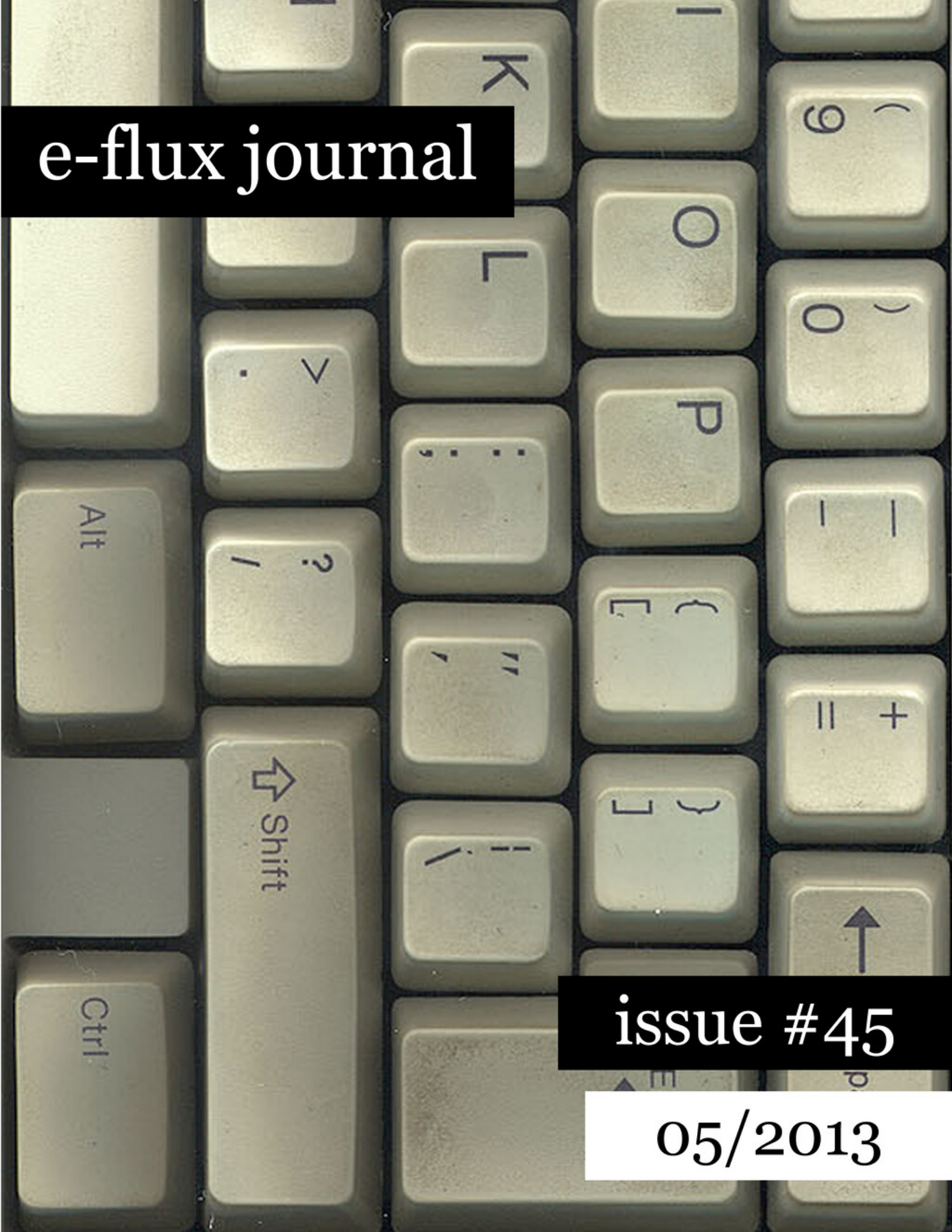
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Editors

Editorial—"Language and Internet"

In April, Mark Epstein from the Cooper Union Board of Trustees announced the end of fully subsidized education across the college's art, engineering, and architecture schools. It was a closing chapter in a ferocious battle in the college since it announced its insolvency in 2011. But it may be the beginning of something else.

The details are too complex to fully describe here. On the one hand, a shortfall in Cooper's endowment became unsustainable following the market crash of 2007–2008. An extravagant and badly timed building project around the same time compounded the problem. Subsidizing a free art school costs money, and the school simply did not have it. But in his address to the Cooper community, Epstein's brutal pragmatism inadvertently described a much larger problem.

As we saw with the absurd closing of Middlesex University's philosophy department in 2010, the logic is deceptively clear: if you want it, you have to pay for it. But the real blow in Epstein's remarks wasn't to be found in his numbers, but in the total evacuation of any idea of why a school should be free in the first place, as a principle and a right, and as the primary means of leveling class differences in society. How could that have gone missing from an address by the school's very own trustees?

Let's try to look at this another way—and maybe we can even take Epstein's pragmatism at its word. The big hit to Cooper's endowment came from the market crash. Essentially, the subsidies to operating costs and tuition had been placed in a number of risky investments and managed assets, and these lost a staggering 14% of their value without ever recovering. So even if we are to take the trustees' argument seriously—that the crisis is a purely fiscal one—then we must also recognize that the markets themselves are in the midst of their own financial, and even existential, crisis. And Cooper Union's solution—to adopt austerity measures at the expense of the college's own mission, thus liquidating support for generations of young artists—is to miss a crucial, and even quite interesting, aspect of what the financial crisis has revealed about how money and markets actually work.

As the role of the state in ensuring the value of currency has grown weaker over the past few decades, markets have increasingly assumed the qualities of language, of a "system of signs in which the only essential thing is the union of meanings" (Saussure). The other language economy is of course the internet, where it was thought that the immaterial qualities of language would evade limits in supply and demand. But now for some reason, this promise reverses. As language becomes more free, everything else becomes incredibly expensive. This has made language, and the internet with it, a class battleground now more than ever, because it represents access to both knowledge and capital simultaneously.

Market collapses have only made it more clear that the

money system follows a recursive structure where value is not absolutely backed but mutually reinforced. And for those whose livelihoods depend on the integrity of the financial system, or even the state for that matter, this has produced a deep existential crisis. How can we be governed by recursive logics and swells of belief and disbelief, by speech acts and depressive episodes? Could my fortunes be pegged to nothing more than just this? Artists will tell you: of course. Because that is how the art system has always functioned. It has always been pegged to language.

The students demonstrating at Cooper Union understand exactly this. And this is why the cost-benefit ratios of Mark Epstein and the trustees sound so alien. Furthermore, when the language of financial markets suffers, why should art education be subordinated to a logic of capital that is not only itself at risk, but also not backed by an idea? Cooper Union can produce its own capital, and the students know this. The language that backs it is the thing to be developed.

—Julieta Aranda, Brian Kuan Wood, Anton Vidokle

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

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Hito Steyerl

International Disco Latin

Last year, Triple Canopy *published Alix Rule and David Levine's "International Art English."*[1] *As a broad critique of globalized artspeak semantics, the essay has since sparked many debates around the exaggerated claims and imprecise promotional language of contemporary art. In this issue of* e-flux journal *, Martha Rosler and Hito Steyerl each respond to Rule and Levine's essay.*

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Let's start with something else. Ever heard of the English Disco Lovers? A fantastic online project trying to outgun (or rather outlove) their acronym twin—the racist English Defence League, also abbreviated as "EDL"—on Facebook and Twitter. For this they use the bilingual slogan "Unus Mundas, Una Gens, Unus Disco (One World, One Race, One Disco)." The English Disco Lovers' name is, of course, a deliberate misreading of the original, a successfully failed copy coming into being via translation.

Likewise in the case of many exhibition press releases—or so Alix Rule and David Levine claim in their widely read essay "International Art English."[2] International Art English, or "IAE," is their name for the decisively amateurish English language used in contemporary art press releases. In order to investigate IAE, Rule and Levine undertake a statistical inquiry into a set of such texts distributed by e-flux.[3] They conclude that the texts are written in a skewed English full of grandiose and empty jargon often carelessly ripped from mistranslations of continental philosophy.

So far so good. But what are they actually looking at? In the unstated hierarchies of publishing, press releases barely even make it to the bottom. They have the lifespan of a fruit fly and the farsightedness of a grocery list. Armies of these hastily aggregated, briefly circulated, poorly phrased missives constantly vie for attention in our clogged inboxes. Typically written by overworked and underpaid assistants and interns across the world, the press release's pompous prose contrasts most acutely with the lowly status of its authors. Press releases are the art world's equivalent of digital spam, vehicles for serial name-dropping and para-deconstructive waxing, in close competition with penis enlargement advertisements. And while they may well constitute the bulk of art writing, they are also its most destitute strata, both in form and in content. It is thus an interesting choice to focus on this as a sampling of art-speak, because it is not exactly representative. Meanwhile, authoritative high-end art writing is respectfully left to keep pontificating behind MIT Press paywalls.[4]

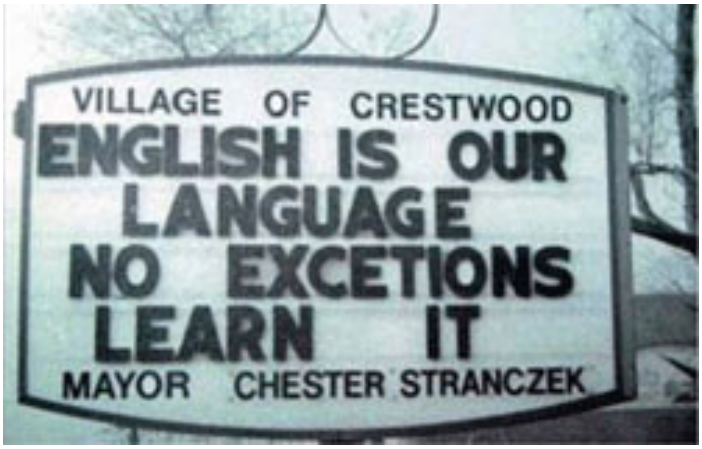
So what is the language used in the sample examined by

Mladen Stilinović, An Artist Who Cannot Speak English Is No Artist, 1992.

Rule and Levine? As the authors incontrovertibly prove, it is incorrect English. This is shown by statistically comparing press releases against the British National Corpus (BNC), a database of British English usage. Unsurprisingly, this exposes the deviant nature of IAE, which derives, the authors argue, from copious foreign—mainly Latin—elements, leftovers from decades of mistranslated continental art theory. This creates a bastardized language that Rule and Levine compare to pornography: "we know it when we see it." So, on the one hand, there is the BNC usage, or normal English. On the other, there is IAE, deviant and pornographic. Oh, and alienating too.

But who is it that is willingly writing porn here? According to Rule and Levine, IAE is, or might be, spoken by an anonymous art student in Skopje, at the Proyecto de Arte Contemporáneo Murcia in Spain, by Tania Bruguera, and by interns at the Chinese Ministry of Culture.[5] At this point I cannot help but ask: Why should an art student in Skopje—or anyone else for that matter—conform to the British National Corpus? Why should anyone use English words with the same frequency and statistical distribution as the BNC? The only possible reason is that the authors assume that the BNC is the unspoken measure of what English is supposed to be: it is standard English, the norm. And this norm is to be staunchly defended around the world.

As Mladen Stilinović told us a long time ago: an artist who cannot speak English is not an artist.[6] This is now extended to gallery interns, curatorial graduate students, and copywriters. And even within our beloved and seemingly global art world, there is a Standard English Defence League at work, and the BNC is its unspoken benchmark. Its norms are not only defined by grammar and spelling, but also by an extremely narrow view of "incorrect English." As Aileen Derieg, one of the best



translators of contemporary political theory, has beautifully argued: "incorrect English" is anything "not phrased in the simplest, shallowest terms, and the person reading it can't be bothered to make an effort to understand anything they don't already know."[7]

In my experience, "correct" English writing is supposed to be as plain and commonsensical as possible—and, unbelievably, people regard this not as boring, but as a virtue. The climax of "correct" English art writing is the standard contemporary art review, which is much too afraid to say anything and often contents itself with rewriting press releases in compliance with BNC norms. However, the main official rule for standard English art writing is, in my own unsystematic statistical analysis: never offend anyone more powerful than yourself. This rule is followed perfectly in the IAE essay, which ridicules the fictive Balkan art student who aggregates hapless bits of jargon in the hopes of attracting interest from curators. Indeed, this probably happens every day. But it's such a cheap shot.

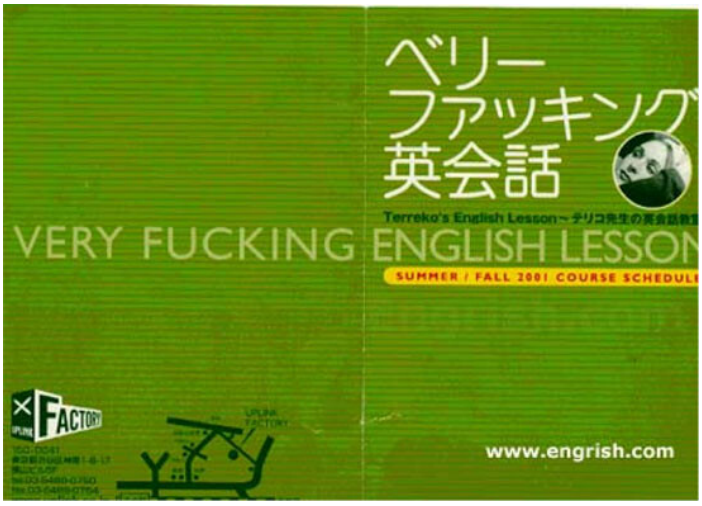
This is not to say that one shouldn't constantly make fun of contemporary art worlds and their preposterous taste, their pretentious jargons and portentous hipsterisms. The art world (if such a thing even exists) harbors a long tradition of terrific self-serving sarcasm. But satire as one of the traditional tools of enlightenment is not only defined by making fun. It gains its punch from *who* is being made fun of.

But Voltairean satire is mostly too risky. We are indeed lacking authors attacking or even describing, in any language, the art world's jargon-veiled money laundering and post-democratic Ponzi schemes. Not many people dare talk about post-mass-murder, gentrification-driven art booms in, for example, Turkey or Sri Lanka. I certainly wouldn't mind a lot of statistical inquiry into these developments, whether in IAE or Kurdish, satirical or serious.

But this is not Rule and Levine's concern. Instead, they manage to prove beyond a statistical doubt that IAE is deviant English. Fair enough, but so what? And furthermore, doesn't this verdict underestimate the sheer wildness at work in the creation of new lingos? Alex Alberro has demonstrated that advertising and promotion crucially created a context for much early conceptual art in the 1960s.[8] And today, the aggregate status of digitally circulated data is wonderfully echoed in many so-called post-internet practices that congenially mash up online commerce tools and itinerant JPEGs using (or abusing) basic InDesign wrecking skills, creating fantastic crashes of accelerated data sets within wacky circulation orbits. The intricacies, undeniable fallacies, and joys of digital dispersion and circulation are not, however, Rule and Levine's focus. Nor are the politics of translation and language. Their aim is to identify non-standard English (or patronizingly praise it as involuntary poetry). But we should not underestimate their analysis as just a nativist disdain for rambling foreigners.

Jakup Ferri, *An Artist Who Cannot Speak English is No Artist*, 2003. Single channel video.

In an admirable essay, Mostafa Heddaya has pointed out the undeniable complicity of IAE art jargon with political oppression in a multipolar art world where contemporary art has become a must-have accessory for tyrants and oligarchs.[9] By highlighting the use of IAE to obfuscate and obscure massive exploitation—such as the contested construction by New York University and the Guggenheim of complexes on Saadiyat Island in Abu Dhabi—Heddaya makes an extremely important intervention in the debate.[10] Whatever comes into the world through the global production and dispersion of contemporary art is dripping from head to toe, from every pore, with blood and dirt, to quote Karl Marx, another forerunner of IAE. This certainly includes many instances of IAE, whose spread is fueled, though by no means monopolized, by neo-feudal, ultraconservative, and authoritarian contemporary art rackets. IAE is not only the language of interns and non-native English speakers. It is also a side effect of a renewed primitive accumulation operating worldwide by means of art. IAE is an accurate expression of social and class tensions around language and circulation within today's art worlds and markets: a site of conflict, struggle, contestation, and often invisible and gendered labor. As such, it supports oppression and exploitation. It legitimizes the use of contemporary art by the 1%. But much like capitalism as such, it also enables a class and geographical mobility whose restrictions are often blatantly defied by its users. It creates a digital lingua franca, and through its glitches, it starts to show the outlines of future publics that extend beyond preformatted geographical and class templates. IAE can also be used to temporarily expose some of the most glaring aspects of contemporary art's dubious financial involvements to a public beyond the confines of (often unsympathetic) national forums. After all, IAE is *also* a language of dissidents, migrants, and renegades.



Again, none of this is of interest to Rule and Levine. Fair enough. I doubt political economy matters much in the BNC. But their essay perfectly expresses the backside of Heddaya's argument. Because, as Rule and Levine correctly state, after IAE has become too global to intimidate anyone, the future lies in a return to conventional highbrow English. And indeed, this is not a distant future, but the present, as evidenced by a massive and growing academic industry monetizing and monopolizing accepted uses of English. UK and US corporate academia has one major advantage over the international education market: the ability to offer (and police) proper English skills.

No gallery in Salvador da Bahia, no project space in Cairo, no institution in Zagreb can opt out of the English language. And language is and has always been a tool of Empire. For a native speaker, English is a resource, a guarantee of universal access to employment in countless places around the globe. Art institutions, universities, colleges, festivals, biennales, publications, and galleries will usually have American and British native speakers on their staff. Clearly, as with any other resource, access needs to be restricted in order to protect and perpetuate privilege. Interns and assistants the world over must be told that their domestic—and most likely public—education simply won't do. The only way to shake off the shackles of your insufferable foreign origins is to attend Columbia or Cornell, where you might learn to speak impeccable English—untainted by any foreign accent or non-native syntax. And after a couple of graduate programs where you pay $34,740 annually for tuition, you just might be able to find yet another internship.[11]

But here is my point: chances are you will be getting this education on Saadiyat Island, where NYU is setting up a campus, whose allure for paying customers resides in its ability to teach certified English to non-native speakers. In relation to Heddaya's argument, Frank Gehry's fortress will be paid for not only by exploiting Asian workers, but also by selling "correct" English writing skills.

Or you might pay for this kind of education in Berlin, where UK and US educational franchises, charging students seventeen thousand dollars a year to learn proper English, have slowly started competing with the city's own admittedly lousy, inadequate, and provincial free art schools.[12] Or you might pay for such an education in countless already existing franchises in China, where oppressive art speech will soon be delivered in pristine BNC English. Old imperial privilege nestles quite comfortably behind deconstructive oligarchic facades, and the policing of "correct" English is the backside of IAE-facilitated neo-feudalism. Such education will leave you indebted, because if you don't pawn or gamble your future on acquiring this skill, you will be shamed out of the market for unpaid internships just because you aggregated some critical theory that monolingual US-professors translated wrongly decades ago. For the art student from Skopje, it's no longer "publish or perish." It's "pay or perish"!

That's why I couldn't care less when someone "unfolds his ideas," or engages in "questioning," or in "collecting models of contemporary realities." Not everyone is lucky enough, or wealthy enough, to spend years in private higher education. Convoluted as their wordsmithing may be, press releases convey the sincere and often agonizing attempt by wannabe predators to tackle a T. rex. And as Ana Teixeira Pinto has said: nothing truly important can be said without wreaking havoc on the rules of grammar.

Granted, IAE in its present state is rarely bold enough to do this. It hasn't gone far enough on any level. One reason is perhaps that it took its ripping off of Latin (and other languages) too seriously. IAE has clung to preposterous claims of erudition and has awed generations of art students into dozing through Critical Studies seminars—even though its status as aggregate spam is much more interesting.[13] So we—the anonymous crowd of people (which includes myself) sustaining and actually living this language—might want to alienate that language even further, make it more foreign, and decisively cut its

ties to any imaginary original.

If IAE is to go further, its pretenses to Latin origins need to be seriously glitched. And for a suggestion on how to do this, we need look no further than the EDL's ripped off slogan: Unus Mundas, Una Gens, Unus Disco (One World, One Race, One Disco). Let's ignore for a moment that the word "disco" could sound so foreign that Rule and Levine might sensibly suggest renaming it "platter playback shack." Because actually EDL's slogan is hardly composed of Latin at all. Rather, it's written in IDL: International Disco Latin. It is a queer Latin made by splashing mutant versions of gender across assumed nouns. It's a language that takes into account its digital dispersion, its composition and artifice.

This is the template for the language I would like to communicate in, a language that is not policed by formerly imperial, newly global corporations, nor by national statistics—a language that takes on and confronts issues of circulation, labor, and privilege (or at least manages to say something at all), a language that is not a luxury commodity nor a national birthright, but a gift, a theft, an excess or waste, made between Skopje and Saigon by interns and non-resident aliens on Emoji keyboards. To opt for International Disco Latin also means committing to a different form of learning, since disco also means "I learn," "I learn to know," "I become acquainted with"—preferably with music that includes heaps of accents. And for free. And in this language, I will always prefer anus over bonus, oral over moral, Satin over Latin, shag over shack. You're welcome to call this pornographic, discographic, alienating, or simply weird and foreign. But I suggest: Let's take a very fucking English lesson!

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Hito Steyerl is a filmmaker and writer. She teaches New Media Art at University of Arts Berlin and has recently participated in Documenta 12, Shanghai Biennial, and Rotterdam Film Festival.

1
Triple Canopy 16 (July 2012). See http://canopycanopycanopy.com/16/international_art_english .

2
Alix Rule and David Levine, "International Art English," *Triple Canopy* 16 (2012). See http://canopycanopycanopy.com/16/international_art_english .

3
I have contributed extensively to *e-flux journal* in the past, thus losing any pretense to occupy any neutral and objective stance within the debate, and squarely positioning myself as a fully conscious coproducer of IAE spam.

4
See Taylor & Francis and other semi-monopolist pimps of publicly funded scholarly writing.

5
Tania Bruguera's transgression against statistically correct English is, according to Rule and Levine, the excessive use of the word "reality." Now, I am not surprised that "reality" doesn't show up very often in the BNC, since over the past few decades the UK has been more obsessed with "realty." However, to make the word "reality" a key term of a supposedly pornographic language is taking its denial a bit far.

6
Mladen Stilinovic, *An Artist Who Cannot Speak English Is No Artist* , 1994–6. Embroidery on banner.

7
In private conversation.

8
In Alexander Alberro, *Conceptual Art and the Politics of Publicity,* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2003). I am fast-forwarding here over an intriguing branch of scholarship that investigates translation within globalization. Some of the findings of this scholarship are available at http://translate.eipcp.net/ . The website's researchers and the practitioners of this scholarship include writers like Gayatri Spivak, Jon Solomon, Boris Buden, Rosi Braidotti, Antonella Corsani, and Stefan Nowotny, among many other equally notable thinkers. Their research deals with power, language, and neoliberal globalization, often using case studies, such as refugee struggles, or specific angles on historical decolonization. This scholarship highlights the role of minor, emerging, and submerged languages in contemporary political realities. Ah! There goes the r-word again. X-rate this footnote!

9
Mostafa Heddaya, "When Artspeak Masks Oppression," hyperallergic.com, March 6, 2013. See http://hyperallergic.com/66348/when-artspeak-masks-oppression/ .

10
See the GulfLabor public statement at http://gulflabor.wordpress.com/2013/01/07/update/ , and the Guggenheim's response at http://web.archive.org/web/20130119044226/https://www.theartnewspaper.com/articles/Guggenheim-responds-to-proposed-artist-boycott/23392 .

