely in one long take, shot from the side so that the two men face each other (and not the camera, as is customary in the shot-reverse-shot style of filming conversations). The effect is all too real: priest and prisoner banter, becoming regular guys that joke, smoke, show their affinities and their humanity, then fall into an intense debate on the merits of the hunger strike. The priest implores Sands not to mistake selfish delusions of martyrdom for political efficacy and Sands rejects the priest's suggestion that talking to the Protestants is possible or could solve the political impasse. The conversation stops and, soon thereafter, so does Sands' life. He refuses the infinity of conversation.

For all the naturalism of this scene, it is a strange thing to see a priest smoking: God's worker on earth speeding his way to the grave even as he defends the sanctity of life. Yet in mingling, the exhalations of Sands and those of the priest materialize and form something third, which lets their moral and ethical confusions hover.[5] After Sands dies, and just before the film ends, we hear the contemptuous monologue of Margaret Thatcher on BBC Radio—another killer of conversation.

Conversation, the converse of monologue. When Blanchot wrote his polyphonous book in 1969, with the memory of the Second World War still vivid, he juxtaposed conversation to the dictatorial monologue of Hitler, most exemplarily, but added that "every head of state participates in the same violence of this *dictare*, the repetition of an imperious monologue, when he enjoys the power of being the only one to speak and, rejoicing in possession of his high solitary word, imposes it without restraint as a superior and supreme speech upon others."

Conversation, Blanchot continues, even in its most coherent form must "always fragment itself by changing protagonists" with an "interruption for the sake of understanding, understanding in order to speak." What is beautiful about Blanchot's notion of interruption is that he considers silence to be one of its strongest forms. He cites Kafka, who wondered, "at what moment and how many times, when eight people are seated within the horizon of a conversation, it is appropriate to speak if one does not wish to be considered silent."

Who doesn't have the urge to remain silent in a conversation—to let it unfold without being implicated and without taking sides, remaining blissfully neutral and knowing? But this omniscience or even omnipotence is not quite what is at stake in this notion of conversation. For Blanchot, both speaking (in turn) and silence—as the two means of interrupting—can either serve understanding (via a dialectic) or they can produce something altogether more enigmatic. It all depends on how we conceive of the interlocutors of a conversation: if I address someone as my opposite, either as object of my subjective discourse or as a subject who is infinitely different but equal to me, I enter into a dialectic which seeks synthesis and unity (understanding). Yet Blanchot also explores conversation with, and interruption by, something other—one that cannot complete or understand its interlocutor, but interrupts in another way. Following Lévinas, Blanchot designates this someone as *autrui*, understood, not as the opposite, but as the neutral—"an alterity that holds in the name of the neutral."[6] Blanchot's notion of the neutral is close to Barthes' in that it is not a nothing, but something beyond the binaries that structure dialectics—a way to move in thought and sensation differently. Conceiving of dialogue beyond dialectics (which holds out unity and synthesis as an end), we can approach the infinity that proliferates via its deployment of the neutral. This is to say that a kind of geometry of thought is at stake that might allow for thought itself to move differently altogether.

### God, avatar of autrui

Of all the avatars of *autrui* as the infinite and the neutral that appear in Blanchot's text, I am perhaps most uncomfortable with God. Yet perhaps it is God as interlocutor that best boggles thinking on the conversation—it is the stuff of revolution if you think of the Protestant Reformation and the aspirations to talk more directly with God. Blanchot considers Levinas' notion that "All true discourse . . . is discourse with God, not a conversation held between equals." A sphinx-of-a-scribe, Blanchot understands Levinas "in the strongest sense, as one always must. And in remembering, perhaps, what is said in Exodus of God speaking: as one man to another" (maybe that is why the sight of Bobby Sands and a priest—God's ambassador—talking as equals comes with a little extra strangeness). This god/man duplicity comes back later, when Blanchot speaks of Apollo, himself

speaking through the poet Bacchylides to Admetus, the founder of dialogue (a plural speech indeed): " *You are a mere mortal; therefore your mind must harbor two thoughts at once.*"(Tell me about it...) And how difficult it is to speak such a mind, especially if the dialectic is not its figure. To be of two positions at once—this is what is afforded to the viewer of McQueen's particular angle (in profile) on the conversation of Bobby Sands and the priest. There is something to be said for film as a particularly complex medium that lets us observe the polyphony (which includes glances and silences) that makes up the plural speech of conversation.