11
See, for instance https://www.e-flux.com/announcements/108849/art-criticism-amp-writing-mfa-now-accepting-applications-for-fall-2013/ .

12
This is my fault, sorry! Working in this system also enables me to partially disregard the rules of "correct" English writing, which full freelancers might admittedly have to put up with to stay in the market.

13
Thanks to Joshua Decter, Richard Frater, Janus Hom, Martyn Reynolds, Christoph Schäfer, Zoran Terzic, and others for extensively debating this issue in private conversation with me. Nina Power helpfully suggested to rename artspeak as "bollocks," with which I entirely agree, as in "International Disco Bollocks."

Last year, Triple Canopy *published Alix Rule and David Levine's "International Art English."*[1] *As a broad critique of globalized artspeak semantics, the essay has since sparked many debates around the exaggerated claims and imprecise promotional language of contemporary art. In this issue of* e-flux journal, *Martha Rosler and Hito Steyerl each respond to Rule and Levine's essay.*

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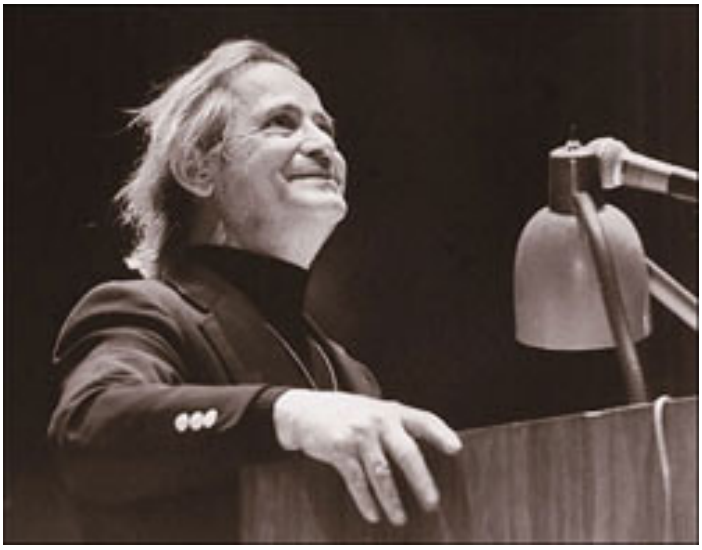
> If one examines Lacanist obscurity, one is faced with a choice: either reject capitalist Marxism or conclude that the significance of the poet is social comment. However, if neodialectic cultural theory holds, we have to choose between subdialectic narrative and capitalist deappropriation. Marx suggests the use of the precultural paradigm of discourse to challenge class divisions.[2]

Martha Rosler

English and All That

In 1974, Thomas Pynchon sent Irwin Corey to Lincoln Center to accept the National Book Award citation for Pynchon's novel *Gravity's Rainbow*. Corey was a nationally known comic monologist billed as Professor Irwin Corey, the World's Greatest Expert. He regularly delighted corporate audiences with double-talk speeches couched in the linguistic codes of their own fields of expertise. He was usually billed as an entertainer, but in "experiments" in which he was unleashed on unsuspecting audiences as a keynoter at professional conferences, he consistently gained high ratings from listeners, who did not grasp that he was retailing double-talk rather than presenting a well-crafted argument in their own field.[3]

I was prompted to write the present article by a request to participate in a public conversation addressing Alix Rule and David Levine's article "International Art English," published in *Triple Canopy*. I was unable to participate but wound up jotting down some notes that led to this effort; my response is meant as complementary to Hito Steyerl's essay, which takes a very different tack. While I reserve the right to consider the original article as an elaborate joke, one hardly needs to be reminded that jokes are often a cover for hostility, and the more elaborate the joke, the more powerful the hostility may be. Furthermore, jokes are often intended to forge an alliance between the teller and the listener, at the expense of the butt of the joke. It's one thing to critique double-talk as gobbledygook, a meaningless jumble of memes and phrases. It's another to shine a negative spotlight on the word salad as a way of proving that theoretical discourse, or the very enterprise of theory, is a sham and a shame, a foreign import, or



Professor Irwin Corey the "world's foremost authority," accepts a National Book Award for Thomas Pynchon, 1974.

An immigrant makes breakfast, aided by instructional ESL materials from the YMCA, 1918.

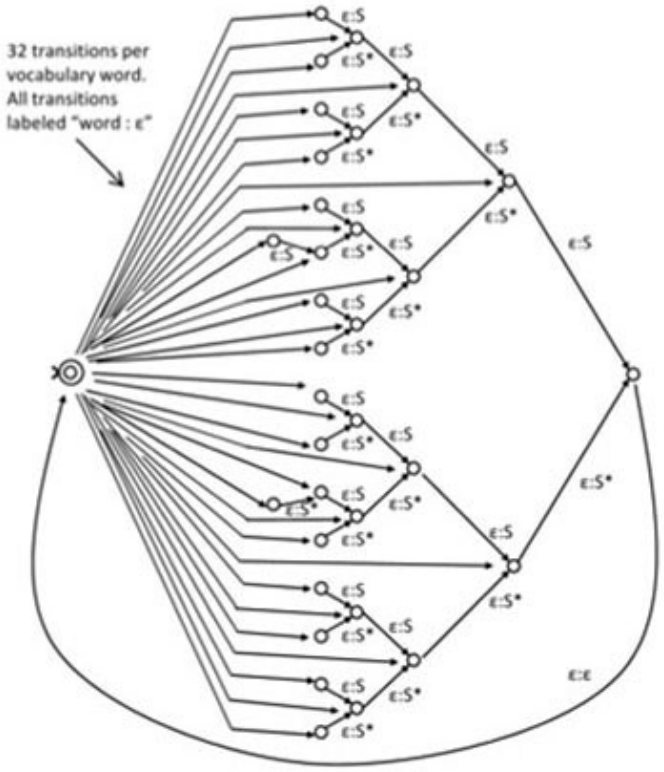
perhaps simply a fallen discourse.

At the turn of the twentieth century, millions of Europeans immigrating to the US were subjected, along with their children, to "Americanization," which rested on learning English, and with it the rationalized work discipline and obedience of office, factory, and retail workplaces, all of it orchestrated and presided over by experts. Management culture, still in its infancy, was an integral element of turn-of-the-twentieth-century industry, leading to the reworking of systems of shop-floor control such as obtained in the steel industry, and the intrusion of "efficiency experts" who came up with motion- and time-management systems, from time cards to rationalized movement to output demands. There developed one understanding of the English language as a privileged, historically rich, and expressive vehicle[4] but also another understanding, a twin-set: an instrumentalized language of control and its corollary language of simplified commands.

Expert culture and its workplace effects have been pilloried, parodied, and burlesqued in many artworks, including Chaplin's *Modern Times,* Kingsley Amis's *I'm All Right Jack*, *Cheaper By the Dozen* (a friendly, comic look at the home life of motion-study experts Frank and Lillian Gilbreth and their twelve children, with the movie based on the book by a few of the children), *Spotswood* (or, *The Efficiency Expert*) , and *Desk Set* (where the villain is a computer, as it is in *2001: A Space Odyssey*). In films like *Die Blaue Engel* and *His Girl Friday*, the professorial expert or his jargon is the target, as it is much earlier in the ridiculous figures of Hamlet's Polonius, Voltaire's Dr. Pangloss, the Houyhnhnms encountered by Gulliver—and surely somewhere in the Greek and Roman plays and in every other culture with hierarchies, stratifications, and so forth, which breed their own discourses of power and jargons of access in exercising control over the workforce, whether slaves, contract workers, piece workers, assembly-line workers, service workers, or wage slaves. If Professor Irwin Corey (a lifelong radical who appeared at Liberty/Zuccotti Park in 2011, at age 97, to cheer on Occupy Wall Street) is a representative symbolic figure of that understanding of discourses of power, Reggie Watts (b. 1972), fusing multilingual double-talk with scat singing and musical riffs, may be the best or at least the most prodigious contemporary successor.[5] Such parodic performances will not vanish soon; the discursive codes of management and the pretentious patter of the hypereducated are robust. One is always trying to get ahead of them, and those subjected to them can mock them with a burlesque flourish or with the scathing mimicry of the outraged. Conversely, the working stiff who cannot make the grade is a perennial object of ridicule, gentle or otherwise; cases in point: Homer Simpson and his spiritual forebear, the aircraft-wing riveter Chester A. Riley.[6] In this they join those others outside the wage scale, that is women, old people, and children.

The universe of consumption provides a host of areas in which specialized language has great appeal. Nothing shows the power of "expertise" more than organized sports, and men (primarily), young and old, learn to parse not only the precise rules but also the quantified actions and technical descriptions of sports, with their recollections of military formations. For the more pacific-minded, there is the language of film and television production, recently augmented by computer-derived jargons.

Illustration from "A Voyage To The Country Of The Houyhnhnm" in Jonathan Swift's Gulliver's Travels.



A machine for analyzing poetry, from "Automatic Analysis of Rhythmic Poetry with Applications to Generation and Translation," by E. Greene, T. Bodrumlu, and K. Knight. Proceedings of the 2010 conference on "Empirical Methods in Natural Language Processing" (2010).

Migration of restricted discourses signifying expert engagement, however, requires more than a mastery of linguistic tropes; to avoid sounding ridiculous, one must learn when, where, and whether to deploy the terminology. Imitation, by cliché the sincerest form of flattery, may produce tortured language that unintentionally exposes one's shortcomings. People aiming to sound learned or informed are often not very good at their highfalutin borrowings.

There are also those among the educated who hope to advance professionally by analyzing other disciplines' inelegant linguistic peccadillos. Efforts to quantify linguistic patterns are surely deserving of suspicion when not done by law enforcement trying to track down a note-writing desperado or in cryptanalysis to decode a cipher, or in pursuit of another forensic usage, such as attempting to ascertain authorship.

I've tried one of these. When I was an undergraduate at Brooklyn College, I was persuaded by my sociology tutor to perform a statistical analysis of a poem[7]; I chose the canonical *Tintern Abbey* by Wordsworth. I can't recall the parameters of the analysis, but both my English tutor and I were embarrassed by the barrenness of the results. The parsing of active/passive and other statistically available measures did not lead me terribly far down the road of "understanding" romantic poetry.

Many years later, in early 2003, I was living in Stockholm and listening to a radio feed of National Public Radio, the American public radio service; the hosts of *All Things Considered* had asked a Berkeley linguistics professor to expatiate on what we could learn from noting who called the country we had just invaded *Eye-rack* and who pronounced its name *EErock*. "Wrong question!" I wanted to yell at the radio. Once again, I felt embarrassed by the inappropriate approach to matters linguistic, and this time it felt like a public shaming: this was what was broadcast to the world about the approach of "my fellow Americans" to matters of invasion and destruction.[8]

In both these instances, the grabbing hold of linguistic tropes did not even manage to grasp the narrative. Instead, it amounted to a sleight of mind, a diversionary trick without a meaningful outcome. With respect to my own low-level Wordsworth analysis, it's possible that,

thanks to the scientism of the day, a statistical take might have seemed to give the analyst a jump on the messy contingency of *reading*, especially in contrast to the belletrist or New Criticism–based study of holy secular English literature in that pre-postmodern moment.[9] With respect to the *Eye-rack /EErock* divide, that might tell us a little about those who were either reporting on, reacting to, or fighting the war (a back door to a class analysis, perhaps), but this was no-news passing as news, and I was upset at the nice professor who had been persuaded to tell us about it in a serious tone of voice. Neither linguistic geography nor social-class usage would equip us to learn much about the real-world exigent politics. In both cases, fixing on words in a sanitized manner rendered them peripheral rather than central to illuminating either a question of poetry or one of a gigantic, ongoing international war crime.

In the early 1970s, we experienced a moment much like the present one, in which the middle class discovers it really, really loves food, expensive food that helps its eaters feel superior to lesser eaters the way saying *EErock* can make you feel superior to those who say *Eye-rack.* Back then, this food was not mere food but *cuisine*, the product of artistry and imagination. It smacked of magic even more than skill and might be considered virtuous in its relation both to producers and to the earth, as well as providing health-giving maintenance for one's precious bodily temple.[10]

We used to joke that every adjective added to a dish on a chain-restaurant menu added another dollar to its cost. The temptation to pile on the adjectives persists. Here's a restrained example from the current menu of the Denny's in Cambridge, Maryland:

> THREE-DIP & CHIPS
> Three delicious flavors—mild salsa, queso con carne and warm, creamy spinach artichoke. Served with crispy tortilla chips.

A somewhat more up-market café lists "Grass-fed organic bison with sautéed mushrooms and melted Swiss on a home-baked roll."

Fascinated by the visual and verbal representations of food and its cultural roles, in 1974, as part of a multi-course performance/installation work based on the semiotics of the menu and the dish,[11] I and a male partner alternated in reciting a list of adjectives for food drawn from aspirational cookbooks and articles: ambrosial, aromatic, awe-inspiring, choice, croquant, dainty, dazzling, delectable, dreamy, dulcet, divine, epicurean, exquisite, and so forth. The list was long. Some of its less recherché words can today be found online; one blog writer commented: "I taught a class on Hotel and Restaurant

Dinner menu for Brooklyn restaurant Five Leaves.

English a little over a year ago at my college and created a list of food descriptors for a Hotel and Restaurant ESL class." We'll get to ESL in a moment.

Descriptive terms and phrases are the coin of the realm for copywriters, especially at demotic levels. Sniffing after the trail of press-release copy in the search for a diagnosis of a perceived art-world malady seems to misconstrue what a press release is and what it is designed to do or to be. It hardly needs to be said that a press release is a long-form piece of advertising copy, with embedded keywords. This is such a commonsensical understanding of linguistic folderol that moving the subject to the art-world press release impels the writers of the article under dissection here to try to reassure us, their readers, that what they are doing is not in fact merely a silly game—when it may very well be merely a silly game (cf. Irwin Corey).[12]

Our diagnosticians note but may not quite understand that global English is a necessarily simplified language, most useful for communicating simple ideas and instructions. Below the guild secrecy of restricted linguistic codes is the lexicon I referred to earlier, the one tailored to develop the subject position of controlled employees and others.[13] A reduced vocabulary is used to communicate instructions, and nowadays these instructions are likely to be in English. No surprise that in the present conjuncture, a simplified international English has been developed as an instrumentalized language meant to enable non-native speakers or relatively uneducated or even just young people to understand and perhaps follow simple instructions.

On the website Simplified English: Key to Successful Internationalization, we find the following:

> As usability professionals [*sic*] we know that making text understandable is very challenging, especially in an international environment. Simplified English can help. It was developed to facilitate the use of maintenance manuals by non-native speakers of English. Aerospace manufacturers are required to write aircraft maintenance documentation in

Simplified English which:

reduces ambiguity,
speeds reading,
greatly improves understanding for people whose first language is not English,
makes translation cheaper, easier and allows automated translation.

How it works:

It starts with a lexicon of approved words,
Each word can only be used as the part of speech as defined:
"close" is a verb, so: "Close the door" is correct, "do not go close to the landing gear" is wrong, "do not go near the landing gear" is acceptable.

Words can only be used with the approved meaning: "Follow" means to come after, so: "the puppy follows the adult," is correct, "follow the safety rules" is wrong, "obey the safety rules" is acceptable.[14]

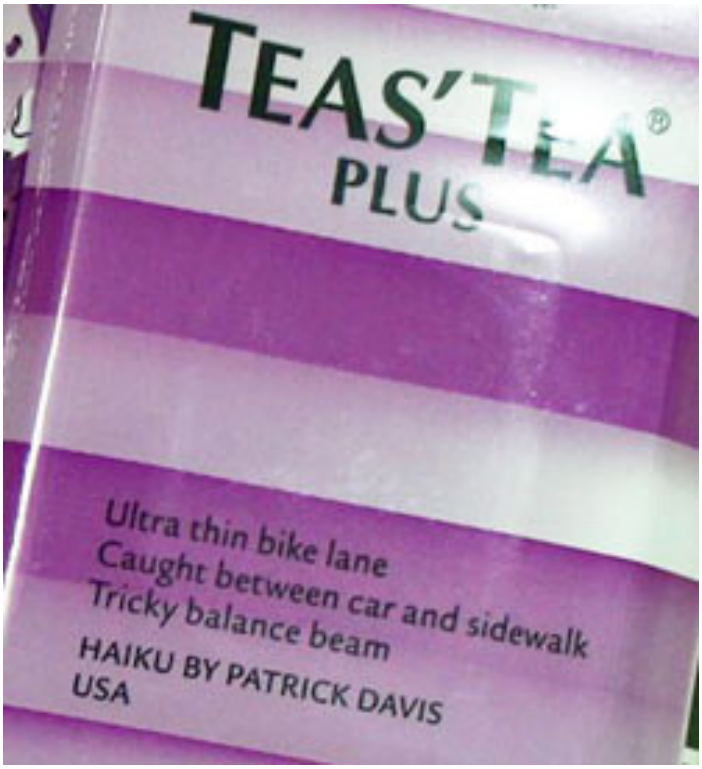
The site produces the following transformation of a paragraph:

Place the water heater in a clean, dry location as near as practical to the area of greatest heated water demand. Long uninsulated hot water lines can waste energy and water. Clearance for accessibility to permit inspection and servicing such as removing heating elements or checking controls must be provided.

Put the water heater in a clean, dry location near the area where you use the most hot water. If the hot water lines are long and they do not have insulation, you will use too much energy and water. Make sure you have access to the heating elements and the controls for inspection and servicing.

Applying the Flesch-Kincaid Reading Ease score, we find the first selection scored thirty-four out of one hundred, with one hundred being most readable (readability increases as the numbers rise).[15] On the Flesch-Kincaid grade-level index, the original paragraph drew a grade level of thirteen. Rewritten, the paragraph's reading-ease score had risen to fifty-five, and its grade level had dropped to ten.

The poetics of instruction manuals reside mostly in the boldly non-Standard imported instructions such as those found in quite a few Asian-manufactured goods. Look up "Chinglish" on Wikipedia and you will find a distinction between "instrumental" and "ornamental"; in the latter



Haiku on a tea bottle.

instance, an almost randomly selected English word put in adjectival position will elevate the worth of a common item, much as restaurants use *smooth* and *crispy* or *braised* or *hand-picked* to raise the status and price of a common-enough menu item (or more appositely, the way *finger-lickin'* or *lip-smackin'* help propel the hordes to the drive-through fast-food window). The fetishistic use of word tokens as keywords is so widely recognized that websites abound that offer "postmodernism generators" and other triplet combinations of recognizable jargon (adverb, adjective, noun).[16]

After guiding us through the putative sources of the international linguistic code as used in generally nonprofessionally written press releases for small art venues, the article under discussion here finally reveals to us that the reductive use of this residual vocabulary of Continental theory is so *literally* uninformative that it amounts to an inadvertent poetry of sorts.

But ornamental language always strives for a poetics; as I've maintained, the language is meant not so much as a validation but as a way of signaling the elevated niche in the particular universe of discourse in which the writer hopes to position the work in question. (Even the *New York Times* has a blog devoted to the "Haiku of the Day" drawn from headlines and copy in the day's paper, and the definitively middlebrow public radio conglomerate WNYC runs promos featuring broadcasters cooing out endorsement "haikus" sent by donors. A hipster-oriented kefir company in New York prints a consumer haiku on its

Wall Street Institute promotional image.

cartons.) Haiku is claimed by the "creative class" as the "quick" equivalent of noncommodified production.

Perhaps these flights of fancy represent the underpaid, unspecialized copywriters' attempts to pull away from the clichés of the approved list and at the same time offer readers a tacit acknowledgment that the language, while space-filling, is neither particularly informative nor meaningful. The international language-instruction chain Wall Street English, while featuring the British Union Jack in its logo—a powerful symbol of imperial dominion and propriety above all—reminds you by its very name that the point is Wall Street, i.e., financial acumen; learning the English lingua franca their way will provide you with an entrée into the transnational world of money. If you consider the echoes of Continental philosophy to signal debased or fallen language, one wonders where else the writers of art ad copy would find their vocabulary of approbation. But what inevitably happens to the pidgins of a global argot—"Roman," I've often called our international global English—is that its users lose the poetics of a half-learned phrase as they are trained to professionalize and adopt the language of the proper social class of speakers, thereby losing the appeal of naive strivers, *Others* Who Fail. As a lieutenant class arises, its members, buckling down to the inevitable lessons of work discipline and consumer discipline, simply get better at writing the instruction booklet and the descriptive sales pitch aimed at keeping, in Pierre Bourdieu's phrase, "the market in symbolic goods" properly cordoned off and its discourses shielded from the speech of the street or even the market.

High-end venues, of course, do not need to pile on the descriptors; they don't have to try so hard. They don't even need to advertise on e-flux, when they can buy an ad in

Salt Crusted Beef Tenderloin Grilled in Cloth, from recipe blog Food 52.

Artforum or pay a critic to write an article of praise. They have established a reputation, and a rich clientele is not swayed by linguistic bling. To those folks, spending money comes easier, and designer words require no added emphasis.

To continue the culinary example, here's a brief selection from the renowned Four Seasons restaurant in Manhattan:

> **Paillard** of Beef chimichurri $55.00
> **Filet of Bison** foie gras, perigord black truffles $65.00
> **Three Lamb Chops** roasted barley-root vegetables $65.00
> **Ahi Burger** mango-red onion salsa $28.00
> **Sirloin Burger** onion-thyme relish $38.00

If someone wants to complain that the art market has so distorted the art world that all we have left in the wake of the death of critical engagement is the cannibalization of theory into a string of faux freshwater pearls, it would be better, I should think, to put together an article exploring that subject. This would be preferable to basing a critique on a statistical model, or worse, to comparing the sales pitches of hapless, underpaid, non-native English speakers to pornography. (A reminder here that for Kant, the faculty of taste saves us from the pornographic—roughly the desire to reach out and touch the object of aesthetic representation. Taste has been resurrected, in what might be called the biopolitical era, as the individual's signature internal method of discerning the good amidst the field of the bad. I idly speculate that the article's authors wish us to find lurking under debased copy its users' inferior taste because their writing flows from an inauthentic borrowed source.)

If, on the other hand, you want to go after international uses of English, here's a thought: it appears that the former English colonies in which English is the primary language and in which the art world lacks a significant indigenous market and in which *national* (as opposed to minority-discourse ethnic) identity politics will get you nowhere, are hoping to dupe people into a painful form of credentialism, persuading them that somehow obtaining a *doctorate* in studio art will make you a better, more employable and "showable" person—an international player. This amounts to teaching an up-sized version of Simplified Art Copywriting, which one can apply to oneself and one's projects.[17] In some places this mincing jargon will land you a curatorial job. But it doesn't hold a candle to some of the brain-swelling gibberish that young art historians and curators—graduates of the very best elite US universities who were also committed to Occupy Wall Street—occupied themselves with in emails and Facebook chains during the high moments of the movement in fall 2011, scholastic strings of reasoning so turgid they defied my ability to decipher their meaning or relevance. After a few go-rounds, I withdrew from the conversation I'd been invited to join; similarly, after the first month of receiving e-flux's announcements a decade or so ago, I opted out of the list.[18]

Paeans to the glory of the English language periodically circulate.[19] The spread of the language may be traceable to colonialism, to be sure, but richness seemed to be the underlying reason for its success, and various English pidgins are adduced to testify to its generative power. In other words, the story of English is an evangelical gospel. In this vein, pidgins and creoles develop spontaneously, and non-English speakers may enroll in Wall Street English lessons, buy Rosetta Stone language programs, or pursue other proprietary ways of learning English as a form of self-advancement or a traveler's luxury, but the teaching of English as a second language (ESL) is another way to frame methodologies for providing the peons, strivers, and aspirants with the linguistic competence to be functional and compliant.[20]

I find in the diagnosis of IAE a rigid formalism in which, in Jessica Mitford's terms, U and non-U[21] English signal the status not only of the writers but of the goods themselves, restricted to the delectation of the elite. If the still-inelegant users are to be mocked, one might as well mock the clerks in Bergdorf's and similar luxury stores who address the customers as *moddom* as they sweep the goods into and out of the buyer's sight. This deference is a condition of employment; without it you do not get through the door. Neither *October* nor the Frankfurt School nor e-flux is responsible for the invention, elevation, or promulgation of Simplified Art Copy and its universalizing usage as the entrée into the art world. It's structural! Trader's argot may never have been so widely disseminated, but it is merely symptomatic, a provisional accommodation, and it would be nice to see the malady itself placed at the heart of such a discussion.