Rather than taking this plurality of thought as something to be reproached while unity is elevated to divine heights, Blanchot concludes something that one might take to heart when confronted with all unitary voices:

> What, fundamentally, is the god asking of Admetus? Perhaps nothing less than that he shake off the yoke of the god and finally leave the circle in which he remains enclosed by a fascination with unity. And this is no small thing, certainly, for it means ceasing to think only with a view to unity. And this means therefore: not fearing to affirm interruption and rupture in order to come to the point of proposing and expressing—an infinite task—a truly plural speech.

Another moving image to consider: Peter Geyer's documentary film *Jesus Christus Erlöser* (2008) *,* where the kranky Klaus Kinski incants a monologue of/as Jesus. In our schizophrenically Godless and post-secular world, this conversation with God might be a place to linger. Kinsky plays the savior to a disaffected bohemian proletariat assembled at the Deutschlandhalle in Berlin on November 20, 1971. His message of radical equality, social redemption, and brotherly love competes with his superstar persona (swathed in a vintage Technicolor flower chemise) and, in light of this glaring contradiction, Kinski is repeatedly interrupted by members of the audience who want to turn his monologue into a conversation. Each time someone takes up the mic, Kinski fights back or storms off the stage, only to return and begin again. By the end of the film, even after the credits have rolled (which extends the ordeal into infinity in filmic terms) Kinski is shown down in the stands, amongst the two dozen or so remaining devotees, trying to remember his lines so that he can finally deliver his gospel in full. Here, then, is the failure of conversation as the failure of interruption—the audience is hushed; Kinski continues.

I saw *Jesus Christus Erlöser* (again), shortly after visiting the Joseph Beuys retrospective *Die Revolution sind wir* (We are the Revolution) at the Hamburger Bahnhof in Berlin—a burgeoning show staged under the broader city-wide theme of "Kult des Künstlers" adopted by the Staatliche Museen in Berlin. Posters in the U-bahn

stations include Dürer's famous *Self-portrait at 28* of 1500, which makes the artist look like a princely Christ; and I was expecting that Beuys would fit neatly into this long history of the Jesus complex in art.[7] My eyes and ears were strained for signs of a Messiah, and these signs proliferated—only in the guise of a divine conversationalist.

With his gaunt face and intense jaw, Beuys bears a striking physical resemblance to Kinsky. His sense of himself as a shaman and the gravitas he projects could lead to further comparison. Yet Beuys embraced the conversational mode in his public persona as well as his artistic practice in a way that Kinsky failed to do. The exhibition features ample footage of the artist involved in public discussions on German and American television or on taped videos, also within the student milieu of the Düsseldorf Kunstakademie. And to be sure, he is often seen as the typical maestro of the German art academy—sole authority and source of mystical wisdom, at times mocking or condescending to his interlocutors. But, he retains a sense of humor—I especially think that *How to Explain Pictures to a Dead Hare* (1965) needs to be considered as much for its arch comedy as for its mysticism and priestly ritual. Not one *or* the other, but both—Beuys' mentality clearly harbors at least two thoughts at once. Here I might note that, all in all, I do not take Beuys' particular mystique as completely repulsive. A messiah needs disciples in order for the mysticism of the work to be as much a product of its reading as the character of its intent. If one option for breaking the circumscribed view wherein figures such as Beuys embody (near) divinity is simply not to congregate around them (and after their death to skip the show), another might be to bring the work of the neutral into play in confronting them.

### Another Neutral

The film footage of the 1965 performance of *How to explain* shows the artist inside the Galerie Alfred Schmela, Düsseldorf, wherein he cradles said dead animal while pointing out and discussing his drawings. The entire exercise stages a kind of impossible or aborted conversation that could almost be understood as a negative manifesto. In other words, it proceeds through a series of refusals: the first to be rejected is the (human/animal) binary. The artist doubles up as a god—his head covered in honey and gold leaf for maximum Apollonian oomph. Then, the human is virtually removed from the equation, if we consider that the camera has captured the performance from the street (through the window), stressing that the audience was emphatically excluded from the gallery space as the space for communion between the man (playing a god) and the dead or sacrificed animal. Finally—and this refusal is particularly ambiguous—in obscuring the audience's ability to hear any lesson imparted to the hare, does the mystical teacher curb his authority or does he silence the authority of discourse? The work of silence, a key cipher of

the neutral, is to perpetually put signification and representation into question. The lesson of Beuys' pictures is withheld. Announced as explanation, the performance is in fact a question engine. It echoes Blanchot's notion of the neutral within the space of conversation as "initiating significance, but signifying nothing, or nothing determined."