Entrance of Bergdorf Goodman department store in New York.

What struck me most forcefully about the article was that it churned up enough interest among the chattering class to provoke some members to imagine that the mandarins have something at stake in linguistic ornaments, and that they themselves have something to defend. Given the attacks on the humanities and their funding, those in the art world (and the "human sciences," including sociology) would, one might think, be more circumspect about picking up some of the tools of the delegitimators, such as statistical analysis. But there are more aggressive "quant" challenges afoot. When Obama rolled out (I use the military metaphor advisedly) his BRAIN initiative—Brain Research through Advancing Innovative Neurotechnologies, or the Brain Activity Map Project—the intended result was not a positive effect on medical research alone. Half the government funding for this field comes from the Pentagon's Defense Advanced Research Projects Agency (DARPA), and part of that agency's rationale is the relatively unsubtle enhancement of

soldiers' performance on the battlefield, through the continued development of machine-brain interfaces.[22] Neural research is also an important element in the technicalization of "aesthetic" reception, including of literature, of which statistical analysis was an early variant.[23] The newer versions acknowledge the popularity of all things "neuro" (except "neurotic," a terminological/diagnostic remnant of the earlier, humanist approach to the mind). Semir Zeki, Professor of Neuroaesthetics at University College, London—the man who came up with the term "neuroaesthetics" and who has been given a one-million-pound grant to further his research on "the ways in which beauty and art are functions of the physiology of the brain"—has said: "art critics … may [feel threatened by my claim] that I know that most people will respond to the beauty of the human figure when it is painted in a particular way because of the way receptors are distributed," but it is "auction house directors who should be more fearful": "Imagine if … you had a priori knowledge of which paintings were actually objectively liked or disliked by people through scanning their reactions, as we may one day be able to do. Values could well change overnight."[24]

The effects extend beyond the prestige and funding of humanities departments, long a target of right-wingers, who see "theory" and critical studies as Marxist tinged and socially disruptive, as well they might. While Rule and Levine point the finger at *October* and theorists such as the Frankfurt School, so do those touting neuroanalysis and neuroesthetics, but with a good deal more scorn and malevolence. Neuroanalysis is also, like much linguistic and information-related research since at least the Sputnik moment, another arm of military-directed research.[25] By virtue of hype and funding, it has more appeal than the fusty old cogitations about "texts" and images, in part because we are in another scientistic cultural moment, once again driven in part by the needs of the military—and roundly supported by the pharmaceutical and educational testing industries. A relatively long-standing initiative in this regard came not from the Left-bashers and humanities-haters, but from the Marxist scholar Franco Moretti. Moretti, based at Stanford University, established the Center for the Study of the Novel in 2000 and, as a logical outgrowth, in 2010 cofounded the Stanford Literary Lab, which "discusses, designs, and pursues literary research of a digital and quantitative nature."[26] The Lab uses statistical analyses, but Moretti's aim is broader: to establish a sort of natural history of literary forms, using quantitative measures of large data sets, scientific hypotheses, and so on. The genealogy of efforts to bring scientific method to studies of literature is far too complex to explore here. Critics of Moretti's research have included others on the Left; Christopher Prendergast, for example, in 2005, while noting the importance of scientific methods of investigation to previous generations of Marxist scholars, suggested that Moretti's project amounted to a social Darwinism of the evolution of literary form, an impossible attempt at naturalization.[27]

In light of the movement toward other forms of quantification, the relatively simple statistical methods employed by Rule and Levine look somewhat benign, though no less antihumanist. Pillorying the qualitative methods, theoretical programs, and descriptive efforts pursued in nonscientific fields is often both necessary and useful. I will end, however, by offering a reminder that critiques and lofty-sounding parodies can be highly damaging when stealthily advanced to blow up a discourse. Samuel Beckett (in 1930) and many others in various fields, including art, have published bogus papers, mostly as malicious acts.[28]Often these are aimed at what is perceived as a threatening language promulgated by "the Left." But my final example, like that of Moretti's research, stems from the Left. It is a quotation from the fake analysis of the social construction of science submitted by physicist (and anti-deconstructionist) Alan Sokal to the journal *Social Text,* where it was duly published, while elsewhere it was simultaneously exposed as gibberish by Sokal himself.[29] Causing a huge international splash at the time, Sokal's article had at least a temporarily deleterious effect on the nascent field of cultural studies, especially when it hit the mainstream press, distracting attention from its areas of investigation and painting it as frivolous with the broadest of brushes.[30] Here we see a weak link, admittedly a noxious pastiche of what might be called "vocabularyism," confected to sink the entire enterprise by the postmodern moment's Irwin Corey. While junior Simplified Art Copy writers may be guilty of unwittingly assembling pretentious lofty verbal concatenations, that sad symptom hardly serves to discredit the entire field.

> [T]he content of any science is profoundly constrained by the language within which its discourses are formulated; and mainstream Western physical science has, since Galileo, been formulated in the language of mathematics. But *whose* mathematics? The question is a fundamental one, for, as Aronowitz has observed, "neither logic nor mathematics escapes the 'contamination' of the social." And as feminist thinkers have repeatedly pointed out, in the present culture this contamination is overwhelmingly capitalist, patriarchal and militaristic: "mathematics is portrayed as a woman whose nature desires to be the conquered Other." Thus, a liberatory science cannot be complete without a profound revision of the canon of mathematics. As yet no such emancipatory mathematics exists, and we can only speculate upon its eventual content. We can see hints of it in the multidimensional and nonlinear logic of fuzzy systems theory; but this approach is still heavily marked by its origins in the crisis of late-capitalist production relations. Catastrophe theory with its dialectical emphases on smoothness/discontinuity and metamorphosis/unfolding, will indubitably play a major role in the future mathematics; but much theoretical work remains to be done before this

approach can become a concrete tool of progressive political praxis.[31]

X

Martha Rosler is an artist who works with multiple media, including photography, sculpture, video, and installation. Her interests are centered on the public sphere and landscapes of everyday life—actual and virtual—especially as they affect women. Related projects focus on housing, on the one hand, and systems of transportation, on the other. She has long produced works on war and the "national security climate," connecting everyday experiences at home with the conduct of war abroad. Other works, from bus tours to sculptural recreations of architectural details, are excavations of history.

1
Triple Canopy 16 (July 2012). See http://canopycanopycanopy.com/16/international_art_english .

2
Generated by http://www.elsewhere.org/pomo/ .

3
To see a transcript of Corey's speech, visit https://midlandauthors.com/routines/ . I have no idea how the talk was received. In fact, there are many such examples of successful discursive hoaxes, in different forms; I return to this below.

4
On the study of this English, see Terry Eagleton, *Literary Theory* (Minneapolis, MN: Univ. of Minnesota Press, 1983).

5
Among other forms of linguistic improvisation, scat talking and scat singing are ages old. Scat singing was practiced in the modern era in the US by Jelly-Roll Morton and Al Jolson (see Wikipedia) and robustly during the Jazz Age by Cab Calloway, Louis Armstrong, the fabulous Ella Fitzgerald, Anita O'Day, Mel Tormé, Carmen MacRae, Betty Carter, and later by the "vocalese" trio Lambert, Hendricks & Ross, the Swingle Singers, and hosts of others; the rock 'n' roller Dion; and of course Bobby McFerrin, and some hip-hop artists. Between double-talk and scatting is poetry, from Gertrude Stein to the Language (or L=A=N=G=U=A=G=E) poets, and Edith Sitwell, Lord Buckley, and Captain Beefheart, but perhaps not including non-bardic monologuists from Jean Shepherd to David Antin to Spaulding Gray or the mellifluous nonsense poets such as Edward Lear or even Lewis Carroll.

6
And related old-timey television characters such as Ralph Kramden and more so his pal Ed Norton, Fred Flintstone, and the rube puppet Mortimer Snerd; by virtue of "allowing" us to mock them, they become fetishized.

7
I was in an experimental program at Brooklyn College, modeled on the British system, that incorporated a tutorial approach to higher education.

8
Clearly, I am ignoring the difference between grammatical and phonetic analyses here.

9
That is, in contrast to a personalized humanistic reading on the one hand, and to a formalist myopia on the other. A statistical study of Wordsworth's corpus rather than a single poem might have led to some insights about his work, but I am not persuaded. Sketch Engine, the online tool used by Rule and Levine, which they characterize as a "concordance generator," claims to work "at the intersection of corpus and computational linguistics"; in the case of IAE, the "corpus" was e-flux's online press releases. Even back in the 1960s, when I was performing my sophomoric analysis, statistical linguistic analysis was meant not as a literary tool exactly, but as a precursor to computerized machine translation and, like almost all government-funded linguistic research, including that of Noam Chomsky, was aiming for an eventual military/AI application. Since then, a whole universe of linguistic modeling has opened up.

10
Something like the ads in Whole Foods, a supermarket chain whose very name ripples out from the *Whole Earth Catalog* of hippie days .

11
A Gourmet Experience, 1974.

12
Rule and Levine, joking or not, are hardly sophisticated linguistic commentators. They attack the generative process of nominalization, but contemporary English is rife with strange nominalizations, so much so that the *New York Times Sunday Book Review* , in a recent article on the process, ridicules, among other coinage, the neologistic *fail* (for fa ilure) and *sequester* (for sequestr ation). (See Henry Hitchings, "Those Irritating Verbs-as-Nouns," March 30, 2013, and his subsequent "The Dark Side of Verbs-as-Nouns," April 5, 2013; the *Times* has addre ssed this issue repeatedly over recent years, but we should remember that journalism amuses itself by pillorying academe.) Our writers also inexplicably fail to recognize the increasing prominence of the word *space* in many disciplines, including psychology and its pop versions, since the 1960s. In that vein, one might consider the importance to many contemporary theories of the *privileging of space over time* (cf. Henri Lefebvre, David Harvey, and others) in contemporary capitalism. Thus we may expect philosophically inflected corpora to have more terms relating to *spatiality* than to *temporality.* Rule and Levine also note the prevalence of dependent clauses, particularly as sentence openers, but what academicized writing fails to employ these? Why else is Microsoft Word always beseeching us to abandon their use, along with high-flown padding, which is also attacked by Rule and Levine? Finally, their comments on the word *text* are close to unintelligible.

13
The military is well-known for its idiosyncratic language of euphemistic substitutions ("collateral damage , enhanced in terrogation, targeted killing"), the most outrageous of which is the renaming of the War Department as the Defense Department; see also Godard's *Alphaville* for the poetics of philosophical and emotional impoverishment abetted by selective lexical reduction, which no doubt is derived from the "Newspeak" of George Orwell's novel *1984* and his postwar ur-texts on politics and language.

14
The slight barbarisms of language are as quoted; the original formatting is worse. See https://web.archive.org/web/20110907003509/http://www.userlab.com/SE.html .

15
J. Peter Kincaid is one of the authors of the document, written in 1992, from which the Simplified English example was drawn. I believe the Microsoft Word dictionary, in trying to get readers to reword their paragraphs to produce less passive constructions, grades the results using the Flesch-Kincaid Reading Ease score.

16
See the opening epigraph and the closing quotation of the present article.

17
The US has few art-making programs that offer a doctorate, except in supposedly non-market-oriented fields such as "social practice." Some are floating the idea that this added credential is necessary to catapult its holders above the MFA crowd when it comes to academic jobs. Caution makes me refrain from adducing examples of self-descriptions by such hyper-educated people that look even worse than the bad examples offered by Rule and Levine.

18
In my effort to stem email overload, I also routinely request to be removed from gallery and artist announcements. I don't appreciate bloat. But I digress.

19
In the mid-1980s, as globalization became a topic, the public television "miniseries" *The Story of English* developed from a book by the same name written by a former US public television news co-host, the Canadian-born Robert (Robin) Breckenridge Ware McNeil. The message was the richness of the language, whose productivity and immense vocabulary (dually sourced from Norse/Germanic and Greco-Roman roots) is the story behind the story of English dominance. This is little more than the imperialist imaginary at work.

20
This is not the place to consider the ways in which the terminology, or designation, of English as a second language (ESL) has been sliced and diced, and in some cases replaced by ESOL (English for speakers of other languages), EAL (English as an additional language), ESD (English as a second dialect), EIL (English as an international language), ELF (English as a lingua franca), ESP (English for specific purposes), or even EAP (English for academic purposes). See the Wikipedia entry for English as a second or foreign language, which is chock-full of variants and their acronyms: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/ESL .

21
"Upper class" and "not upper class."

22
President Obama, in his speech of April 2, 2013 on the BRAIN initiative, announced an initial expenditure of $100 million for 2014 and a projected total of $3 billion over the decade. (See "Remarks by the President on the BRAIN initiative and American Innovation," https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/the-press-office/2013/04/02/remarks-president-brain-initiative-and-american-inn

ovation .) The European Union got there slightly earlier, announcing in January 2013 the Human Brain Project, on which it expects to spend $1 billion over the coming decade. (See John Horgan, "Why You Should Care about Pentagon Funding of Obama's BRAIN Initiative," Scientific American Cross-Check blog, May 22, 2013, https://blogs.scientificamerican.com/cross-check/why-you-should-care-about-pentagon-funding-of-obamas-brain-initiative/ , and his earlier posts linked therein.) Some sources suggest that the National Institutes of Health already spends about $5.5 billion yearly on neuroscientific research. (See Jason Koebler, "Obama's $100 Million BRAIN Initiative Barely Makes a Dent in Neuroresearch Budget," *US News & World Report* , April 3, 2013, https://www.usnews.com/news/articles/2013/04/02/obamas-100-million-brain-initiative-barely-makes-a-dent-in-neuroresearch-budget .)

23
See Alyssa Quart's summary "Adventures in Neurohumanities," The Nation, May 27, 2013, https://www.thenation.com/article/archive/adventures-neurohumanities/ ; Patricia Cohen, "Next Big Thing in English: Knowing They Know That You Know," New York Times, Mar. 31, 2010, https://www.nytimes.com/2010/04/01/books/01lit.html ; "Can 'Neuro Lit Crit' Save the Humanities?" by the editors of the New York Times Opinionator blog, Apr. 5, 2010, https://archive.nytimes.com/roomfordebate.blogs.nytimes.com/2010/04/05/can-neuro-lit-crit-save-the-humanities/ ; and Tim Adams, "Neuroaesthetics," published on the blog Blouin Artinfo, April 23, 2009.

24
Tim Adams, ibid. For a look at a recent neuroaesthetic reading of literature, see Kay Young, *Imaging Minds: The Neuro-Aesthetics of Austen, Eliot, and Hardy* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 2010), available at https://kb.osu.edu/bitstream/handle/1811/46926/Young_final4print_text_file.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y . On this bandwagon one finds Marina Abramović; after people sat staring into her eyes for extended periods, often bursting into tears, during *The Artist is Present* (2010), her performance at MoMA, Abramović became interested in somehow making visible the brain function involved in "the transfer of energy between performer and public." Supported by the Mortimer D. Sackler Family Foundation, Abramović worked with US and Russian scientists on "an experimental performance installation" at Moscow's Garage. The installation was called *Measuring the Magic of Mutual Gaze* (2011). See Marina Abramović, "Neuroscience Experiment I: Measuring The Magic of Mutual Gaze," on the Abramović-Garage website http://archive.garageccc.com/eng/events/lectures/18526.phtml . She and New York public radio talk-show host Brian Lehrer sat, wired up and gazing across at one another during a radio broadcast; the resulting discussion can be hear at https://www.wnyc.org/story/275310-neuroscience-and-art/ .

25
Hats off to Greg Sholette for his reinsertion of the Sputnik effect into art discourse. Much of the funding in linguistics and related fields stemmed from the legislation passed to respond to this Cold War space race.

26
See https://litlab.stanford.edu/. For a sample of a pamphlet put out by the lab, see https://litlab.stanford.edu/LiteraryLabPamphlet1.pdf .

27
Christopher Prendergast, "Evolution and Literary History: A Response to Franco Moretti," New Left Review 34 (July/August 2005); much of Moretti's work had been also published in the New Left Review. For a later, non-theoretical critique, see Kathryn Schulz, "Distant Reading," New York Times Sunday Book Review, June 26, 2011, p. 14; published online as "What is Distant Reading?" June 24, 2011, https://www.nytimes.com/2011/06/26/books/review/the-mechanic-muse-what-is-distant-reading.html?pagewanted=all&_r=0 . See also Elif Batuman, "Adventures of a Man of Science: Moretti in California," n+1 issue 3 (Fall 2006) and published online (Apr 23, 2010) at https://www.nplusonemag.com/issue-3/reviews/adventures-of-a-man-of-science/ . Batuman distinguishes formal literary development from Darwinian natural selection, as does Prendergast's essay, and notes that Moretti does not mind the loss of a "human" element in such studies.

28
Judith Rodenbeck has directed my attention to the magazine *November,* parodying *October* —a target of Rule and Levine—which put out a single issue in 2006. It featured articles by "Lukács G.C. Hechnoh," "Rosamund Kauffmann," and "Chip Chapman" (respectively, Benjamin Buchloh, Rosalind Krauss, and Hal Foster).

29
"Transgressing the Boundaries: Towards a Transformative Hermeneutics of Quantum Gravity," *Social Text* (Spring/Summer 1996). Sokal published his self-exposé in *Lingua Franca* in the May 1996 issue.

30
The article under discussion here, "International Art English," gained a second life when the authors were interviewed in the *Guardian* newspaper.

31
In case it is not abundantly clear, let me reiterate that the book-end quotations gracing the present essay are, in the first instance, the machinic product of a generative computer program, and in the second, Alan Sokal's devilish foray into gobbledygook/double-talk. See http://www.physics.nyu.edu/faculty/sokal/transgress_v2/transgress_v2_singlefile.html .

Geert Lovink

After the Social Media Hype: Dealing with Information Overload

The "social media" debate is moving away from presumed side effects, such as loneliness (Sherry Turkle), stupidity (Andrew Keen), and brain alterations (Nicholas Carr), to the ethical design question of how to manage our busy lives. This Foucauldian turn in internet discourse sets in now that we have left behind the initial stages of hype, crash, and mass uptake. Can we live a beautiful life with a smart phone, or is our only option to switch it off and forget about it? Do we really have to be bothered with retweeting each other's messages for the rest of our lives? When will the social fad that is Silicon Valley be over and done with? We are ready to move on. Time to send your last lolcats.

Mainstream internet discourse has turned sour. How long can we bear witness to the shadow boxing of useful idiots such as Steven Johnson, Clay Shirkey, and Jeff Jarvis, who ceaselessly battle Evgeny Morozov over whether memes have supremacy over the American liberal opinion space? Is social media the nail in the coffin of traditional gatekeepers? "Twitter is a vast confusion of vows, wishes, edicts, petitions, lawsuits, pleas, laws, complaints, grievances" (James Gleick). Who will guide us in our search for the rules, duties, and prohibitions of digital, networked communication? Where is the stoic calm in this sea of populist outrage?

Prototype of LCD screen in a curved contact lens by a team of researchers at Ghent University. To demonstrate the capacity to form simple images on the conductive polymers of the lens scientists chose a flashing dollar sign.

The internet and smart phones are here to stay. They blend smoothly into our crisis-stricken neoliberal age, which is characterized by economic stagnation, populist anxieties, and media spectacles. The question no longer concerns the potential or the social impact of "new media," but how to cope with them. In calling this

"Foucauldian," we do not refer to the Foucault of surveillance and punishment, but rather to the later Foucault, the one who wrote about the ethical care of the self. How do we practice the "art of living" with so much going on simultaneously? A few years ago, blog research already invoked Foucault's genealogy of confession when analyzing Web 2.0's user-generated content as a self-promotion machine. Recently, attention has shifted towards the aesthetics of mental and physical sanity. Can we speak of a "virtue of networking" that guides us in what to say and when to shut up, what to save and when to join, when to switch off and where to engage? How can everyone's life become a work of art in this age of standardized commodities and services?

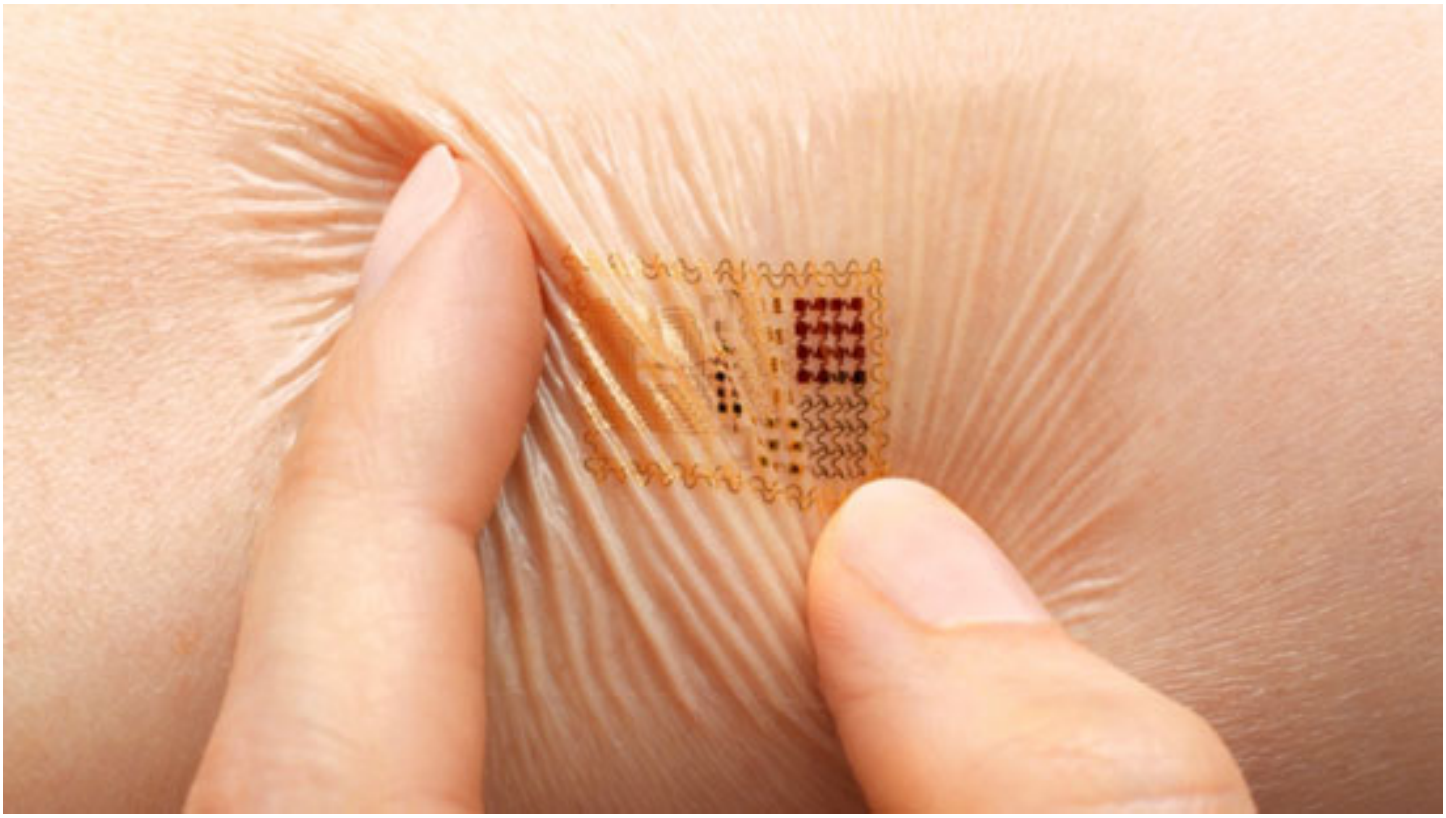
Most artistic, activist, and academic work portrays social media as a technology of domination. Whereas the Unlike Us network (in which I am deeply involved) is engaged in the struggle for internet privacy and the building of software alternatives to Facebook and Twitter, the authors I will discuss here explore the possibility of altering our lifestyles.[1] The data streams may rain down on us, but we still have the freedom to decide how best to respond to this meteorological given. We can remain inside and focus on the shape of the umbrella, or we can take a walk outside and get wet. The sovereign attitude of ignoring the constant stimuli of our techno-saturated everyday lives is not available to everyone. Distraction is a useful holdover from our hunter-gatherer past, when it helped us focus on dangers that could approach from all sides. As such, it is inscribed deep in our human system. But could it also be a gift that helps focus on multiple tasks simultaneously?

The question on the table is—following Foucault—how to minimize domination and shape new technologies of the self. Why has the internet industry bred its own monsters of centralization and control (Google, Facebook, Amazon) while promising the opposite? What bothers us is our own survival. Which techniques are effective in reducing the social noise and permanent data floods that scream for attention? What kind of online platforms facilitate lasting forms of organization? We're not merely talking here about filters that delete spam and "kill" your ex. As the state of internet discourse shows, it is all about training and repetition (as Aristotle already emphasized). There is no ultimate solution. We will need to constantly train ourselves to focus, while remaining open to new currents that question the very foundations of our direction. This is not merely a question of distributing our concentration. When do we welcome the Other, and when should it be jammed? When do we stop searching and start making? There are times when our real-time communication weaponry should be fired up for mobilization and temporary spectre dominance, until the evening sets in and it is time to chill out and open other doors of perception. But when do these times ever arrive?

We know by now that publicly criticizing the Facebooks of the world is not enough. There is a hope that boredom will prevail amongst youngsters, with users moving on, forgetting current social media platforms altogether within weeks of their final logoff (as happened to Bibo, Hyves, StudiVZ, Orkut, and MySpace). It is not cool to be on the same platform as your parents and teachers. The assumption is that the heroic gesture of the few who quit will eventually be followed by a silent exodus of the multitudes. While this may be inevitable in the long run, the constant migration from one service to the next does only increases the collective feeling of restlessness. According to Belgian pop psychiatrist Dirk De Wachter, author of *Borderline Times*, Western citizens are struggling with a chronic feeling of emptiness. Intense social media use thus becomes part of a larger societal malaise, connecting a variety of issues from the echo chamber effect to ADHD and globalization. Instead of reading social media as a zeitgeist symptom, I approach the Internet Question here as an interplay between cultures of use and the technical premises of these systems.

There is a need to design daily rituals of sovereignty from the network. If we do this, we may no longer get lost in browsing, surfing, and searching, but when the techno-social routines become meaningless and there is nothing left to report, there is a similar danger of "rienisme." That's the moment when we need to come up with passionate forms of disengagement from the virtual world. The question is: How to lose interest into something vital? The issue here is different from the late twentieth century dialectic between remembering and forgetting. There is nothing to remember in Facebook—nothing but accidents. In the end, it is merely a traffic flow. In such a cybernetic environment, history becomes a question of managing eventless events. Because of its "tyranny of informality," social media are too fluid, secondary, and unfinished to be properly stored, and thus to be remembered. As a consequence, they can also not be forgotten. Viktor Mayer-Schönberger, author of *Delete: The Virtue of Forgetting in the Digital Age*, may be right that all digital information can and will be stored. However, the architecture of today's social media is developing in the opposite direction. As temporary reference systems, hard to access with search engines, the streaming databases are caught in the Eternal Now of the Self.

Social Wisdom, anno 2013: *"You can't get a house mortgage based on your Facebook reputation" (Jaron Lanier)*—Ignore Requests— *" What I often do at 3 a.m., exhausted, yet unable to sleep, I sometimes browse on my twitter, reading banal nonsense to further raise my ire for the human race and listen to Tom Waits to restore my faith in humanity" (Mickey MacDonagh)*— Government of Temper —*" I'm no prophet. My job is making windows where there were once walls" (Michel Foucault)* —*"Bullshit is the new wisdom" (@ProfJeffJarvis)*— *"I know how it ends: one day I will be declared 'web-hostile' and liquidated. God, why is so much Internet theorizing so*



Prototype for flexible electronic circuits that stick directly to the skin like temporary tattoos and monitor the wearer's health.

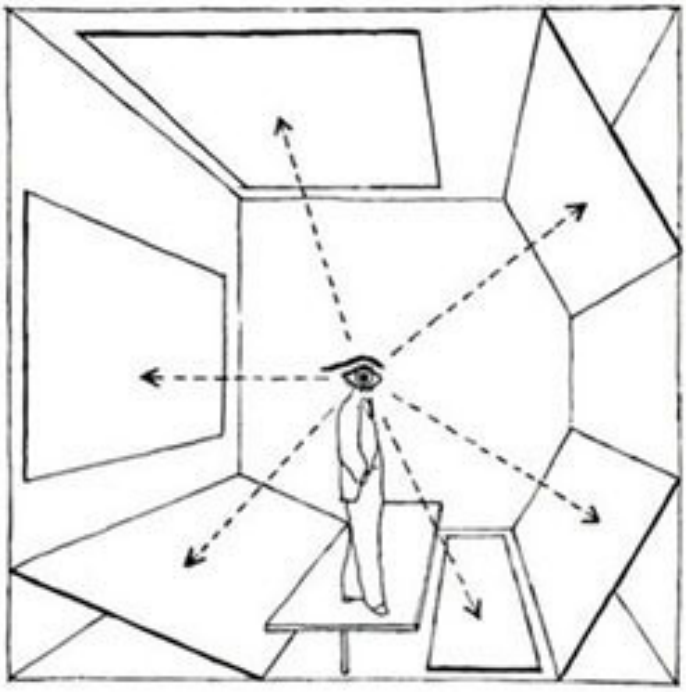
awful?"(Evgeny Morozov)— Cataclysmic Communications, Inc. —*" Man ist zwar kreativ, aber das heißt noch lange nicht, dass man etwas schafft" (Twitter)*— Critique of the Enhancements — *"Facebook to Tell Users They Are Being Tracked" (* New York Times *) —"My data is bigger than your data" (Ian Bogost)—"Forums are the dark matter of the web, the B-movies of the Internet. But they matter" (Jeff Atwood)—The necessary "haven't we done this seventeen times already?" thread—"Since the world is evolving towards a frenzied state of affairs, we have to take a frenzied view of it" (Jean Baudrillard)*.

If we limit our scope to the internet debate, we can see that the New Age tendency that dominated the roaring 1990s has slowly but steadily lost supremacy. The holistic body and mind approach has been overruled by waves of conflict in society. The New Age faction shies away from negative critique, in particular of corporate capitalism. So Google still can't be evil. Suspicion about the business model of internet start-ups will not and cannot arise. We use technology, they say, in order to "thrive." In this positivist view, our will is strong enough to "bend" the machines in such a way that they will eventually start working for us—and not the other way around. If we as conscious citizen-consumers flock together, the business community will follow suit. There is no Facebook conspiracy (for instance their collaboration with the CIA) as we are Facebook. We are its employees, investors, first adoptors, app developers, social media marketers—in short, propagandists of a cause we do not understand. It is the technology that is disruptive, not those who complain about it. Those who unwittingly support the malignant social media cause which they naively believe to be a force for good are kept busy thinking they have signed up for a self-improvement course. The user is too busy "thriving" with the constant streams of tweets, status updates, pings, and emails, until it is time for the next gadget.

Is there a way out of the self-help trap that we have set up for ourselves? Why should we think of our lives as something that we need to manage in the first place? Take *The Information Diet: A Case for Conscious Consumption* (2012) by California IT professional Clay A. Johnson. The book is about information obesity and how to recognize its symptoms. Johnson discusses the ingredients of a "healthy" information diet and shows how we can we develop a data literacy that helps us be selective about the information we access. Information obesity arises, he says, when consensus in society over what is truth and what is not diminishes, when any odd piece of information can pass as vital scientific knowledge. For Johnson, the parallels between food and information consumption are all too real and go beyond metaphorical comparisons. There's no such thing as information overload, he writes. It's all a matter of conscious consumption.

Gherasim Luca, title and date unknown. Collage

We can read as many facts as we like, but if we try to add them up, they refuse to become a system. We struggle to keep track of all the information that approaches us, making it hard for most info bits to be properly digested. This is the passive indifference that Jean Baudrillard celebrated during his lifetime, and which has now become the cultural norm. The result is "epistemic closure." When we are constantly exposed to real-time interactive media, we develop attention fatigue and a poor sense of time. (Johnson says that his overconsumption of information impaired his short-term memory.) The info-vegan way out would be to work on the will power—an executive function that can be trained—with the goal of increasing one's attention span. To start with you, can install RescueTime on your desktop, a program that tracks what you pay attention to and sends you a weekly productivity score.



Herbert Bayer, Extended Field of Vision, 1935.

As Peter Sloterdijk already noticed in his *You Must Change Your Life* (2009), training is key. The "anthropotechnic approach," as Sloterdijk calls it, is different from the rational IT world of engineers in that in it is cyclical, not linear. It is not about concepts and debugging. Instead, it is about workouts.
Self-improvement will have to come from inside, in the gym. If we want to survive as individuals while maintaining a relationship of sorts with (potentially addictive) gadgets and online platforms, we will have to get into fitness mode—and stay there. In extreme cases, visiting a Social Media Anonymous group might be helpful, but what average users need is merely a minor trigger to instigate the process of forgetting the gadget world.

Some may view the idea of improvement through repetition as conservative and anti-innovative. In an environment where paradigm shifts happen overnight, planned obsolescence—not durability—is the rule. But Sloterdijk's emphasis on exercises and repetition, combined with Richard Sennett's argument (in *The Craftman* [2009]) in favor of skills, help us to focus on tools (such as the diary) that we can use to set goals in the morning and reflect in the evening on the improvements that we made during the day. However, the disruptive nature of real-time news and social media needs to find a place in this model. In the meantime, Sloterdijk remains ambivalent about the use of information technology. It is clearly not on his mind. In his recently published dairy covering the years 2008–2011 (called *Zeilen und Tage* and running to 637 pages), I counted precisely one entry that deals explicitly with the internet. In this short entry, he describes the internet as a universal bazaar and Hype Park *Gemüsekiste*. The same could be said of Slavoj Zizek, who admits that he is not the world's hippest philosopher.[2] Even though both use laptops and internet intensely, information technology has not (yet?) been an object of inquiry in their work.

Yet, there are public figures who do speak out. Take Vivienne Westwood, whose manifesto *Active Resistance to Propaganda* is a call to arms against information overload.[3] She says we need to defend ourselves against the "abundance of everything," of sound, images, and opinion, the non-stop distractions that keep us away from the important things in life, namely introspection and reflection. Westwood targets pathological consumption in particular. Quit updating, "get a life, artlovers unite." However, what we need to overcome is not technology as such, but specific time spent consuming popular applications. Unlike knowledge, which we obtain or run into and then store, interpret, spread, and remember, our attitude towards how to deal with info overload and multitasking needs to be worked on constantly, otherwise we lose our "conditioning" and fall back into previous modes of panic and indifference. Dealing with data excess requires a 24/7 state of "mindfulness," as it is called in New Age circles.

Whereas Clay Johnson is focused on the polarized world of the political news industry in the United States, Howard Rheingold, in his book *Net Smart: How to Thrive Online* (2012), discusses more explicitly the balance between the peaceful mind and a clever reorganization of the computer desktop. The idea is not, Rheingold writes, to capture the flow and to freeze-dry the incoming status updates, but to create a mental distance from the scene. It is all about feeling like you're back in control, gaining confidence, and becoming independent again. There is a movement of tactical detachment at play here. In this context, the addiction metaphor is misleading. It is not about total involvement followed by complete withdrawal. In the case of social media, withdrawal is often not possible for social and economic reasons. Who can afford to endanger his or

Joe Tilson, Transparency - The Five Senses - Taste, 1969, screenprint in acrylic moulded transparency case.

her social capital? Rheingold knows this and offers his readers a range of practical guidelines for how to master the master's media.

What makes *Net Smart* and the accompanying online video lectures by Rheingold so compelling is not the author's utopian message, nor his merciless deconstruction of the corporate agendas of the Silicon Valley giants. Rheingold is neither a net visionary à la *Wired* magazine editor Kevin Kelly, nor a continental European critic. However, he is a brilliant and nuanced instructor who believes in "internal discipline, not ascetic withdrawal." *Net Smart* is a pamphlet in favor of public education. Self-control along with other social media literacy needs to be taught, Rheingold argues. We're not born with these skills. We need to learn how to practice "real-time curation." Following Daniel Sieger, author of *The Mindful Brain* (2007), Rheingold argues that we have to wake up from a life on automatic. Forget for a moment how many of us prefer this state of mind—killing time by

using escapist social media, in non-spaces, surrounded by non-people, is widespread, and loved, as we all know. What Rheingold teaches us are tricks to train the brain—for instance, through breath exercises. He concludes the book by saying that "the emerging digital divide is between those who know how to use social media for individual advantage and collective action, and those who don't."

In my view, the best part of *Net Smart* deals with "crap detection," a 1960s term that indicates a critical attitude towards information. Using your "crap detector" meant that you inquired about the political, religious, and ideological background of the person who was talking. (*Let's do some fact-checking!*) Ernest Hemmingway and Neil Postman both argued that everyone needed a built-in crap detector. In today's age, where there are ten times as many PR agents as fact-checking journalists, internet users are supposed to do their own homework. How do we dissect the pseudo-information that comes from think-tanks and consultants? The postmodern insight that everything is "discourse" also contributed to the demise of the clear demarcation line between propaganda and truth. What I like is Rheingold's blend of old-school values concerning media manipulation coupled with a sophisticated knowledge of how to manage a range of online research tools, both in terms of their functionality and interface usability. Rheingold's screen is large, there are a lot of menus open at the same time, yet he is in charge. This is called personal dashboard design—and we don't hear enough about this, as the organization of one's desktop is supposed to be a private matter. Rheingold calls it "infotention," which he defines as "synchronizing your attentional habits with your information tools," with the aim to better "find, direct and manage information."

The different forms of social media are often portrayed as necessary channels of communication. For Rheingold and Johnson, they are here to stay. For the outgoing European baby boomers, however, these platforms may seem like nothing more than nihilist drugs which produce the contant feeling that we are being left out of something, that we are about to miss the boat. Linking, liking, and sharing uphold the systemic boredom and "rienisme" that is a consequence of the event inflation that we all experience. It therefore comes as a surprise to read Tom Chatfield's *How to Thrive in the Digital Age* (2012)—a booklet in Alain de Botton's "School of Life" series—which claims to reinvent the genre of the self-help book. No more moralistic warnings and well-meaning tips, such as the one from Evgeny Morozov, who hides his iPhone and internet cable in a treasure chest when he has to work. Surprisingly, Chatfield's way out is to politicize the field in the spirit of the Arab Spring, Occupy, Wikileaks, Anonymous, pirate parties, and demonstrations in favor of online anti-copyright peer-to-peer exchanges (such as Kim Dotcom's recently launched Mega platform). We have received enough tips for how to carve out time away from our smart phones, he says. Offline romanticism as a lifestyle solution is a dead horse, and so is its philosophical equivalent of "interpassivity" as formulated by Robert Pfaller and Gijs van Oenen.[4] While it may be liberating to let go of all our gadgets, to do nothing for a while, to pretend to live in accordance with nature and enjoy a well-deserved break, what do we but then? Venture into slow communication? For Chatfield, what comes after the information hangover are new forms of collective living. Through protests and other collective experiences, we find ourselves dragged into events, stories, situations, and people that make us forget all the yelling emails, Tumblr image cascades, and Twitter business-as-usual. When will the Long Wait be over?

X

1
For the Unlike Us network, see http://networkcultures.org/wpmu/unlikeus/ . On this website you can find extensive reports about social media and the internet, plus videos of Unlike Us #3, a conference on network culture which took place March 21–23, 2013 in Amsterdam.

2
See his interview with Salon.com at https://www.salon.com/2012/12/29/slavoj_zizek_i_am_not_the_worlds_hippest_philosopher/ .

3
Read the manifesto at https://serpentine-uploads.s3.amazonaws.com/uploads/2021/03/Active-Resistance-to-Propaganda-Manifesto-by-Vivienne-Westwood.pdf .

4
See Robert Pfaller, Asthetik der Interpassivität, Philo Fine Arts, Hamburg, 2008 and Gijs van Oenen, Nu even niet, over de interpassieve samenleving, Van Gennep, Amsterdam, 2011 (a dialogue between me with van Oenen on this topic appeared in Theory and Event, Vol. 15, No. 2, (2012).

Ana Teixeira Pinto

The Whole Earth: In Conversation with Diedrich Diederichsen and Anselm Franke

"The Whole Earth," whose first iteration can be seen at the Haus der Kulturen der Welt in Berlin, is a project by Diedrich Diederichsen and Anselm Franke that takes as its point of departure the Whole Earth Catalog *by Stewart Brand. In 1966, Brand initiated a campaign for the release of satellite images of earth that he believed NASA possessed, and which he felt would be a powerful icon for the notion of a shared human experience and destiny. One such image graced the cover of the catalog and came to be know as the Blue Marble; it showed the earth as a glowing blue and white globe against a pitch-black background. Brand was also instrumental in bridging the gap between traditionally opposing social groups, like the military—responsible for the space program—and the budding ecological movement. He also forged an alliance between the California counterculture and the emerging fields of cybernetics, computer science, and information technology.*

Following in the footsteps of "The Family of Man," the Whole Earth Catalog *testified to the kinship of Mankind, transcending all borders and class distinctions. But the image of the blue planet had a dark side. The* Whole Earth Catalog *was also used as a tool for anti-Soviet propaganda and gave rise to the lifestyle industry. The California dream was a weak utopia that simply denied political difference and substituted feedback for dialectics. Cybernetics—which had been briefly outlawed under Stalin for conflicting with Marxism-Leninism—extended the presuppositions of thermodynamics to evolutionary biology, neuroscience, anthropology, and psychology. Thermodynamic systems are not subject to dialectical tensions. Nor do they experience historical change. They only accumulate a remainder—a kind of refuse—or increase in entropy. In the 1960s, this refuse surfaced as the Manson Family. At present, the rejects of globalization remain the subject of the global war on terror.*

—Ana Texeira Pinto

Ana Teixeira Pinto: Perhaps we could start by introducing the concept of "whole earth," on which "The Whole Earth" exhibition is based.

Anselm Franke: "The Whole Earth" is an exhibition about the ideas and ideologies that emerged in the wake of the first photographs of the planet earth. The concept of whole earth is also, historically, about the last universalist claim and the last universalist program: the whole earth—this is, the biggest possible frame, allegedly something for the entire "Family of Man." In our project, we identify three decades, from 1968 to 1998, that stood under the sign of the "blue planet."

ATP: When you say "blue planet," you mean the image of the earth as seen from outer space?

AF: Yes, the images of earth viewed from space that emerged around 1968, the most famous of which were made by Apollo 8 and Apollo 17. This turning of the gaze back towards earth signified a change of direction: the expansion-geared, outwards-directed frontier imaginary folding back on itself, in a 180 degrees turn. Ever since, we have been living in this period of interiorization. Nowadays, most accounts of the Space Age—and the Apollo missions in particular—are rife with quotes, especially by astronauts, who claim the whole fuss of the Space Race was worth it because "man" gained a new image of earth, of the planetary condition.

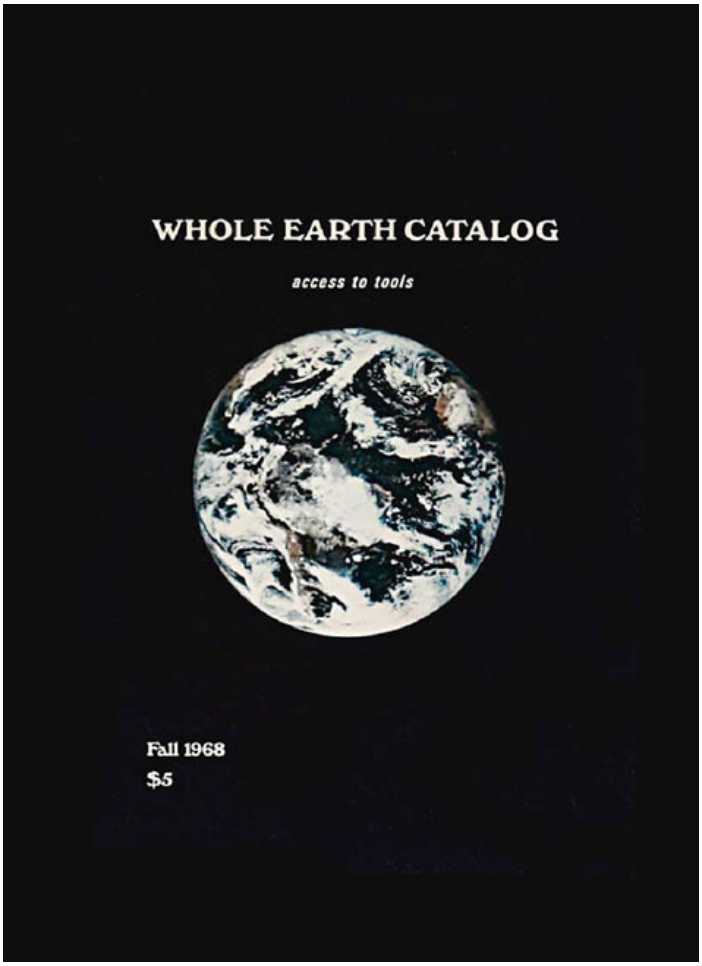
Diedrich Diederichsen: Above all, I think the image of the earth became an argument for a discourse of legitimation and political reasoning. Take the color, for instance. Viewed from down here on the surface, the color of earth was brown, green, even black—it was a dark color. Then all of a sudden, the earth was blue. And blue, up to that point, was the color of the far-away—of the oceanic, of distance, of escape from earth. Blue was the opposite of earth. All of a sudden, these two opposites became one. This constituted a great reversal. Suddenly, the earth meant "planet" instead of the ground beneath our feet.

ATP: Did t his image, the Blue Marble, which emerged out of the space program and the first moon landing, bring about a conceptual shift?