This "nothing determined" makes way for conversation. And it is not to determine, but to extend indeterminacy (infinitely) that conversations occur. What emerges here is a notion of the neutral stripped of its beige, eventless character. *How to Explain Pictures to a Dead Hare* involves both show- *and*-tell. It is plural and extravagantly symbolic. As such, it opens up to a sense of the neutral as *ex*cess and remainder alongside the identification of the neutral with the void. Voids—especially the avoidance of judgment—have an important part to play in neutrality. The neutral is a radical other in that it is neither opposite nor like anything because it cannot be judged.[8] Only when there is a tendency to kneel before a void (veneration is a form of judgment) does it break with the sense of the neutral.

Here, Beuys' *Das Schweigen von Marcel Duchamp wird überbewertet* (The Silence of Marcel Duchamp is Overrated), painted in the year before *How to explain*, refuses an overly respectful interpretation of Duchamp's inscrutable seclusion. And although the attempt to undervalue his silence, or at least question its overvaluation, plays into the game of judgment (and thereby ruins its neutrality), the painting highlights another powerful engine of conversation: listening. By troubling Duchamp's silence, Beuys' shows how loudly he heard it. For all the criticism leveled at Beuys regarding his inability to absorb the lessons of Marcel Duchamp, one artist's refusal to take the other at his silence may be read as a conversational gesture. Indeed, we could say that the registering, even the amplification, of a silence is a fine beginning for a conversation. For all their differences, I do wonder if both artists were not exploring registers of "the neutral," albeit in very different ways.

### Bestiary

How then to proliferate the neutral? This is the question at the heart of the art of conversation. This is at once very close and very far from the common sense of conversation. There is: "let's not fight; we'll meet on neutral ground and talk it over." But there is also: "how can we listen to the inaudible, the unheard of, that which does not so much transcend as suspends not only the binaries but also the equivalences which constitute subjectivity?" A radical misalignment of interlocutors is needed for the work of neutrality to occur. This is how Beuys' *How to explain* may prove most interesting. In introducing this strange sense of conversation, my aim is to apply pressure on the givens of conversation as a harmonious unifying operation. BBC Radio tells me every twenty

minutes to "join the global conversation" as if something of the sort were naturally taking place. A lot of things are called conversation; and to work in the name of this model of exchange is to mark one's tolerance for diversity, but often only as a mask for unifying operations.

A few last words from Blanchot, for whom the idea of conversation resides in a downright weird conception of the interlocutor as possessing a speech "beyond hearing and to which I must nonetheless respond." This notion is conjured in a fictive dialogue, which includes the following retort: "Such then, would be my task: to respond to this speech that surpasses my hearing, to respond to it without having really understood it, and to respond to it in repeating it, in making it speak." How to exercise such a hearing? Here is the other great question of conversation—not one of articulating (which is more proper to discourse), but one of hearing (which is proper to a notion of conversation as that which interrupts discourse as we know it). I cannot think through this proposition except maybe by considering certain exchanges between a woman and a stone , between a man and an animal. For the former, Wislawa Szymborska's 1962 poem, "Conversation with a Stone," conjures up the geological specimen's stone-cold voice of reproach to the human poet: "You lack the sense of taking part / No other sense can make up for your missing sense of taking part. / Even sight heightened to become all-seeing / will do you no good without a sense of taking part." For the latter, consider Marcel Broodthaers' *Interview with a Cat,* a rather "bad example" perhaps, in that Broodthaers also has no "sense of taking part" beyond a well-rehearsed "sense of the absurd." But it is a somewhat fitting example nonetheless, as Broodthaers' gesture was recorded (in 1972) at the *Musée d'art Moderne, Département des Aigles* in Düsseldorf, and thus in Beuys' backyard.