DD: From that moment onwards the concept of earth changes in several ways. It becomes simultaneously the starting point and the goal, the far-away place and the familiar. It is blue but also still brown. It is only one planet among millions of others, but at the same time, it's the only planet we have. The earth becomes more valuable because it can be exhausted. All of these contradictory concepts are perfectly illustrated by this image, which emerges in a specific historical context: at the climax of the Cold War—or one could say, at the beginning of the end of the Cold War. It also emerges at the beginning of the age of immaterial production and digital culture. All of these things were around at that time.

ATP: There is also a correlation between the notion of "system" as it arises from cybernetics and systems theory, and the way the earth starts to be represented as a system in the sense of a self-sealed entity.

DD: It's important to mention the historical parallel between, on the one hand, the growth of systems theory and cybernetics, and on the other, the development of space travel. Another point is the conceptual similarity between a planet and a system, or rather between the image of the planet and the system. The image of a planet, just like a system, is something you watch from the outside. But at the same time, you're also inside it. And this



Front cover of Whole Earth Catalog: Access to Tools, Fall 1968.

is the aporia of the system, because the system always tells us: you can't look at a system when you're part of it. But you're *always* part of it. And it's the same with the planet. There is a strong analogy between system thinking and planet thinking.

ATP: I gather that the notion of closure is also important?

AF: We address the motif of closure in the section "The End of the Outside," which is also the subtitle of the exhibition: "California and the End of the Outside." This is a trope with many different meanings. Our project sets out to map how these different meanings are conflated in the cultural imaginary of the present, and to help untangle these conflations. Closure as a motif is of course akin to the older notion of naturalization. Regarding the image of the blue planet, one can say that it has both a strong mobilizing capacity and a great ability to naturalize. This produces an interesting paradox: seen from the outside, the image of earth tells us that there is no more outside. To add a wild association: maybe it's worth drawing an analogy between the aporia that Diedrich mentioned and schizophrenia, which was of enormous significance in

Adrian Piper, LSD Womb, 1965. Acrylic on canvas. Collection Emi Fontana Milano/Los Angeles. Photo: Roberto Marossi.

political philosophy at the very time when the blue planet image was produced.

ATP: You mean the correlation between capitalism and schizophrenia.

AF: Yes, but it's not only Deleuze and Guattari who are reconceptualizing schizophrenia at the moment when this image emerges.

DD: LSD use was described as artificial psychosis and artificial schizophrenia. The higher consciousness of the LSD-enlightened person was regarded as an artificially induced schizophrenic state. The new humans, who took LSD, were all happy schizophrenics.

ATP: Can you elaborate a bit further on the connection between the whole earth and the notion of the split subject?

AF: The image of earth is, in many ways, a paradoxical one. And one paradox—or aporia, as Diedrich pointed out—is the position of viewing from the outside a system to which we are at the same time immanent. That is, whenever you look at or talk about this image, you are actually surfing a sort of schizo-meridian, a borderline between being part of it and being on the outside of it.

DD: The position of whoever took the photo of the planet while looking at it from outer space is like the voice that you hear in your head when you are schizophrenic. You don't know where it's coming from. Of course, the voice that you hear is nothing but your own thinking. Yet your own thinking seems like a voice from afar uttering commandments. That's exactly the situation with the concept of the "visible planet." I think that's a very fitting description.

AF: In our project, we operate with a couple of fictions, a set of hypotheses. One could be described as follows: let's say that the image of the earth carried a message, which had a very strong influence and reached a lot of people whose diverse worldviews assembled around this image. Let's say that Stewart Brand's *Whole Earth Catalog* was its official medium, because Steward Brand appointed himself as the messenger. Everything the image had to say was then written in the pages of the catalog. This is how the image of the blue planet gets grounded in the concrete environment of California and the historical momentum of the Cold War and the counterculture. This image also anticipates the end of the Cold War. In it, the earth is already whole, without boundaries or borders, analogous to post-1989 global capitalism and the oceanic, interconnected globe of the 1990s. After 1945, the blue planet replaces the mushroom cloud as a universalist icon. Under its sign a new period begins, a new world order. Our aim is to inscribe this new planetary systemic paradigm into several historical continuities: above all, into the continuity of the Western-modern-colonial frontier, which, contrary to the common impression, does not disappear, but rather becomes a universal—that is, a permanent—condition. This is very different from believing that, like the Berlin Wall, all "old divisions" will soon disappear. Another noteworthy continuity is that this image is actually the product of Wernher von Braun's invention, the V-2 rocket. The V-2 rocket is the first man-made object in space, and it has a television camera on it. That is, in terms of its technology, the birth of the Blue Marble was in complete continuity with the program that von Braun took to the US, where he developed the rocket program for the military. The first images of earth are, literally, V-2 images.

DD: Through his insistence on the photograph of the blue planet as an element of the *Whole Earth Catalog*, Steward Brand also appropriated space travel and NASA and astronauts for the counterculture, while at the same time reconciling the romanticism of the counterculture with advanced technology. Needless to say, this reconciliation between romanticism and futurism becomes the basis of digital and internet culture. On the other hand, the image of the blue planet was also tied to early rocket science, which had already made this connection between reactionary romanticism and novel technology. This is present, for instance, in the idea of bringing people back to live on their homeland, conquering the earth that belongs to them, and all these kinds of racist German projects. One could say that Pynchon's *Gravity's Rainbow* comes back, in a way, through the *Whole Earth Catalog*.

Eleanor Antin, Merrit from California Lives, 1969; replicated 1998. Gasoline can, bush hat with “peace” decal, metal comb, and text panel. Dimensions variable. Courtesy Ronald Feldman Fine Arts, New York.

AF: It is especially interesting to follow this connection throughout the 1970s, because this alliance between technology and romanticism was always a very fragile one. In the short period when Steward Brand acted as an official advisor to California Governor Jerry Brown, they organized a "Space Day" financed by California's aerospace industry. Space Day featured astronaut Russell Schweickart, who had famously said, "From up there, there are no frames, no boundaries." Schweickart sat next to Jerry Brown, Carl Sagan, and Gerald O'Neill, who was a major advocate for space colonies. Stewart Brand managed to stir a huge debate among his readers, who were the core of the California environmental movement. The technology/nature divide, and the question of whether to act outside or inside the system of big business and the military, broke open, only to close again shortly thereafter. It's an odd mix. In the environmental movement, many hated the space colony stuff. For them, it was big industry, it was everything they were fighting against.

DD: Timothy Leary was very much in favor of space colonies. Though society in general mocked it, Timothy Leary supported the idea.

ATP: So the Blue Marble functions like a tangled skein out of which one can pull several threads?

DD: One important point is the conjunction of these discourses, which are usually contradictory. Another important point is that this conjunction of binary opposites has something to do with the structural oddity of photographing, or observing, the territory that you are, at the same time, inhabiting. That is, you direct the gaze of desire—which, in relation to territory, always meant colonial desire—towards the place on which you are already standing. This is the formal reason why all these binary oppositions collapse, or mingle, or develop a dialectical synthesis. In one way or another, the culture has to process this problem. Whatever you project upon this image, it will behave accordingly. And then it's up to the specific propagandists and cultural activists to do something with it.

AF: I think the biggest question is how to find a narrative to account for this synthesis, this reconciliation of binaries, this conflation of opposites, which is still going on. This appears as a historical process with its own logic and necessity, and I suppose it's worth wondering about the underlying structures that create this necessity. There is a larger narrative at work in the whole earth project: the narrative of the general cyberneticization of the epistemological-technological apparatuses of Western modernity after 1945. It is, in a way, a slow embrace of what was previously excluded from the constitution of the modern social and epistemological order: the irrational, the mimetic (contagious or playful), the animistic. These become the new resources. There is a structural affinity between the synthesis of opposites—or the desire for such a synthesis—that occurs under the aegis of the blue planet, and what Freud and anthropologists like Edward Tylor used to describe as the animism of pre-modern people. Both involve a conflation of binaries. The cyberneticization of the world also becomes its re-animation, a project of undoing alienation, a desire for immersion and enchantment. The once fixed, objectified, reified world begins to be dynamic, talkative, and transformative again—but at the price of immersive adaptation to systemic conditions. This results from transporting cybernetics from the fields of mathematics and computing into social theory, and—after cybernetics was made credible via psychedelic experience—into the world at large. This leads to such things as the immanent mind and a conception of nature as an animated information system. The counterculture also becomes depoliticized to the degree that it embraces visions of spontaneous harmony and neo-animistic conceptions of the whole. All of this was derived from the new cybernetic reality principle: communication, the medium, the in-between.

Oyvind Fahlström, Section of World Map—A Puzzle, 1973. Silkscreen on vinyl, magnets and enamel on metal plate. Copyright: The Oyvind Fahlström Foundation / VG Bildkunst. Courtesy Aurel Scheibler. Photo: Simon Vogel.

ATP: Would you say that feedback shares a kinship with animism?

AF: Yes. There is a structural affinity.

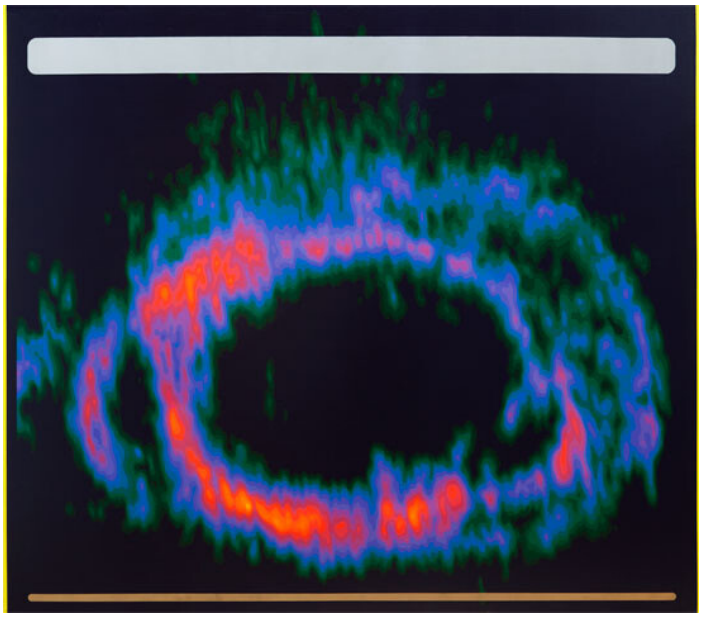
ATP: If I get what you're hinting at, one could say that cybernetics mirrors the main insight of structural linguistics: that language can be interpreted as a formal system of differential elements, which is also how Lacan addresses desire.

DD: Let me put it like this: when systems theory tries to

solve the problem of epistemology, the major structural question it asks must be answered both at the level of content and at the level of fantasy, the imaginary. Lacan looks at desire as a structural dilemma, the same way systems theory looks at science and cognition. There are two ways to respond to this: one is embracing the paradox, the other is getting rid of the subject and letting cybernetics take over.

ATP: In systems theory and first order cybernetics, you might say that information is the coefficient of freedom. Mathematically speaking, the freedom of choice is between a 1 and a 0.

DD: But what Anselm was describing—the origin of all these ideas of harmony and conservation—has a lot to do with the notion of desire in the sense of not having a choice. You don't even have a small choice. It's what humans *have to* want. It's not *what* we want. We *have to* want. We have to love each other. It's not that we really do. But we have to. And hippie culture is about how we actually do love each other. *Come on people now. Smile on your brother. Everybody get together. Try to love one another right now.* Try to, but …



Jack Goldstein, Untitled, 1988. Acrylic on canvas. Courtesy: Vanmoerkerke Collection, Belgium. Copyright: We Document Art.

AF: Cybernetics also entails a transformation from static to dynamic, from linear to circular models. Before the word "feedback" came into being, it was called "circular causal relations." This phrase was used at the Macy Conferences. The introduction of the circle is basically what culminates in the Blue Marble. The entire process that produces this new ideological matrix is structured upon a transition from linearity to circularity. That which is one-directional becomes the devil. This ranges from hierarchy to the scientific understanding of cause and effect. With cybernetics—particularly when cybernetics steps into the social sciences and humanities—you have an interesting witch hunt starting, an anti-Cartesian witch hunt, a general anti-dualist witch hunt. This culminates in the fall of the Berlin Wall, which stood as a mega-symbol for the bifurcated, linear, static, objectified world. The point now is to see and focus on the dialectics of this process—the degree to which the doors that were opened eventually closed upon themselves, the degree to which dynamization produced new static fixities.

ATP: Anselm, I believe you used this image of the closing door to illustrate how, when you see the earth from outer space, just at the moment when you would expect a door to open towards the expanding universe, it suddenly slams in your face.

DD: In Roberto Bolaño's last novel, the protagonist, who has been a heterosexual man all his life, finally discovers his homosexuality. The chapter in which this occurs is called "The Fall of the Berlin Wall."

ATP: Couldn't you also say that the Cold War is the perfect expression of a cybernetic model? Cybernetics defines itself by establishing an operational dichotomy between system and environment, which, in turn, gives rise to the concept of "information" as what the system extracts from its environment. The field of game theory, for instance, is based on the psychology of the Cold War: two players, one on each side, neither of whom knows what the other is thinking. For each player, the other is the environment from which they aim to extract information, forming a perfectly enclosed feedback loop.

AF: There's a great book on that called *The Closed World*. But there are two lines of inquiry here which we can interestingly juxtapose. One is the RAND Corporation game theory model, which is based on the mimetic economy of war. But this is old stuff. Clausewitz already described this strategic guesswork—how you necessarily become like the enemy, which generates a closed system. But then there's the other model, this planetary unity fantasy, where there are no more opponents—an oceanic mimetics, not an antagonistic mimetics. In that sense, the Blue Marble anticipated the end of the Cold War, or induced it with the principles of sympathetic magic.

DD: I think the Cold War already contains the end of the Cold War. It's a permanent element of it. You can observe it now. The situation in Korea in a kind of grotesque reenactment of the Cold War. You had the same situation in the Cold War, in that it had all these components of communication, which were basically symbolized by the red telephone: the symbol of the notion that communication would prevent the Cold War from becoming hot. The bottom line of the Cold War is that it's

cold which is to say that war is not happening. And war is not happening because of communication. So communication can also lead us out of any war situation. That is why the whole feedback idea became such a glorified element of countercultural lifestyles, theories, pedagogies, psychologies, and music: there was nothing people liked more than a long feedback loop—which, at a concert for example, became a moment of total communion for all the bodies in the audience.

But my favorite example is the story of the blues. Under Jim Crow in the US, there was, of course, segregation. There were radio stations for black music and radio stations for white music. But then the counterculture brought in all these white musicians who adopted black music. Certain black stars also played at white festivals. Around 1969, the major record companies adapted to this new situation, assuming that they no longer had racially separated markets. CBS did a huge double-album compilation with white and black musicians. It was called *The Blues*. And what was on the cover of this album? The Blue Marble. Because it's blue? No. Because it could express the idea of overcoming a distinction.

AF: It's the universal formula for overcoming distinctions.

ATP: Speaking of which, I would like to go back to the idea of the American frontier or the space frontier as the capitalist frontier. How is the moment of primitive accumulation continuously actualized in these iterations of the frontier imaginary?

Mother Earth News, January 1970. Reprinted with permission by Mother Earth News. All rights reserved.

AF: In the 1890s, the Census Bureau of the United States announces the closure of the frontier. Around the same time, the colonization of the world elsewhere is basically complete. The scramble over Africa is over. This closing of the frontier concerns the entire globe. All of this also happens at the same moment as the Chicago World's Fair. It's not the first World's Fair, but in a strange way, it's the first to embody this moment of a planet-wide closure of the modern, Western, colonial, capitalist frontier. It also announces a period of intensification for electricity and communication technologies. At the same time, the conservation movement begins to see nature as no longer an inexhaustible resource, but as an enclosed "outside" to be protected and conserved—a big shift in attitude. Freud and William James conceive of the psyche and the mind as closed systems without an outside: the unconscious and the irrational are part of the system. They are inside the circle. In the 1960s, the outside is a utopian site: outside of "the system," outside of the "technocracy," outside of alienating, conformist mass society and its "objective consciousness" and hierarchies. The outside—the imagined, produced, or actually remaining outside—becomes the source for the transgressive ideas of the counterculture. Hippies call for a return to nature. The psychedelic counterculture, the Human Potential Movement, and the anti-psychiatrists attempt to liberate the self by embracing the irrational and setting it free, rather than trying to control or repress it. Another paradigmatic outsider of Western colonialism—the "native"—is embraced in the form of neo-primitivism. The American Indian, for a short time at least, is hailed as a role model for non-authoritarian, harmonious, and tribal forms of community. But the most important point is to see that with the closure of the frontier, there is a passage from the linear to the circular.

DD: This is similar to the idea of circulation—capitalist circulation—in Marxism.

AF: The period between 1890 and 1960 was also the period when the idea that capitalist modernity would turn souls into mere things—the idea of reification—was most viral.

DD: Or what the situationists called "the critique of separation." If all these leftists are criticizing capitalism via a critique of separation, voilà: here's a whole.

ATP: I have a question concerning the political aspects of this shift. There's basically one epistemological model to

explain historical change, and that is dialectics. I have always thought of cybernetics as a reversal of dialectics: although feedback and dialectics represent motion in similar ways, dialectics implies a fundamental tension, an unresolved antagonism from which a novel system may emerge, whereas feedback knows no outside or contradiction, just perpetual iteration. One could say that feedback is dialectics minus communism. That is, feedback, if seen as an epistemological model, precludes change on a material, political level—or better put, change can only appear in terms of (self-)adjustment. In other words, cybernetics provides for a smooth transition from political philosophy to economic theory.

DD: Yes, but cybernetics is really a non-historical model of change. It doesn't distinguish between historical situations. It distinguishes between states. It only has states. Things are in certain states. But since they form only one part of a network, the whole will not change. By definition it cannot change. It can only be in different states.

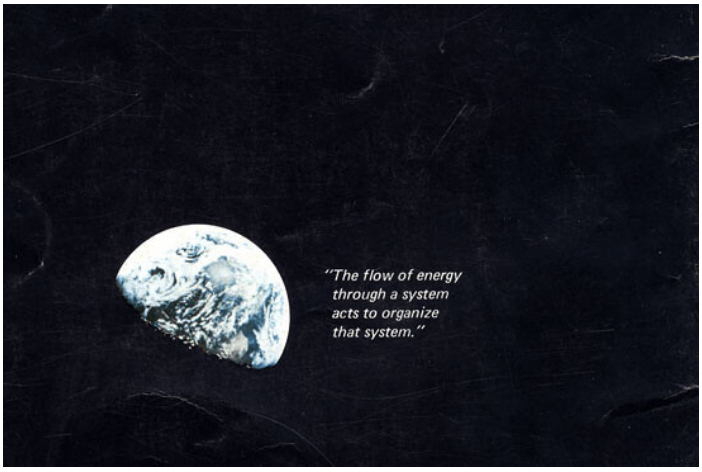
ATP: It's a recursive system. Change can only be represented as iteration.

DD: It will iterate, iterate, and iterate, and it will never be different. But we're describing first-order cybernetics. Once we introduce the problem of the observer, it's not that easy anymore. I would say that in late systems theory, and late *Niklas Luhmann*, that blind spot becomes more than just a technical blind spot. It becomes dramatized—when he finally realized, for example, that there was more than Europe.

ATP: How do you position yourselves critically towards cybernetics and systems theory?

DD: We frame it as ideology, and we locate this ideology historically. You could even call it a superstructural phenomenon—although it's more than a superstructural phenomenon, because it creates material reality. Basically, it's the beginning of post-industrial capitalism.

AF: Returning to the beginning of our conversation, I think it's important to contemplate where the Blue Marble has led us. I want to insist on this ambivalence between being both a structural critique of something and a symptom of something. There is this cover of *Wired* magazine from 1997. It's ugly, like most covers of *Wired* magazine. It shows a huge smiling blue marble and has a headline that says "The Long Boom." The corresponding article inside predicts twenty-five years of global unity, prosperity, and growth. When you read it, you realize what the Nineties made of the ideas of the Sixties: they turned them into visions of magically expansive and self-balancing technological, biological, financial, and social systems—it has all become one and the same. In retrospect, the Sixties looks like an attempt at self-therapy, an effort to



Cover for Stewart Brand (Ed.), Whole Earth Catalog: Access to Tools, Fall 1968.

recover from the huge trauma of planning. The trauma of linear planning in the twentieth century was so strong that this California avant-garde embraced everything that had to do with feedback and emergence, as if this was their pharmacon against planning. Even when it became clear that they could not overcome the problem of political planning by just embracing systems rhetoric and mimetically likening society and technology to an ideal system-built nature—even in the moment when this became clear, they went one step further into a kind of beyond/delirium mix, deeper into the fantasy of a completely organic capitalism. This is the power of the call to move beyond binaries. It's a tendency that tries to forget the schizoid condition that prevails: namely, that you are supposed to attain a condition of dynamic immersion, which at the same time has been declared as already universally existing. The point today is to see how the program of opening doors has actually closed them, to see how systems can act in conservative or demobilizing ways.

ATP: This IT ecological fantasy is also connected to the denial of materiality. When one says that the digital era has outflanked industrial production, one always speaks as if digital technology has no material aspect, as if no labor or resource exploitation are involved.

DD: It's not only the digital. The entire California fantasy deals heavily with immateriality, especially with immateriality understood as spirituality, where the opposite of the material is not immaterial labor but spirituality—which is, of course, a form of immaterial labor, but glorified and ideologized. I think the question is: What is the leftover from that idealization and ideologization? Where is the symptom produced by the failure of this maneuver? Before one can know the answer to this question on a political level, it will emerge on a symptomatic level, or in the acts of individuals. I'm referring, of course, to people like Charles Manson—not so much the real Charles Manson, but the mythical

Charles Manson as he appears in Neil Young's song "Revolution Blues." The first-person narrator in the song is precisely the leftover of the California ideology, and he has identified two enemies: the computer and the culture industry, represented by the stars who live in Laurel Canyon. He wants to kill them. And he has an army with rifles and dune buggies in the mountains who come down to do it. That, I think, is the leftover, the material basis.

X

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Abou Farman

Towards a Post-Secular Aesthetics: Provocations for Possible Media in Afterlife Art

Can we make art *after* we die? What are the possible media for an art of the afterlife? To consider the possibility seriously is not to revisit work that deals with grief and dying, or with the mere representation of the afterlife. It is not to ask the disenchanted to return to the open arms of the Church.[1] But it does require that we reexamine the limits around our ideas of transformation; it does require that we parse "the secular" as the background code that determines the parameters for many of our activities and assumptions.

Whatever our private beliefs today, the secular code—or the "Secular Age," to use Canadian philosopher Charles Taylor's better-known designation[2]—forces us into this consciousness, this disposition: we believe we are, in some real sense, going to die.[3] Of course, everyone in every other age had a similar intuition, but not the same experience of it. This difference hinges on orientations towards the afterlife. (It is crucial to emphasize that, unlike secularist interpretations of them, doctrines of the afterlife do not deny death; death is precisely their condition of possibility. It's what happens afterwards that is the real issue.)

The historian Jacques Le Goff has documented how the invention of purgatory in the ninth century produced a radically new experience by changing the absoluteness of the ending.[4] In those days, judgment came right at the time of death. After mere decades of waffling through life, suddenly you faced the prospect of eternal damnation. That's tremendous temporal pressure, and the doctrine of purgatory was invented as a sort of release valve. Saints and sinners were sorted out right away, but the rest of us who are a sausage of saint and sinner (to use Charles Simic's Eastern European formulation) could at least loiter around a while longer and get our surviving family members to intercede on our behalf. Because of what could be done on your behalf by others after you died, you were, in a sense, *not done being*, or *your being was not done with*.