Marcel Broodthaers' *Interview with a Cat*

The tangle of Broodthaers and Beuys, whose own conversations with animals did not stop at the hare, are most often read through Broodthaers' open letter dated September 25, 1972, published in the *Rheinische Post* on October 3 of that year, where he effectively accuses Beuys of being too Wagnerian.[9] Yet, in sharp contrast to his interview with the cat, Broodthaers' *Department of Eagles* encroaches on the sinister uses of the bird by administrative and totalitarian forces. His interview is thus imbedded within an extensive project of extravagant animal symbolism. Like Beuys with the hare, Broodthaers chooses to talk pictures with the cat. In a stroke of arch-irony, we hear the comparison of conceptual art with an unseen canvas—constituted as pure concept. A climax of sorts comes as Broodthaers, ventriloquizing Magritte, alternately repeats " *C'est une pipe*" and " *Ceci n'est pas une pipe*" as the feline chimes in with its loud inarticulate noises. The recording feels manipulated, in that the cat's timing, his absolutely polite waiting for its turn, turns the

disruptive element of the animal's voice into the mechanical certainty of a laugh-track. In the end, Broodthaers poses many questions, but does not articulate any questions that he hears of himself so that he might invent "a response without understanding."

\*

Now dear, patient reader, you might ask:

"Where does this leave us? What have we learned about the art of conversation, which is already dead, or is by most accounts dying? Are we meant to put ourselves in the shoes of Beuys' hare? Is this some elaborate funeral?"

I might respond, provisionally, or as a preface to the next chapter, that:

"The thought of conversation needs to become stranger still if we want conversation to forge something altogether new. In de-naturalizing it—and veering towards the neutral—we might get out of the circle we're in, take God and animal, and forge some kind of Sphinx to listen to, posing questions that interrupt what we have thus far called conversation."

**X**

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1
The interest of this very journal and its organizers at e-flux in these notions is well evidenced by two texts on the subject: one in Issue no.0 by Irit Rogoff (whose Curatorial/Knowledge Seminar at Goldsmiths University, co-organized with Jean Paul Martinon, which I have participated in, often questions notions of conversation and how conversational modes play a compensatory role in the art world); and one by Liam Gillick in Issue no.2, which was first formulated for the Hermes Lecture he delivered in Den Bosch on November 9, 2008. But the investment in conversational and discursive practice is also evidenced by e-flux projects in Berlin and Night School at New York's New Museum, which consist predominantly of activities such as talks, panel discussions, and similar arenas of knowledge production and exchange. Here, I should mention that one of my closest encounters with e-flux was *The New York Conversations* , a three-day event co-organized in the summer of 2008 with *A Prior* journal (of which I am a contributing editor), which included Anton Vidokle as one of the featured artists alongside Rirkrit Tiravanija and Nico Dockx. While the list could go on indefinitely, I'll mention just one more text, Emily Pethick's "Resisting Institutionalisation," found at https://archive.ica.art/bulletin/resisting-institutionalisation/ , because her understanding of conversation as above all "a way of preventing a fixed representation" is important for my own understanding, and perhaps also connected to Gillick's sense of conversation as a place to "hide within a collective" and thus become difficult to recognize or represent in a Deleuzian sense.

2
For an elaboration on the elevated status of conversation as an art in the period, and the attendant attempts by French aristocrats to distinguish themselves from a rising bourgeoisie, see Mary Vidal, *Watteau's Painted Conversations: Art, Literature, and Talk in Seventeenth- and Eighteenth-Century France* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1992) 75-98. One of Vidal's most prescient themes is that of conversation as a form of creating and disseminating knowledge and information in a manner other than the conventional and fundamentally hierarchical school model where those who learn are pupils and those who teach masters. To uphold a veneer of perfection from birth, nobles could not be taught and therefore rejected formal notions of learning. Vidal notes that, "A conversation with one's equals was one of the few acceptable ways for the aristocrat to increase knowledge and to perfect (not acquire) superiority... The salons had initiated a distinctly noble learning process based on the exchange of agreeable and relevant bits of information among equals, in contrast to the authoritarian, pedantic, master–student relationship of the bourgeois academic system" (95). This scenario presents an interesting foil to current experiments-making which privilege the conversational mode – I am not concerned about this a snobbish pursuit. Rather, I see the nobility described by Vidal as under duress, and conversation as a means of self-constitution and self-preservation, which had to remain clandestine. Her main point about Watteau's paintings is not that they show conversations but that they cannot represent what is said.

3
*Show me, don't tell me* was organized by Nicolaus Schafhausen and Florian Waldvogel for the inaugural Brussels Biennial, as a satellite exhibition organized by the Witte de With (where, incidentally, I work as the head of that most discursive of departments: publications). I mention the exhibition with a lot of sympathy for the curators and artists, but also a sense that the title rehearses a cocky stance and a binary that was only interesting in that it irritated and was in turn foiled by the joint contribution of Charles Esche (for the Van Abbe Museum, Eindhoven) and Maria Hlavajova (for the BAK, Utrecht) installed next to it at the former Post Sorting Center in Brussels. The project entitled *Once is Nothing* discursively restaged an earlier exhibition claiming to critique the unreflexive production of ever-new shows.

4
See Maurice Blanchot, *The Infinite Conversation* , ed. and trans. Susan Hanson (Minneapolis and London: University of Minnesota Press, 1993), 75. All subsequent quotations are from the section "Plural Speech: (the speech of writing)," 3-82.

5
This strange smoke is also the strangely all-but-sharp *punctum* of the image of Sands smoking, used on posters for the film, taken from the shot that breaks the long take that captures his conversation with the priest. It hovers almost like a blank speech bubble, enforcing the refusal of speech.

6
Blanchot's continued meditation on 'the neutral' occurs in dialogue with Roland Barthes, for whom this term is a continually elaborated and multiplied point of departure for developing a movement of thought that suspends binary structures, even the most sophisticated of these – the dialectic. While Barthes thought about the neutral throughout his career, it was not until 1977–1978 that he developed it into a seminar – the second of three he gave while he held the Chair of Semiology at the Collège de France. See Roland Barthes, *The Neutral*, trans. Rosalind Krauss and Dennis Hollier (New York: Columbia University Press, 2005).

7
I must admit that, in North America, where I studied art history, the reading of Beuys has been overshadowed by Benjamin H.D. Buchloh's damning 1980 essay "Beuys: The Twilight of the Idol," *Artforum* 5, no.18, 35-43. Here, Beuys' assumption of the identity of a shaman and healer is seen as an obfuscation of German post-World War II guilt. For a complication of Beuys' complex play with totalitarian power, see Jan Verwoert's essay in Issue no.1 of this journal.

8
Both Blanchot, and Gilles Deleuze (in dialogue with Claire Parnet) stress the work of conversation as the avoidance of judgment. See especially p.81 of Blanchot's *Infinite Conversation* where he notes that "we know, first of all, that there is almost no sort of equality in our societies. (It suffices, in whatever regime, to have heard the 'dialogue' between a man presumed innocent and the magistrate who questions him to know what this equality of speech means when it is based upon an inequality of culture, condition, power, and fortune. But each of us, and at every moment, either is or finds himself in the presence of a judge. All speech is a word of command, of terror, of seduction, of resentment, flattery, or aggression; all speech is violence – and to pretend to ignore this in claiming to dialogue is to add liberal hypocrisy to the dialectical optimism according to which war is no more than another form of dialogue." Deleuze's attempt to critique the continual presence of judgment in existing conversations, is made clearest through the folksy lyrics of Bob Dylan: "And while you're busy prosecutin' / we'll be busy whistlin' / cleanin' up the courtroom / sweepin' sweepin' / listenin' listenin'..." – a set of attitudes that could be named neutral, especially the space of acute listening. See Gilles Deleuze and Claire Parnet, "A Conversation. What is it? What is it for?" in *Dialogues II* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2002), 1-35.

9
The most notable addition would have to be *I Like America and America Likes Me* (1974) wherein the artist shared the space of Galerie Réné Block in New York with a young coyote for the duration of three days. This time, as the film of the performance attests, the animal-other was very lively and unpredictable. And for all the black-and-white seriousness of the footage, and the heavy symbolism that has been rehearsed around the work (the coyote purportedly stands in for Native Americans), I cannot help but think of the chasm between the artist and the animal as that infinite expanse which stretches under the paws of Wyle E. Coyote, hanging at the edge of a cliff, before he plunges to become a puff of Nevada sand. Why not find some humor in Beuys' work, misread it, laugh out loud and bare our teeth like beasts?