In the secular age, the default assumption of finality is not so different from the pre-purgatory version of death, minus the judgment. Some might go to church on Sunday and believe they will end up in heaven, while others might believe they will survive by joining some universal consciousness or Noosphere. But secularism has privatized belief to such an extent that, outside of Sundays, very little of this sort of thinking is institutionalized in wider educational, legal, or state spheres.[5] It is permitted insofar as it is privately held. Even for those who believe in life after death, the possibility of a person remaining active as *an agent in this world* after his or her death is outside the realm of possibility; their lives are not inflected by either the decisions, desires, and doings of the dead, or their own post-mortem plans.

This possibility is eliminated by the generalized rules of secular life-death regimes, which impose a specific

Life Magazine picture of cancer victim James H. Bedford being preserved in cryocapsule for later revival, 1967. Photo: Henry Groskinsky.

Giuseppe Arcimboldo, Portrait of Eve, 1578. Oil on canvas.

temporal order on the body and the person ascribed to it. Secularism is generally understood in terms of the doctrine of the separation of powers between this world and the next, between church and state. But as the anthropologist Talal Asad has argued, a set of background assumptions, dispositions, and epistemologies create the conditions of possibility for this secularist separation, grounding its discourse of justification and systems of thought, producing its selves and experiences, its temporalities and rules of conduct.[6] This is what distinguishes the secular from the religious and the supernatural. The play between the secular and the religious has always turned on an important set of rules having to do with the relationship between person, body, and identity—especially at the crisis point of death.

In a secular order, a person—as a locus of rights and interests, as a possessor of consciousness—is separable from the body. That is, social status and political rights accrue to a rational, willful, and conscious entity with interests, not to an organism or a biological body (which means that the secular is dualistic, but in a rationalist way: it's a dualism that does without the concept of a soul). This is what allows for formulations such as "corporate personhood" or "brain death," in which the body is kept biologically viable (or alive) for the sake of its organs, whilst the person who formerly occupied the body is declared dead by the secular medico-legal regime.[7] However, within a secular frame, this separation is unidirectional: whereas the secular body can outlive its person, the secular person cannot outlive its body. The latter would be read as religious, or as a cognitive error locatable in the angular gyrus of the brain.

This is the ideology, or the code, of the Western secular tradition. Why ideology? Because beneath the discourse and formal rules, there are ways in which persons are allowed to *quasi-survive* their date of biological expiration. The most obvious is through personal objects of memory, those things which resonate with the accumulated traces of the deceased's life, and which cause intense reactions in surviving loved ones. People are thus permitted to believe that the deceased in some way survives in these object, whose animistic power we tame by calling them "objects of memory." But this sort of interaction is permitted only as long as a) it is understood that the force does not reside in the objects but in the survivor's head, and b) this belief does not last too long (hence *quasi*-survival). Sustained, long-term relations to objects that evoke strong emotions and attachments are pathologized and interpreted through the idiom of mental disorder; the role of the psychiatrist or counselor then becomes that of *de-animizer*, removing the spirit from the

inanimate objects so the bereaved patient can achieve "closure."

Significantly, another secular domain that functions as a de-animizing force is the museum. Ethnographic museums, which were among the earliest museums, were set up with this function explicitly in mind—to take "the primitive fetishes" and reveal them as nothing but objects. This was accomplished through strategies of display and archiving.[8] But this function is not just a colonial one; it is generalized to all objects in museums. No one cries upon seeing an heirloom in the Met, even if it belonged to one's own family. Another ideal-typical example of this phenomenon is the perfectly archived possessions of Song Dong's deceased mother at MoMA.[9]

There is room for quasi-survival in secular law as well, where the law allows some intentionality and agency, some ability to act, after the bounded, conscious, sovereign self has medico-legally expired. Take the last will and testament. This a legal formalization of the deceased's "will," that is, the "power to decide" or "the part of mind that makes decisions." This faculty is what defines secular personhood: when it is lacking—for example, when someone is in a coma—that person is not considered a full person. His or her decisions are then carried out by the family or agents of the state.[10] Yet, this *will*—this power to decide, this part of the mind—is allowed to legally survive the end of bodily death. In a secular world, where the dead are supposedly dead and gone, we are nevertheless bidden to respect the desires of the dead. The dead, then, have a will. They have desires and they have interests. And as legal scholar Ray Madoff has documented, the rights and interests of the dead are growing daily in the US.[11]

Artists and collectors have only ever used their legal wills for conventional purposes—foundations, donations, estates, supporting their friends and family, protecting their works, and so forth. As far as I know, the legal will has never been taken up as artistic form. This, I am suggesting, is due to a bias in our secular code that has blinded artists to the possibilities of making art *after* they die; after death, the assumption goes, the artist is no longer present. What if we conceived of the afterlife as having the potential for continued agency after bodily demise, an agency not confined to the body but activated in and by others and other things—what anthropologists call "relational personhood"? Then we might also ask about the *media* available to the artist seeking this mode of survival.

Let me try and get at this from the angle of biopolitics. Foucauldian biopolitics describes a shift in techniques of governance, where instead of just wielding exemplary death—public hangings, occasional slaughters, arbitrary slayings—the state begins to manage the health of the body politic.[12] The interests of the sovereign state and the sovereign individual coincide more and more, such that

Taryn Simon, Cryopreservation Unit, Cryonics Institute, Clinton Township, Michigan, 2004-7.

the health of one corresponds representationally and materially to the health of the other. The grounds of this conjunction is biological life itself. We thus get the emergence of the clinic, departments of health, morbidity and life expectancy statistics, mandatory physical education, gyms and other disciplines of the self through which the body and subjectivity are monitored and shaped.

I am interested in biopolitics because it also marks a secular shift—a this-worldly turn in governance. The imagined spaces of purgatory and heaven and hell, the journey of the soul and the afterlife, are foreclosed as organizing socio-political forces through which people are shaped as ethical beings seeking fulfillment. Judgment and justice become matters necessarily organized in a real space called *this world*. The same thing happens to happiness and health—the conjunction of which gets enshrined in what we call a "constitution," a term that turns the original biological meaning ("one's general condition of health") into a country's fundamental laws governing the well-being of the nation. Hence the enshrinement of life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness as the trinity of earthly activity.

This leads relatively directly to what many today term "the culture of life," where life itself—bare life or life as matter—becomes the locus of sociopolitical and aesthetic intervention.[13] In the twenty-first century, biotechnology is clearly the big *embodiment*, so to speak, of all this. Biotech: not just as a lab technique dealing with immortal cells, cloning, and stem cells, but also as utopia, as imaginary, as the model and language through which we understand our existence.

What this has meant aesthetically is, on one level, obvious: we get Eduardo Kac's green bunny, and live birth in an art

gallery.[14] Put another way, biology and art collapse into each other, only to reveal each other as modalities of copying. DNA, the original copying machine, is now the perfect medium for art. With a quick cheek swab and the click of a mouse, you can ask clever companies to turn your DNA sequences into a "self-portrait" to hang above your bed.[15] The age of mechanical reproduction regresses into the age of biological reproduction, taking commodity fetishism to the level of what Eugene Thacker called "biocapital," where the social relations of production are between you and your DNA, those cellular proletarians laboring to produce you from the inside out.[16] Because of all this focus on life as matter, the very *other of life* has fallen into neglect. But think what your DNA might be able to do after your so-called death!

A great deal of the art that gave rise to the modern institution we call "the museum" was death-related, funerary art (especially mummies displayed at the British Museum in the eighteenth century), or else artifacts from dying cultures (including collections from defunct monarchies or regimes). Gillian Beer reminds us that with the popularization of Darwinism, extinction—as central to Darwin as survival—was a prominent concern in Victorian culture, echoing new worries about a death without the afterlife.[17] Modern secular cultures totemized artifacts of extinction and survival in museums—on the one hand, as emblems of their own ascendance and progress, images of *their own* survival as the fittest; and on the other, as a displacement of their new worries about dying and not dying, which they handled by objectifying death. The modern attitude was to view the afterlife as an illusion, appropriate only for atavistic collection and display. It bears mentioning that memorial monuments came about at the same time as museums. The original Nelson's Column-type celebration of triumph in war was biopolitically turned into a commemorative monument to remember the the nation's fallen sons.[18] Memorials are built in response to collective trauma, as the nation-state's shamanistic act of exorcising bad spirits. Memorials, like museums, house both extinction and survival.

When museums added the qualifier "modern" to their purpose—"art"—they wanted to mark a shift: from that which was extinct or slated for extinction, to that which is being created now. The terms "modern" and then "contemporary" signified an increasing distance from death, like the circles of the inferno moving backwards. So the modern art museum came to store the activity of people who were not dead. But there is no doubt: it did so in preparation for their deaths. The artist's labor now becomes a fetish kept in this storage pod "for posterity," like the pinkie of a saint, like the foreskin of Jesus. Collecting "work" made by people who were not dead, but doing so in anticipation of their deaths, museums of modern art were already claiming the artist as relic, as corpse. Ironically, they and their collectors produced the artist as a category of the living dead, valued for his or her "remains," the remains of his or her labor.

Film still from The Ballad of Genesis and Lady Jaye

In the absence of notions of personal survival, art is one of the better vehicles for leaving a trace beyond a solitary finite existence. This is a prominent worry in secular psyches, which is why Woody Allen's quip always draws a laugh: "I don't want to achieve immortality through my works; I want to achieve immortality by not dying." The museum is a secular place for the first kind of immortality, a place where your work survives when you don't. That is precisely the nature of the exchange. Thus the perfect show, title and all, for this secular age was the New Museum's *Younger Than Jesus*, fetishizing artists younger than Western civilization's greatest sacrificial figure, turning life into death at thirty-three, and invoking resurrection as the ideal of a continuous life project of staying young but nailed to a museum wall.

I don't presume to propose an antidote to this cannibalistic consumption of live art. But can't we get away from the myopia of life itself? Are there media that can be used for afterlife art, for an aesthetics whose imaginary and field of practice might be called "post-secular"? Where can we find clues?

A number of artists have consciously approached this territory, but have stopped short at the boundaries of the secular. An example is Theresa Margolles, with her work using water from a morgue. The water used to wash corpses has touched the dead, mixing with the corpse. She then uses the water to generate vapor or bubbles in a gallery space. The repulsion and fear she triggers in the audience questions the secular notion of a corpse as inert matter, and of the dead as without any causal effect in this world. The dead here have measurable, physical causal effects on the living. The only trouble is that they are anonymous. It is not a specific person whose agency is felt by the audience; rather, the work produces a charged environment that triggers generalized phobias around death.

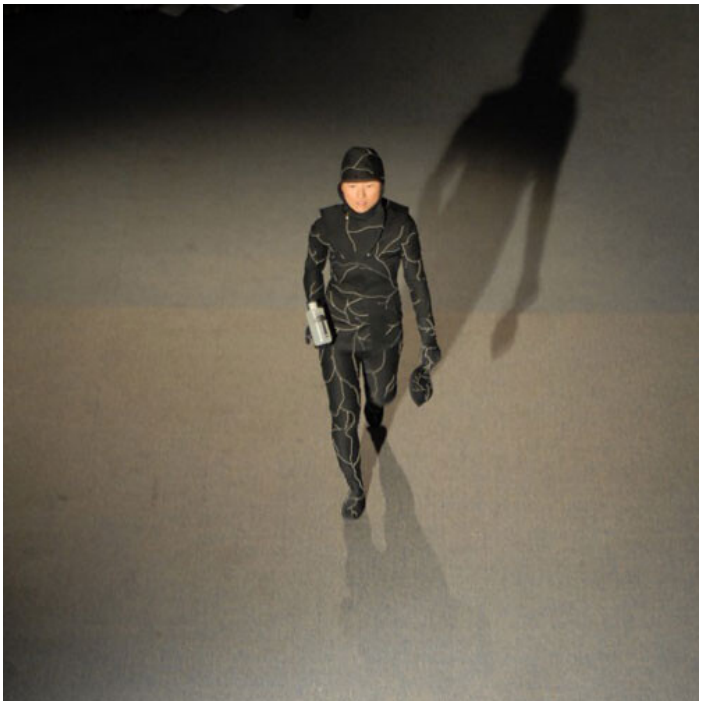
Teresa Margolles, Aire (Air), 2003. Installation.

In another register, Jae Rhim Lee, a Korean-American artist, has started *The Infinity Burial Project*. She has developed mushrooms that will help decompose your body in such a way as to get rid of all its accumulated environmental toxins. So instead of your dead body poisoning the earth, it will enrich it. She has designed a Mushroom Death Suit, carrying mushroom spores that are activated on burial. The best thing about her project is that people have agreed in principle to donate their bodies after they die. She is using *other afterlives* as performative and experimental substance. However, she frames her work in terms of a typical notion of a corpse, embracing the secular aesthetic that says: *Accept death! You are done as a person! You have become a post-mortem body only!* Her project is thus an environmentally friendly mortuary ritual—which is a popular practice of its own these days, called "green burial."

The musician and performance artist Genesis Breyer P-Orridge provides an interesting counterpoint—one that actually starts in the creation of a new form of life-before-death. Genesis came to the East Village in the early 1990s after years of making experimental art in England as a member of Throbbing Gristle and Psychic TV. In the US, he fell madly in love with Lady Jaye, a practicing nurse, dominatrix, and musician. In their blissful, dedicated union, they decided they wanted to merge—not so much to become one, but to create a third, other being made of the two of them joined beyond social identities, a being they called a "pandrogyne." They both underwent radical plastic surgery to begin to resemble each other. The exterior changes were not, as Genesis emphasizes, superficial. Extreme physical changes affect the psyche, and increasingly the two did look, feel, and act like a single pandrogyne. Then Lady Jaye died—or as Genesis terms it, "She dropped her body, the cheap suitcase." You can imagine Genesis's sadness. But you can also imagine how the original merger in life provided a new possibility for not dying, for being preserved in and as the pandrogyne. But Lady Jaye has survived as an agent in even more interesting ways. Genesis says, "One of us is technically dead, but she's involved in everything I do … We're still working together and the things we create couldn't have happened without her presence." Indeed, Genesis is inhabited by an assemblage of agencies, no longer even using the first person pronoun. If language is a measure, s/he has deictically shape-shifted. That's one way to conceive of post-secular aesthetics, one in which an assemblage of things—including people in their parts or wholes—are enlisted in the activation of distributed, substrate-independent agency.

There has been a recent tendency—mostly by non-artists—to have some artistic fun with death by designing customized coffins and tombstones. Whilst this is clearly not what I mean by afterlife art, one outcome of this tendency has intriguing potential. A number of companies, such as QR Memorial, offer new QR-encoded tombstones. What if instead of showing old photographs and videos, these were to activate self-regulating, evolving, and interactive avatars? Perhaps avatars that already exist and have been active in other spaces, such as *World of Warcraft* or *Second Life*? Currently, every movement and interaction made by a player in *WoW* is recorded. Thus the avatar captures a relational or social self.[19] The avatar self can outlive its humanoid player (or agent) and continue functioning as what is now being called a "non-player character (NPC)." Researchers are trying to make NPCs behave more like specific people on their own, without a human agent behind them.[20] The avatar-person that survives the body-person can then continue relations with others through a QR-activated pocket-sized "tombstone" (like an afterlife Furby), thus challenging one of the key secular rules of personhood. A minor version of this is already available for the Twitterati. If you sign on to the website Liveson.org, you can have their algorithms analyse your tweets in order to learn "about your likes, tastes, syntax." Your feedback in this process will help the algorithm develop a "better you." The algorithmic you "will keep tweeting even after you've passed away." Their branding jingle is: "When your heart stops beating, you'll keep tweeting."[21] That is closer to what I am calling post-secular aesthetics.

Returning to the original body of flesh, it is worth noting that people regularly donate their biological bodies to afterlife adventures, but because this act is mediated by science, it is not glossed as performative. Yet, when bodies are donated to scientific research, they become, in their *after* lives, all sorts of cool things: from crash test dummies to functioning organs in other people's bodies to clumps of cells growing in tissue culture. The specifics are sometimes left up to the donor, who can, for example, donate directly to an organization, such as *Bodies: The Exhibition*. But in such cases—as in all donation—there is a major problem: anonymity. The *Bodies* exhibit, for



Jae Rhim Lee, N=O=Infinity, Infinity Burial Suit, 2009-ongoing.

Nineteenth century anatomical model of an eye in papier-mâché developed by Dr. Louis Theroux.

example, will not associate any specific parts of you with your name or personal identity. You might become a cornea in a running back, or an index finger in a poker player. People in the *Bodies* organization have told me they regularly receive requests asking that a donor's identity be made public in the exhibit, but the company ignores these requests. Your *body* is on display, not your person. Indeed, the entire organ donation system works on the basis of anonymity, since the medico-legal regime does not want to encourage the continued life of one person inside another, despite the fact that many organ recipients and family members of donors restructure their senses of self, feeling, and behavior as though some aspect of the dead donor is active in a new hybridized body.[22]

But the anthropologist Lesley Sharp has documented patient activists who are trying to change the anonymity rules.[23] As a result, organ donation is now a promising afterlife art medium. Artists could use the power of organ donation laws to exert personal agency *after* secular law has declared them dead. One way to do this would be through other bodies. For example, imagine an eyebank full of artists' eyes. One pair might have belonged to David Hockney. Perhaps Marc Glimcher, the director of Pace Gallery, which represents Hockney, could bid to have them implanted in himself, and so begin to see the world through Hockney's eyes. Maybe he'd stop collecting.

The legal will is another potential afterlife medium. Rather than use it simply as a way of devolving estates, artists could use it to guide action in the future. Emily Jacir could sell her legal will, or a part thereof, as art to the Guggenheim. She could insist in the will that, for example, Nancy Spector, or her equivalent, make an annual pilgrimage to Haifa and return with a briefcase full of Palestinian earth which, diluted in some Poland Spring water, should be drunk by all members of the board at their annual meeting. There is precedent for this. Charles Whitmore, a lifelong hiker, requested that his ashes be spread on 315 peaks in southern Arizona; at last count, Whitmore's remains had been spread on 176 peaks by hikers from his club, who were working on the remaining 139.[24] Indeed, Mr. Whitmore is a great post-secular performance artist.

Some further possibilities are suggested by my own research as an anthropologist working with Immortalist groups, who want to achieve physical immortality through scientific means—through Artificial Intelligence, molecular biology, and cryonics. Terasem is an organization based in Satellite Beach, on the space coast of Florida. Its founder, Martine Rothblatt (née Martin), is a transgender lawyer and inventor who was a pioneer of the satellite vehicle tracking and satellite radio industries, including Sirius. Martine is also the founder and CEO of United Therapeutics, a biotechnology company, and the author of several books, including *The Apartheid of Sex* and *Unzipped Genes*. Terasem and Rothblatt have teamed up with William Sims Bainbridge, a social psychologist and a director at the National Science Foundation, on a project called CyBeRev. The two are founding members of the "Order of Cosmic Engineers," whose goal is to "permeate our universe with benign

intelligence, building and spreading it from inner space to outer space and beyond."

CyBeRev has been collecting "mindfiles"—digital files that represent your mind. The information is gathered from participants based on a psychological profile form designed by Bainbridge. The form is meant to elicit as much useful information about you as possible, so you can be reconstituted by a superintelligence in the future. Participants can choose to include additional information as well, such as photographs, data files, and scanned journals. The more complete the file, the better it will approximate you.[25] The mindfiles are then "spacecast"—transmitted as digital information via satellite into outerspace. Rothblatt says, "Every Terasem joiner or participant who has mindfiles with us has already achieved a certain level of immortality by having aspects of their mindfiles already anywhere from up to five to six light years away from the earth depending on when they started uploading." In other words, there is no reason why "you" couldn't be making art, or unfolding as an art piece, near a red dwarf star after your earthly demise.

In closing, let me turn to cryonics, which abides no final endings. Cryonicists argue that death as presently defined and administered is merely a placeholder for the limits of our primitive knowledge. Death is nothing more than a medical and legal convention. The process of biological death is a cascade of events that takes much longer than we assume. There is a much wider *window* for intervention between the *onset* of these events and the accumulation of final and decisive damage. Cryonicists believe that if they can immediately stop further decay of the body and brain, future science will likely find a cure for the affliction we currently call death. In order to do this, their members are cooled down as soon as legal death is declared, and they are stored, or suspended, in gleaming vats of liquid nitrogen called "cryostats." In there, all metabolic and biochemical processes are halted at minus 196 degrees Celsius, a temperature at which virtually nothing happens. But since this *is* a matter of life and death, it's best to be precise about *how much* nothing actually happens: biochemical reactions that at a normal 37 degrees Celsius occur over a timespan of six minutes would, at a temperature of minus 196 degrees Celsius, take 100 sextillion years to unfold.[26]

In this example, the choice of a six-minute timescale is not random. Conventionally, six minutes is considered to be the time it takes after cardiac arrest for ischemic damage to result in final brain death. For cryonicists, biological time is elastic time: you can stretch it, and if you get into a cryostat quickly enough—right after the properly authorized person pronounces death—and you stabilize the body, cooling the head and circulating blood and oxygen so that brain cells and organ cells remain alive, you can eventually, perhaps, expand that six-minute window into … 100 sextillion years. One cryonicist told me, "It's like hitting the pause button."

Artist Cryopreservation Options: mock-up of a possible design for a cryocapsule by Jeff Koons.

In the meantime, all those people on pause, in their liminal state of suspended animation, cannot be treated as mere corpses. They are regarded as having future potential lives. Secured under lock and surveillance camera, they are called "patients." They have patient numbers and patient files. They are treated as quasi-people with rights, people worthy of protection and care, people with a life waiting for them in the future. Perhaps.

Rather than its *mechanics*, think of the *poetics* of this act of not dying. Perhaps as a cryonically frozen body you are not ultimately recoverable. But perhaps you are. After all, hundreds of people have survived "clinical death" after, for example, drowning in frozen rivers.[27]Every year hundreds of patients undergoing cardiac surgery are deliberately taken down into "cold death"—no heartbeat, no circulation, no brain signals, body temperature a little above freezing. And then, having been legally dead for an hour while their non-beating heart was repaired, they are brought back to the surface, to this thing we call consciousness. As one heart surgeon told me, "We take them down to death. We just don't call it that."

I am not trying to convince you of the scientific possibility of cryonics, but of the poetics of that "perhaps," the poetics of the space of suspension, in which return is not the issue at all. It is the sheer possibility, the liminality of it, the openness and suspension that matters, along with the unanswered and perhaps unanswerable questions and fears that are activated in the encounter.

I think, then, it would be fitting to start a cryonics museum. It would free us from making art altogether. All we'd have to do was die under the right circumstances and be stored properly, still full of potential, nothing but potential...

X

This paper is based on a talk delivered at the 2012 CAA meeting in Los Angeles, on the panel "Live Forever: Currency and Posterity of Performance Art," organized by Sandra Skurvida and Jovana Stokic. My thanks go to Sandra Skurvida for inviting me to the panel and commenting on the paper. I also want to thank the students in my seminar "Post-Secular Aesthetics?" for helping me to push some of these ideas further.

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1
This is a phrase resurrected from Max Weber's essay on disenchantment, "Science as a Vocation" (1946), in which he sardonically offered the bosom of the Church to the modern, disenchanted self. Suggesting that such a return was not feasible, he told his audience that the man of science had to suck it up and stoically continue doing his work despite the meaningless present and the already-obsolete future.

2
Charles Taylor, *A Secular Age,* (Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard Univ. Press, 2007).

3
We are reminded of this in a video piece by the Chinese artist Yang Zhenzhong called *I Will Die* (2000–2005). It shows a series of faces looking straight and emotionless into the camera, repeating one after the other the same natural fact: "I will die. I will die. I will die." The seriality of the faces in linear time, each declaring an absolute end, collapses individual subjective time into the eternal time of nothingness, in which none of the people in the video—none of you, none of us—will exist. Under their cumulative weight, the banality of individual finitude turns into a sense of horror in the face of nature's holocaust.

4
Jacques Le Goff, *The Birth of Purgatory* , trans. Arthur Goldhammer (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984).

5
On public and private religion see José Casanova, *Public Religions in the Modern World* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994); and Talal Asad, "Trying to Understand French Secularism," in *Political Theologies: Public Religions in a Post-Secular World* , eds. Hent de Vries and Lawrence E. Sullivan (New York: Fordham University Press, 2006).

6
See Talal Asad, *Formations of the Secular: Christianity, Islam, Modernity* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2003).

7
See Beth Conklin and Lynn Morgan, "Babies, Bodies and the Production of Personhood in North America and a Native Amazonian Society," *Ethos* Vol. 24, No. 4 (1996): 657–694; and Margaret Lock, *Twice Dead: Organ Transplants and the Reinvention of Death* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002).

8
Some of these ideas, especially in relation to the colonial encounter, were covered by Anselm Franke's show and comprehensive catalogue *Animism (*Franke 2010). They were further elaborated in *e-flux journal* 36 (Summer 2012). See https://www.e-flux.com/journal/36/ .

9
See https://www.moma.org/calendar/exhibitions/960 .

10
See Sharon Kaufman, "In the Shadow of 'Death with Dignity': Medicine and the Cultural Quandaries of the Vegetative State," *American Anthropologist* Vol. 102, No. 1 (2000).

11
Ray D. Madoff, *Immortality and the Law: The Rising Power of the American Dead* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2011).

12
Michel Foucault, *The Birth of Biopolitics: Lectures at the College de France, 1978-1979* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008); and Foucault, *Discipline and Punish* (New York: Vintage, 1999).

13
See Karin Knorr Cetina, "The Rise of a Culture of Life," *European Molecular Biology Organization Reports* , Special Issue, Vol. 6 (2005): 76–80.

14
See http://www.ekac.org/gfpbunny.html#gfpbunnyanchor and https://web.archive.org/web/20131227220038/http://www.marnikotak.com/pages/performances.html .

15
See, for example, http://www.dna11.com/gallery_portraits.asp .

16
Eugene Thacker, *The Global Genome: Biotechnology, Politics, and Culture* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2005).

17
Gillian Beer, "Darwin and the Uses of Extinction," *Victorian Studies* , Vol. 51, No. 2 (2009): 321–331.

18
See Reinhart Kosselleck, "History, Histories and Formal Structures of Time," *The Practice of Conceptual History: Timing History, Spacing Concepts* , trans. T.S. Presner et. al. (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2002); and Jay Winter, *Sites of Memory, Sites of Mourning: The Great War in European Cultural History* (London: Cambridge University Press, 1995).

19
See William Sims Bainbridge, *The Warcraft Civilization: Social Science in a Virtual World* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2010).

20
See Samantha Murphy, "World of Warcraft Predicts Future," *New Scientist* (March 2010).

21
See http://liveson.org/. I owe this reference to Anna Wheeler.

22
See Lesley Sharp, *Bodies, Commodities and Biotechnologies* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2007).

23
Ibid.

24
See Madoff, *Immortality and the Law* .

25
CyBeRev used to be open to anyone, but now your have to be approved to participate. See https://web.archive.org/web/20130911224227/http://cyberev.org/ .

26
See Benjamin P. Best, "Scientific Justification of Cryonics Practice," *Rejuvenation Research* Vol. 11, No. 2 (2008).

27
See M. Farstada et. al., "Rewarming From Accidental Hypothermia by Extracorporeal Circulation: A Retrospective Study," *European Journal of Cardiothoracic Surgery* 20 (2001): 58–64; and B.H. Walpoth et. al., "Outcome Of Survivors Of Accidental Deep Hypothermia and Circulatory Arrest Treated with Extracorporeal Blood Warming," *The New England Journal Of Medicine* Vol. 337, No. 21 (1997): 1500–5.

Natasha Ginwala and Vivian Ziherl

Sensing Grounds: Mangroves, Unauthentic Belonging, Extra-Territoriality

When R.L. Stevenson undertook his first transatlantic voyage at the age of 25, journeying to reunite with his future wife in California, he wrote the essay "The Amateur Emigrant." This writing became the first chapter of his collected works, *Essays of Travel*, published in 1905. On board the *Devonia* from London to New York in August of 1879, he opens with scenes from "The Second Cabin":

> A few Scandinavians, who had already grown acquainted on the North Sea, were friendly and voluble over their long pipes; but among English speakers distance and suspicion reigned supreme. The sun was soon overclouded, the wind freshened and grew sharp as we continued to descend the widening estuary; and with the falling temperature the gloom among the passengers increased.[1]

In this account by Stevenson, and also more famously in the opening passages of Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*, we are made to bear witness to the beginning of a journey, and to immediately access a plot of characters that are compatriots in making a specific voyage. While they are initially sketched with their codes of national belonging and social standing (the Lawyer, the Accountant, the Director, a fine young Irishman), they soon develop from a descriptive assemblage of exaggerated personal traits into a collective chorus brought together by the bond of the sea, by the mesh of travel memories and cultural relations formed through a shared sea-route.

These ships become a sensing ground—a space of exposed bodies, ideologies, infrastructural and social productions. From their shared departure point of the Thames, the *Devonia* and *The Nellie* both lift their anchor and therein also depart from "European gloom." While the Nellie sets course towards the New World of California, Conrad's steamboat glides into the final leg of its journey where it is deeper and quieter. There is a sense of alienation and incomprehension in the unknowable quality of his environ—the entrance into an unearthly earth. He then states, "We were cut off from the comprehension of our surroundings. We glided past like phantoms, wondering and secretly appalled, as sane men would be before an enthusiastic outbreak in a madhouse."[2]

The Mangrove's Spectral Subject

The mangrove is itself just such a place where the earth seems unearthly. It is here that human traces cannot survive as a lasting form, for this tropical coastal ecology is a site of continual refiguration: neither sea nor land, neither river nor sea, bearing neither salty nor fresh water, in neither daylight nor darkness.

Frontispiece to the 1895 edition of R. L. Stevenson and Lloyd Osbourne's The Ebb Tide.

Air is the weight of water—and the leg that ventures into a mangrove swamp is asking to be eaten. If it isn't snapped up by saltwater crocodiles, a tiger, or tropical insects, it will at the very least partially disappear in the dense mud between protruding roots. Memory fails in the mangrove, just as the marking of claims becomes impossible.

The mangrove has been prone to confused definitions, since it is a grouping of over eighty specialized plant species that survive as "botanical amphibians," but is also a complex coastal ecosystem in itself. With these hybrid conditions of "belonging," the mangrove lends itself to helping us think through the present-day schematic of Euro-American crises amid larger constellations of political insurrections and migratory movements. Its polymorphous personality as a sediment-carrier, land-builder, defender of numerous life forms, and also an inadvertent protector of pirates renders the mangrove a fascinating study in the biopolitics of selfhood.

Made in the 1920s, the image of an unknown subject amidst mangrove vegetation in northwest Bali begins to signify the spectral nature of the mangrove environment, its impassable yet fecund qualities. While the photographer remains anonymous, it seems a relic "between" colonial fantasy and social documentary. The unspecified relation linking the photographer and the doubled subject of the figure with(in) ground gives vantage to the interval maintained in colonial administration and its conflated imaginary of native and nature. [3] It is an image depicting proximity that nonetheless institutes a barrier of distance.

However, in capturing the figure's reflection, the image of it produces a double location: first enmeshed in the dappled shade and light of the background, and then spectrally as an upside-down figure formed by the water surface. Its duplication unsettles the camera's emplacement of the figure as part of the landscape, extending a counter-image produced by the watery landscape. The pictorial organization of the photograph signifies, then, an inverted self—the upside-down nature of the mangrove root as a sensing ground for all that lies "above" the surface.

Of Inversion(s) and Extra -territoriality

Next to the human form, the mangrove appears as a field of suspension, a zone of impasse to usual technologies of passage. Unlike the ease of a ship moving through an estuary, the mangrove is impossible because it is impassable. The English explorer and natural historian William Dampier (1651–1715), the first person to circumnavigate the world three times, noted with frustration regarding the Red Mangrove of the West Indies:

> It always grows out of many roots about the bigness of a man's ankle, some bigger, some less ... Where this sort of tree grows it is impossible to march by reason of these stakes, which grow so mixed one among another that I have, when forced to go through them, gone half a mile and never set my foot on the ground, stepping from root to root.[4]

The mangrove is, hence, a landscape demanding extra-ordinary measures. Its porous body, which renders it a fluctuating life determined by tidal cycles, provides it also with the quality of *extra*-territoriality. In the descriptions of nineteenth-century botanists and travelers, these tropical and subtropical mangrove regions appear as *other* worldly places, strangely framed both as wastelands and as zones invested with extra-natural life force. Both types of description indicate a situation of exception—on the one hand, the image of pestilence, of

Mangrove vegetation in north-west Bali, 1920-1927, Photographer unknown. Image courtesy of Tropenmuseum, Amsterdam.

the malarial mosquito; and on the other, the fable of a land so rich that oysters grow on trees.[5]

This image of an inverted self has its echo in the classic tarot card of "The Hanged Man." This tarot archetype represents the suspended self, signaling the condition of being "withheld," of being forced to take life as it comes. It is a card for introspection and "surrender" as modes of emotional release.

In sympathy, the mangrove may be read as a symbolic protagonist of the self, performing as a porous satellite that grasps signals from its environs by locating its roots upwards rather than burrowing underground to claim an authentic history, bound by complexes of majoritarianism. It is an unsettled self that simultaneously produces "subject" and "place" through sensible readings of surrounding life and politics.

The mangrove's manner of suspension is also one of respiration, as it experiences rhythmic and daily tidal inundation. The adaptive stilt-roots common to the *rhizophora*, or "true mangroves," partially raise the tree body, again expanding its exposed surface. As a sensory mechanism, it is one that remains "anchored" to location, and yet perpetually undertakes the task of absorbing its "surround." It is this intricate dynamics of exposure that renders the mangrove a critical motif of affective cartography during times of hyper-mobility.

Bringing Deleuzian analogies above ground, the germination of the *rhizophora* occurs also as an airborne process, its seeds dropping as root-bearing organs—breathing, rolling, circling in the air. Hence, not determined by the subterranean, this inverted form indicates an alternate imagery to tropes of authenticity that fix rights and rightful territorial identity through downward-tending rootedness—as a contraction of "belonging" to the narrow column of heredity.

In times of heavy traffic, where bodies are pressurized into strands of belonging turning towards paranoid structures and self-insulation, the aerial root may permit a gasp of air.

Landsat 7 image of Sundarbans, released by NASA Earth Observatory.

A Mangle of Names

The mangrove also traces a language cartography, setting sail through the routes of travel and the histories of encounter to which mangrove-naming bears witness. The hybrid terms that define mangroves in different linguistic cultures become conveyors of sociopolitical contact between civilizations and coastal ecologies. For instance, the combination of the old Malay word " *mangi mangi*" and the Arabic word " *el grum*" refers to the *Avicennia* genus of mangrove tree, which is a favorite attraction for fireflies. Or consider the juxtaposition of the Portuguese "mangle" with the English word "grove," potentially linking the mangrove to the sacred grove.

However, the mangrove's intense bed of foliage, punctuated with prop and stilt roots, remains antithetical to the manicured and decisively cultivated grove. It may therefore be more productive to reflect on the mangrove's word origins not merely through land, but as linkages with a specific kind of tree and tide.

The Sundarbans covers an area of 10,000 square kilometers of intertidal zones between parts of southwestern Bangladesh and the state of West Bengal in India. The largest mangrove forest in the world, its name bears the combined genesis of a beautiful "sea forest" and of the Sundari tree, the *Heritiera fomes* species of mangrove, which grows across these wetlands in abundance.

The novelist Amitav Ghosh writes in *The Hungry Tide* (2005) of another traditional naming of the region:

> In the record books of the Mughal emperors this region is named not in reference to a tree but to a tide— *bhati*. And to the inhabitants of the islands this land is known as *bhatir desh*—the tide country—except that *bhati* is not just the "tide" but one tide in particular, the ebb tide: it is only in falling that that water gives birth to a forest. To look upon this strange parturition, midwived by the moon, is to know why the name "tide country" is not just right but necessary.[6]

As a landscape, the Sundarbans is marked by unfixity, since its intertidal nature places it between appearance and disappearance—with islands being submerged overnight. It is ironic that while the aerial root systems of mangroves are highly valued as fortifications against the onslaught of angry tidal waves (as experienced during the tsunami of 2004) their porous quality does not allow for clear border-making. In reading this satellite image of the Sundarbans, produced by what is said to be "the most stable, best characterized Earth observation instrument ever placed in orbit," we are met with the trembling instability of borders. The water channels eat into the land as gnarled roots of mangrove, uncontainable on ground and from an aerial view—here the coastline becomes indiscernible as a single entity.

The legal vexations of such amphibious and obtuse terrain become pronounced in sea-rights cases, wherein boarder-making becomes the necessity of tenure. Forming rulings over such zones lays legality prone to paradox. In the Blue Mud Bay case, heard by the High Court of Australia in 2008, a legal body was called upon to make a determination regarding the shifting geography of a mangrove coastal region. In the final ruling the aboriginal Yolgnu claimants were successful, with the court ruling that the column of tidal water lying above land should be regarded no differently from the land itself. Thus the court's attempt to encompass Dholupuyngu cosmology and "aqueography" occasioned a legal magic transforming water flow into the fixity of "land."[7]

The case has its echo in an earlier "land-mark" Yolgnu claim of 1973, the first native title case to be heard in Australian courts. In that instance, it was determined that the doctrine of *terra nullius* would be upheld, the basis upon which Australian nationhood is legally constituted through the disavowal of "prior occupation." The regime of authentification that followed—necessitated in the making of exceptions to this doctrine of legalized dwelling—marked belonging as a status granted through mere recognition, mere naming in "title," rather than inscribed in ongoing self-making and place-making processes.

In the intertidal and interpenetrating zone of the mangrove, the border between land and sea becomes a choreography of re-crossings. The mangrove line is, hence, one of sedimentary reclamation rather than clear political divisions of terra firma. In mangrove zones, human determinations become ghosts. The inability to form a mark is registered as a problem also of historicity.

Roberto Chabet, "Bakawan" (Exhibition View), 1974, Bakawan wood, nylon strings, hooks, fluorescent lights, dimensions variable. Acknowledgment to the artist and The Chabet Archive at Asia Art Archive for making the material accessible.

Regarding Place

Drawing figures, is figured.
Drawing pulls, pushes, tugs, drags.
Drawing is friction, gravity.
Earth draws, is drawn, draws maps.
Sun draws, draws shadows, photos.
Moon draws tides.

— from Roberto Chabet's exhibition *Lines on Drawing* (1999)

The artist's shadow falls upon a patch of mangrove-dwelling mudflats. As Roberto Chabet photographs this ecology of aerial roots, there is a simultaneous charge of self-inscription and of capturing a "nearby." At once, through proximity and a shadow of impermanence, this photograph becomes a conceptual process-note in which the mangrove emerges as coauthoring an indexical self. It is a figure of locationality and an agent of absorption, such that the principle of locating remains immersive.

The material form of the Bakawan, a local mangrove tree in the Philippines, has been a focal point across modalities of Chabet's artistic production. Knowing the root became an inexhaustible journey of constant figurations, through installation, through drawing, through photography, through living close to tidal riverbanks, and through the common market sale of Bakawan segments for firewood. By turns this is knowing also as commodity, as the aesthetic, and as the "natural."

Chabet's first Bakawan exhibition took place in 1974, two years into the period of martial law proclaimed by President Ferdinand Marcos. It was held at the Cultural Centre of the Philippines, a heightened locus within the cultural politics of the Marcos regime. The installation presented a grid of fifty-six mangrove segments suspended amidst the representational void of a white-walled gallery setting. This scenography of "looking" was heightened by being viewable only through a glass door, its handle removed, both sealing the room and the symmetry of the setting. As poet and critic Joy Dayrit remarked, this suspended installation thus insists upon being viewed frontally, and yet it portrays the accentuated violence of the vertical—the mangrove as a barricade, as a territorialization after all.[8]

Throughout 1974, mangroves were the center of Chabet's attention. He made a series of forty-eight watercolor and pencil drawings of Bakawan. The series was enfolded within the daily act of drawing and re-drawing "10,000 Things," which subtends both Chabet's work and his self-conception as an artist. These drawings often proceed

Tejal Shah, Between the Waves—Inner, 2012, mixed media on paper, digital print. Image courtesy of the artist.

in serial by tracing over a previous drawing, in a movement of both reproduction and annihilation, recurrent yet without producing a rehearsal of the same. The pictures do not accumulate to form a monumental image, nor is their memory of a monumental time. Through this ongoing act of self-exposure in observation and of self-application in drawing, Chabet produces not repetition but a kind of vivid co-presence enacted within a durative present.[9]

In his notes towards *Regarding Place, No Place*, Chabet outlines the multiple operations of "regarding"—of looking and seeing, of consideration and attention, of respect and esteem. The act of "regarding place," then, is an act of making place through self-emplacement. The Bakawan works may perhaps also be seen as exercises in self-cartography amidst the estranged condition of martial law and parochial nationalism. Yet they also "act" beyond this realm of implicated belonging by structuring modes of a situatedness that is "between." "Placement, location, is central in art," Chabet writes, "This sense of place is the artist's sense of self."[10]

Unauthentic Belonging

To maintain an enduring receptivity while making journeys from known to unknown territories, one must have the capacity to risk states of exposure. Exposure to disease, exposure to friction between values, loss of control—and yet exposure as risk cleaves also to exposure as the opening into "real" transformation. In the histories of intercontinental commutorship, as well as in the excessive nature of present-day mobility, what ironically resurfaces is an attitude of isolation—a paradoxical in-transit state of quarantine. Hence, infrastructural intensifications have, to a certain extent, induced blockage in the capacity of sensation in body-land relations.

Quite unlike the estuary—a meeting between water forms—mangrove zones are catchment areas which invent potential models of entangled affectivity, enfolding fertile matter in detritus. They do so while performing exuberant cycles of re- and decomposition. However, in British colonial occupation and settlement, the problem of the mangrove was often solved with another: the problem of waste. Unfit for built structures or known forms of cultivation, the mangroves lining the banks of tidal rivers that permit access to settled towns were often zoned for landfill—as if areas that do not obey the demands of a territorial border should be punished, and should also become a field for acts of punishment.

In *Between the Waves*, Tejal Shah introduces us to improbable bodies that infiltrate the mangrove, its sediments, refuse, and excesses—becoming animal-plants and plants as animals. Suspended between states of dreaming and wakefulness, these ambiguous beings hold stimulatory appendages. And yet, in their sensing they remain beyond mutation and beyond forces of ownership. In the resistant flesh and dense fertility of the aerial root, we find the radical feedback of self-exposure.

The impossibility of the mangrove is designated as an externality, but in forming the contours of limitation it defines the cultural entity itself. It is a problem that binds. From this perspective, it is perhaps in its exceptional self-exposure that the aerial root is the root of an identity formation that is, by contrast, aware of the problems that it constitutes. Indeed, it is one that perhaps *must* know, from having been marked as unauthentic—as ill-fitted to the regimes under which identity is summoned. It is thus that the good feelings of "belonging" may give way to the bad faith of sovereign hypocrisies.

By producing the unauthentic, the possibility of inauthentification is instantiated. In the positive action of making belonging beyond prescribed bounds, the edifice of authority may be breeched. As Aimé Césaire wrote in his *Cahier d'un retour au pays natal*,

> my negritude is neither tower nor cathedral
> it takes root in the red flesh of the soil
> it takes root in the ardent flesh of the sky
> it breaks through opaque prostration with its upright patience.[11]

The root that heads also skyward, the quality of belonging that refigures narratives of place by figuring itself as upright, does not bind itself only to earthbound histories rendered as inert and received through descent. There is a reaching out into contact, a porosity. As Césaire writes in his *Discourse on Colonialism*, "for civilizations, exchange is oxygen."[12]

X

This essay was composed within the framework of the ongoing research project "Landings," and a forthcoming exhibition, to be held as part of the program "The World Turned Inside Out" at Witte de With Center for Contemporary Art, Rotterdam, May 25–August 18, 2013. We are grateful to Ringo Bunoan for her generous support in accessing the Robert Chabet Archive (Asia Art Archive, Hong Kong), and to the inspirational work of Roberto Chabet (1937-2013).

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1
Although written in 1879-1880, Robert Louis Stevenson's The Amateur Emigrant from the Clyde to Sandy Hook was only posthumously published on account of the discomfort of Stevenson's friends and family to its candid descriptions of dwelling amidst the lower-classes.

2
Joseph Conrad, *Heart of Darkness,* (original publisher: Blackwood's Magazine, 1899).

3
Regarding the narrations by which native and nature became figuratively collapsed under a logic of cultivation in the British colonial context, see Rosalind Morris, "Imperial Pastoral: The Politics and Aesthetics of Translation in British Malaya," *Representations* Vol. 99, No. 1 (2001): 159–194.

4
Cited in John Reader Jackson's *The Mangrove and Its Allies,* published in 1900. At the time, Jackson was Curator of the Museum of the Kew Royal Botanical Gardens.

5
As portrayed in the accounts of one Dr. Hamilton, presented to the British Royal Pharmaceutical Society in 1846: "Its roots rise in the form of arches, above the muddy soil in which it grows, and affords attachment to myriads of small but delicious oysters, which are left bare during the efflux of the tide, giving rise to the popular fable of oysters growing on trees, which, with the exception of their not being fed by, but merely adhering to the tree, is literally true. These oysters make a most incomparable soup, of which I once partook at the house of an American merchant, at Cape Henri." Cited in Jackson's *The Ma ngrove and Its Allies* .

6
See Amitav Gosh, *The Hungry Tide,* (New York: Mariner Books, 2005)

7
The term "aqueography" is advanced in Barber, M. (2005) "Where the Clouds Stand: Australian Aboriginal Relationships to Water, Place, and the Marine Environment in Blue Mud Bay, Northern Territory," PhD Thesis, Australian National University. Research data underpinning the thesis was presented in evidence during the Blue Mud Bay case (Gumana vs. Northern Territory, 2005).

8
Joy Dayrit, *Notes on Roberto Chabet's Bakawan* , unpublished notes - 1974, (Hong Kong: The Chabet Archive, Asia Art Archive).

9
See Rosalind Morris, *At War With Gertrude Stein* , (lecture, 5th Annual Feminist Workshop, Duke University: 2011), also, *Wars / Have (Not) Seen* , (Calcutta: Seagull Books, forthcoming).

10
Roberto Chabet, *Notes On Place / No Place* , unpublished notes - 1996, (Hong Kong: The Chabet Archive, Asia Art Archive.

11
Aimé Césaire, *Cahier d'un retour au pays natal (Notebook of a Return to the Native Land)* , (originally published Paris: Editions Presence Africaine, 1955).

12
Aimé Césaire, *Discours sur le colonialisme* (Paris: Présence Africaine, 1953).

Brian Kuan Wood

We Are the Weather

> Weather is the key paradox of our time. Weather that is nice is often weather that is wrong. The nice is occurring in the immediate and individual, and the wrong is occurring systemwide.
> —Roni Horn in 2007[1]

The sublime of the nineteenth century was described by Kant as the feeling of watching an avalanche from a distance. A glacier crumbles, a frozen world breaks down, creating awe and shock and awe again, pleasure and horror at the same time—but always at a remove. Today the sublime of the nineteenth century has gone haywire. It's more like a monster wave. A tsunami as freeze frame. A twister exhaling in slow motion, collapsing a block of South Asian textile factories. A moment of exhilarated foam suspended high up then crashing down to devastate your lives terminally. The razor-sharp spike of an algorithm when it crests, just barely high enough to brush up against the inside of the bubble.

The distance between the observer and the disaster has disappeared. In fact the observer and the disaster might even be the same thing. It's as if when one bubble bursts, another one expands to become the atmosphere itself. We are standing above the remains and the rubble of the first, but still inside another enclosure that arrives as some sort of psychotic causality. Is there a way out of the market or are we only trapped inside with no escape? Yes and yes! The trouble has to do with being liberated and newly imprisoned in such quick succession. You are watching the storm and being blown and carried away by it at the same time. This is why you may often feel that you're in competition with yourself, or that you are not yourself at all. You may be a wanderer above the mist, but you are also in the mist.[2] The Caspar David Friedrich painting went gray. You think you may be God himself, but you still need Google Maps to find your way through the mist. The wanderer lost his phone and is just trying to get to a restaurant.

In the aftermath of the financial crisis, Wall Street firms made some very interesting adjustments. It is well known that after slashing jobs by the thousands, salaries and bonuses for individual executives reached record highs. But how is this possible? Did executives simply stuff their own pockets with bailout money? Well, yes, but only through a much larger systemic adjustment by which Wall Street firms essentially diverted money away from infrastructure and support staff, clearing the way for a slimmer workforce of highly gifted, self-sufficient, and well-paid geniuses.

Walid Raad, Let's Be Honest, The Weather Helped (Egypt), (1984-2007). Archival inkjet print. Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York.

This allowed the liquidated infrastructure to flow into the hands of individuals whose extraordinary intelligence and instinct could singlehandedly sustain the entire system. And of course, without infrastructure these highly gifted geniuses would find themselves in a strange vacuum—with no desk and chair, no heating, probably no office to go to for work, and possibly looking to rent a warehouse space next to an artist studio in Brooklyn, where even a sizable private staff could be hired out of a single salary to sustain a semiautonomous fiefdom. Following the liquidation of institutions private and public alike, not only the creative industries but now also the financial executive starts to inhabit a condition traditionally associated with the artist.

Around the same time as the crash, while artists and art institutions feared the worst, many have been surprised to find the field of art as a whole thriving, even in spite of savage cuts to public funding nearly everywhere. Institutionalized austerity seems to remake the artist into a carrier of a much more important technology—one that it becomes increasingly necessary to understand and access. And the sensitive artist still guilty from being an agent of property speculation and gentrification during the boom years of the creative class may not have seen the ruins of that cutesy economy in cities like Dublin.[3] As a vanguard of resilience in the face of impoverishment, the artist who beautified low-income or derelict neighborhoods has only more to give, because he or she is also an originator of extra-economic technologies, of ways of living inside and outside of economic relations, of the conquering genius of exemplary survival, with some misshapen idealism that pours forth seemingly endlessly, with or without resources, over and above demands and expectations.

Either due to an increasingly abstracted political conviction, or some metaphysical contact with eternity within the studio, the artist always dreams of going beyond. But what happens when that is actually possible? Just look at Bradley Cooper's character in *Limitless* (2011), who found a pill to give him unlimited mental power. The character who began as a tortured writer quickly dropped fiction for finance, before finally going into politics—only at the end. It is a portrait of the hero of instability—a pill-popping super genius who can get the fast read on all the angles of any situation ad infinitum.

Let's consider for a moment that these superpowers are actually real. It's important to point out that this genius

figure is not simply a decoy but is actually fully operative, because we know artists are both inside and outside of economic exploitation. It's not just some fiction (or pill). An artist actually does exceed the terms of the economy. Look at the artist who watches his or her civilization collapse due to revolution, civil war, or economic disaster, only to withdraw into feverish art production. The deft, outmaneuvering cosmopolitan from the broken society who was raised on other societies or false histories, and whose life was basically already art from a very young age, comes out the other side through proposals that manifest in their work. This artist becomes the model of disaster survival.

An infrastructure is being built around this model. Liquidated finance office furniture takes shape again to make the rods of pop-up art fair tents. The young cosmopolitan gets pushed into a weird speculative statecraft. Just as an overpaid financial weather prophet has to sustain the whole system, the forward-looking artist has to produce entire worlds within, and in spite of, the wobbly art fair tent. Artworks start to assume a new concreteness—on the one hand strangely stabilizing to replace real estate as objects of financial speculation, and on the other projecting a kind of clarity, even ideological, even critical and external, that can go beyond the horizon of an economic day that never ends.

But even the financial value of artworks is not based in individual works, but in the career of the artist, in the rising trajectory of her person in time.[4] The artist thus assumes a double responsibility to outperform himself constantly, to grow and evolve in spite of austerity and stagnation everywhere else. It is a strange and contradictory double role of serving and evading demands simultaneously, which means creating works and technologies that constantly reinvent ways of exceeding their own structural limits in time, in space, in political prospects. It's a structural drive to become a sorcerer producing a kind of magical alchemy of the outside from within.

In traditional economic terms, these demands for surplus are characterized as exploitation, or artistic self-exploitation. But artists are flexible by nature, and a traditional view of quantifiable labor output no longer accounts for what is actually being produced, and it also doesn't account for what is happening to the producer, as a person, in the process. As the contradictions twist tighter and tighter, it starts to become clear that a massive reallocation of resources from infrastructure to intellect produces a bubble economy within the artist's person as its primary carrier.[5] This means that, as this person develops strange superpowers just to find expansive solutions for constant contractions in time and space, an internalized instability emerges as pure psychosis.

On the one hand, this psychosis produces its own form of vision. But it's not just that. Haven't you noticed how the past few years have been distinguished by psychotic

Film still from Melanie Gilligan's Popular Unrest, 2010.

weather patterns? Just look at this weather report from earlier this month, about a bizarre snake-shaped weather pattern moving across the United States, bringing snowfall and wildfires:

> A highly unusual jet stream pattern is bringing a bizarre combination of heavy May snows, flooding, extreme fire danger, and well below average severe thunderstorm activity to the U.S. A strong "blocking" high pressure system has set up over Greenland, blocking the normal west-to-east progression of weather systems. A truly unusual situation has developed where the blocking high has forced a low-pressure system near Greenland to move southwestwards to a point just off the New England coast. The blocking high has also forced an unusually sharp southwards dip in the jet stream over the Central U.S., where all-time May snowfall and cold temperature records are being set. This loop in the jet stream will get cut off from the main flow of the jet over the weekend, forming a "cutoff" low that will drift over the Southeast U.S., bringing cold, flooding rains of 2–4" over a wide swath of the Southeast. But over the Western U.S., an unusually sharp ridge of high pressure has set up, bringing record high temperatures, a strong Santa Ana wind event, and dangerous fire weather.[6]

Now weather emerges as a strange figure of a kind of metaphysical instability. It's as if the market collapse and the dismantling of the fortress of the state as absolute shelter has amplified a sense of vulnerability to the elements to a point where the earth's atmosphere responded in kind. We all know about climate change, and of course there are clear links between atmospheric events and crop yields that exert pressure on governments and economies. But the effect of weather on agriculture doesn't explain the degree to which a completely abstract collective emotion has emerged in the past few years to determine the ups and downs of markets

and the legitimacy of regimes. The weather arrives first as a metaphor of the atmospheric abstract, then as a figure of volatility after the breakdown of markets and uprisings, and finally as a projection of psychosis and enclosure as a massive, faceless body you cannot exit. The weather assumes the shape of a kind of romantic poetry turned frighteningly concrete. Your feelings control the weather because on the one hand you are insane, and on the other hand because they actually do. Weather as emotion feedback can be lethal. You need to be very careful what you feel. The Wall Street trader who started to lose his mind after the crash looked up into the sky and saw oceans of infographics telling him about markets and futures. The exemplary survivors, the heroes of stagnation, artists, you, me, however—we all have to do the exact same thing to survive.

In 2004, Paolo Virno described the sublime as a paradoxical mix of safety and helplessness when faced with circumstances beyond one's control:

> According to Kant, when I observe a terrifying snowslide while I myself am in safety, I am filled with a pleasing sense of security mixed together, however, with the heightened perception of my own helplessness. *Sublime* is precisely the word for this twofold feeling which is partially contradictory. With my starting point being the empirical protection which I have benefited from by chance, I am made to ask myself what it is that could guarantee an absolute and systematic protection for my existence. That is to say, I ask myself what it is that might keep me safe, not from one given danger or another, but from the risk inherent in my very being in this world. Where is it that one can find unconditional refuge?

> Kant answers: in the moral "I," since it is precisely there that one finds something of the non-contingent, or of the realm above the mundane. The transcendent moral law protects my person in an absolute way, since it places the value which is due to it above finite existence and its numerous dangers. The feeling of the sublime (or at least one of its incarnations) consists of taking the relief I feel for having enjoyed a fortuitous place of refuge and transforming it into a search for the unconditional security which only the moral "I" can guarantee … There is a sharp bifurcation here: on one hand a particular danger (the snowslide, the malevolent attentions of the Department of the Interior, the loss of one's job, etc.); on the other hand, there is the absolute danger connected to our very being in this world.[7]

Judging by its swells and moods, we can infer the ideology of the weather system: paralyzing stasis with intermittent disasters. In the 1993 movie *Groundhog Day*, Bill Murray is a rude weatherman who finds himself caught in a stagnant loop where he is destined to re-live the same day over and over again in a small town in Pennsylvania. Initially, he discovers an incredible power in being the only one to know what will happen before everyone else, and sets out to exploit all possible opportunities only to have the clock reset yet again for the next day. Eventually, he begins trying to figure out what he is supposed to do in this strange eternity on an earth that revolves endlessly on its axis without ever orbiting the sun. Out of complete boredom, the weatherman is left with only one option: to improve himself and adapt his unruly personality to the looping day in a small town. But what if this small town were the earth? And what if we are the weather forecasters stuck on the wrong side of the End of History in a day that never seems to end?

Sinkhole in Guatemala City, 2010.

Let's be a bit cautious of claims that all this points to a totalizing apocalyptic horror. Many thinkers in recent years have asserted that there is no longer any horizon to speak of, that an old distinction between outside and inside has become null. More recently, the figure of collapsing distinctions has been provocatively resolved in science-fiction terms as pseudo-organic slime or lifelike trash.[8] But the figure of inorganic matter animated by capital and trade flows starts to become another sublime taking capital as its object rather than nature. Maybe this can be useful as a figure of confused or lapsed materialism that sees a nineteenth-century idea of nature transported by capital into what Timothy Morton has called "the featureless remainder at either end of the process of production."[9] The danger is that fall-from-grace apocalypse narratives amplify the horror of enclosure, when actually in some dark hidden crevice we are still simply trying to figure out how to be free.

The weather is a warped mirror of this aspiration. It is a doubling confusion between subject and object coming from the psychosis of looking for a way out. The God's-eye view that forces a resolution of inside with outside in whatever terms is not speculative, but something we inhabit already. Hito Steyerl has pointed out that it is actually through visuality that any ground is produced. It is actually in the act of seeing and monitoring that trembling lines of distinction, scale, and distance are produced through a perspectival sleight of hand:

> Many of the aerial views, 3D nose-dives, Google Maps, and surveillance panoramas do not actually portray a stable ground. Instead, they create a supposition that it exists in the first place. Retroactively, this virtual ground creates a perspective of overview and surveillance for a distanced, superior spectator safely floating up in the air. Just as linear perspective established an imaginary stable observer and horizon, so does the perspective from above establish an imaginary floating observer and an imaginary stable ground. This establishes a new visual normality—a new subjectivity safely folded into surveillance technology and screen-based distraction. One might conclude that this is in fact a radicalization—though not an overcoming—of the paradigm of linear perspective.[10]

This shifts the metaphysics of inside and outside down to the hard infrastructure of surveillance, of who is at the controls and who is subject to being monitored. Our wanderer rising above to contemplate the mist can only be a drone. If you are on the other side, the weather may be your only hope for degraded vision or camera failure.

There is slime in Syria, but it has none of the qualities of the sublime or of science fiction. A friend recently described the dismal state of another country in mid-post-revolution by saying that it was really inspiring when things broke open and all this shit started coming out. But it never stopped! Now there is sewage gushing everywhere and some people start to ask how to put the lid back on, to go back to the way things were, anything. In fact the Syrian slime is made of something else altogether, and it is not surrounded or enclosed by liberal democracy or capital. Let's be clear: atmospheric mood swings in Syria come from air power, and the slime is made of blood and rubble. The radical contingency of hypercapitalist slime as an all-consuming natural/unnatural bio-commodity is a figure of faceless mushy power, of a postmodern techno-industrial triumph over the modern. When modernity fails to suppress sectarian differences, the postmodern weather is military, militant, or satanic-fundamentalist, the rain is artillery, and the slime is a putrid mix of blood and psychic sewage. This contingency may look into the atmosphere as its horizon, but it also looks death in the face. And our wanderer above the mist becomes a hawkish general or a commander of a brigade.

Caspar David Friedrich, The Sea of Ice also known as The Wreck of Hope in reference to an early North Pole Expedition, 1823-1824. Oil on canvas.

The artist coming out of this takes by necessity Kant's stabilizing moral "I" of the non-contingent as a means of survival. The emotional feedback loops of the stock market could even be a reassuring reflection of one's desires in an environment where electoral democracy is already assumed to be a joke. The burden to outperform is a preexisting condition when the backdrop for what is being produced has no economy for it in the first place. Actually, it's taken for granted by most artists who are not completely cynical that the economy around art is a remote supplement, however crucial, to something much larger. The purpose of looking to an abstract figure such as the weather is to understand how a widespread mental breakdown that may have common effects can still originate in many different sources. But it nevertheless exacts a severe toll on the artist's person. Look at a superhero like Storm from X-Men, whose ability to alter the weather comes from none other than a violent claustrophobia from being buried under rubble during the 1956 Suez Crisis in Egypt. Her ability to change the weather constitutes a demand for space to breathe.

This space to breathe is precisely the purpose of the bubble that suspends determined meaning and value in favor of interpretation. We know very well how orthodox Marxists from wealthy capitalist countries like to cast particularly this suspension of value as the highest form of capital. After all, it is. And it's true that it leaves artworks open to financial speculation and rampant exploitation. However, when it comes to art, a search for absolute value and meaning leads nowhere fast, or rather it leads straight

Roni Horn, From Still Water (The River Thames, for Example), 1999. Lithograph on paper.

back to the nineteenth-century Romantic foundations of Marxism. It leads also to the sublime of Kant, to an absolute system that would bring empirical protection from the snowslide. It would allow a distanced contemplation of death, catastrophes, or artworks that is purely aesthetic—a kind of dandy *schadenfreude* we are familiar with.

But in the new sublime we become both wanderer and mist, landscape and traveler, doctor and patient, cause and effect, artist and artwork simultaneously. We become the weather. If this sounds too hysterical and utterly without any ethical horizon, Gianni Vattimo helps us close the circle by outlining how a wobbly condition of instability actually returns to become the basic foundation of the law. He maintains that interpretation sits at the very center of the production of truth, and that it is necessary to maintain if we are to accept that the law has no absolute foundation, but needs some semblance of one nonetheless—contingent or otherwise:

> Interpretation is neither the apocalyptic-messianic unveiling of the violence (injustice) implicit in any position of law, nor the consolatory masking of this violence by means of ad hoc fabulations, but a cumulative process of dissolution of the violence arising from the initial unfoundedness of the law. The logic, logicality, and validity (including ethical validity) of this perfect hermeneutic circularity necessarily escape those who live nihilism as unconsumed grief for a Being that ought to be (the foundation) and *is not*. This hermeneutic circle is a virtuous circle, the only possible virtue.[11]

We can start to see this hermeneutic circle emerge as a more productive feedback loop, where nihilism is essentially a fiction produced not by instability itself, but by the sudden removal of a perceived foundation. So, we will survive. But there is one final aspect of the weather I've overlooked so far. As a figure of rapture, the instability of weather is both a planetary absolute and a shared condition. Maybe currencies should be pegged to weather.[12] Regardless, it brings people together, whether for pleasure or for horror. It is a collective mood swing that arrives as disaster and homelessness, but also as a day at the beach. Funnily enough, as a shared condition in the most extreme sense the weather can even be read as a kind of geopoetic revenge of the public sphere. It actually works as an axis of commonality, which is to say that, if we're all becoming insane, at least we'll be insane together.

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Thanks to Hito Steyerl.

Brian Kuan Wood is a writer and editor of *e-flux journal.*

1
Thanks to Roni Horn for inspiring the title of this essay with her foundational work from the mid-1990s *You Are the Weather*.

2
See Dieter Roelstraete's prescient essay on aesthetics of drift and immersion from 2010 https://pdf.e-flux-systems.com/journal/jena-revisited-ten-tentative-tenets/ .

3
Has Richard Florida? It seems he did notice. Oops—it was a bubble http://www.thedailybeast.com/articles/2013/03/20/richard-florida-concedes-the-limits-of-the-creative-class.html. .

4
See http://www.aptglobal.org/Pages/About .

5
See the recent writings of Franco "Bifo" Berardi.

6
See http://web.archive.org/web/20130505054306/https://www.wunderground.com/blog/JeffMasters/article.html?entrynum=2398 .

7
Paulo Virno, *Grammar of the Multitude* , trans. Isabella Bertoletti, James Cascaito, and Andrea Casson (Los Angeles: Semiotexte, 2004), 31–-2.

8
See the object-oriented ontologists who try to think the unthinkable.

9
See http://ecologywithoutnature.blogspot.com/2010/10/hyperobjects-lecture-mp3.html .

10
Hito Steyerl, "In Free Fall: A Thought Experiment on Vertical Perspective," *e-flux journal* 24 (April 2011). See https://pdf.e-flux-systems.com/journal/in-free-fall-a-thought-experiment-on-vertical-perspective/ .

11
Gianni Vattimo, *Nihilism and Emancipation : Ethics, Politics, and Law* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2007), 146.

12
Although with climate change, this would actually be a terrible idea.

Boris Groys

Art Workers: Between Utopia and the Archive

The topic of this essay is artistic work. I am not, of course, an artist. But in spite of being quite specific in some respects, artistic work is not fully autonomous. It relies on the more general—social, economic, technical, and political—conditions of art production, distribution, and presentation. During recent decades these conditions have changed drastically, due first and foremost to the emergence of the internet.

In the period of modernity, the museum was the institution that defined the dominant regime under which art functioned. But in our day, the internet offers an alternative possibility for art production and distribution—a possibility that the permanently growing number of artists embrace. What are the reasons to like the internet, especially for artists, writers, and so forth?

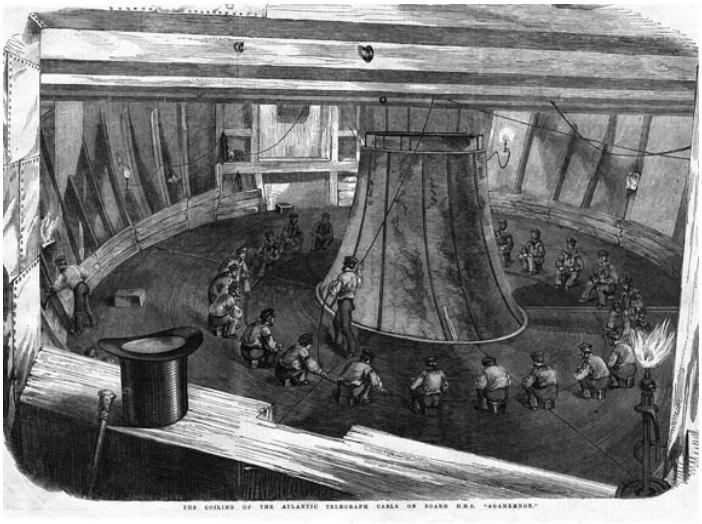
Obviously, one likes the internet in the first place because it is not selective—or at least much less selective than a museum or a traditional publishing house. Indeed, the question that always troubled artists in relation to the museum concerned the criteria of choice—why do some artworks come into the museum while other artworks do not? We know the, so to speak, catholic theories of selection according to which artworks must deserve to be chosen by the museum: they should be good, beautiful, inspiring, original, creative, powerful, expressive, historically relevant—one can cite thousand of similar criteria. However, these theories collapsed historically because nobody could explain why one artwork was more beautiful or original than another. So other theories took their place, theories that were more protestant, even Calvinist. According to these theories, artworks are chosen because they are chosen. The concept of a divine power that is perfectly sovereign and does not need any legitimization was transferred to the museum. This protestant theory of choice, which stresses the unconditional power of the chooser, is a precondition for institutional critique—the museums were criticized for how they used and abused their alleged power.

Song by *Les Horribles Cernettes* written in 1993 when less than a hundred websites existed. *Les Horribles Cernettes* was an amateur band constituted by staff from the Cern Labs in Geneva, Switzerland. The band are also the subject of the first picture to ever be uploaded online.

This kind of institutional critique doesn't make much sense in the case of the internet. There are, of course, examples of internet censorship practiced by some states, yet there is no aesthetic censorship. Anyone can put any texts or visual material of any kind on the internet and make it globally accessible. Of course, artists often complain that their artistic production drowns in the sea of data that circulates through the internet. The internet presents itself as a huge garbage can in which everything disappears, never getting the degree of public attention that one hopes to achieve. But nostalgia for the old days of aesthetic censorship by the museum and gallery system,

which watched over art's quality, innovation, and creativity, leads nowhere. Ultimately, everyone searches the internet for information about one's own friends—what they are doing right now. One follows certain blogs, e-magazines, and websites, and ignores everything else. The art world is only a small part of this digital public space—and the art world itself is very much fragmented. So even if there are many complaints about the unobservability of the internet, no one is really interested in total observation: everyone is looking for specific information—and is ready to ignore anything else.

Still, the impression that the internet as a whole is unobservable defines our relationship to it—we tend to think about it as an infinite flow of data that transcends the limits of our individual control. But, in fact, the internet is not a place of data flow—it is a machine to stop and reverse data flow. The unobservability of the internet is a myth. The medium of the internet is electricity. And the supply of electricity is finite. So the internet cannot support infinite data flows. The internet is based on a finite number of cables, terminals, computers, mobile phones, and other equipment. The efficiency of the internet is based precisely on its finiteness and, therefore, on its observability. Search engines such as Google demonstrate this. Nowadays, one hears a lot about the growing degree of surveillance, especially through the internet. But surveillance is not something external to the internet, or some specific technical use of the internet. The internet is by its essence a machine of surveillance. It divides the flow of data into small, traceable, and reversible operations, thus exposing every user to surveillance—real or possible. The internet creates a field of total visibility, accessibility, and transparency.



Sailors coiling transatlantic telegraph cable on board the Agamemnon. The transatlantic cable crossed the Atlantic ocean underwater and paved way for the fiber-optics connections almost a century and a half later.

Of course, individuals and organizations try to escape this total visibility by creating sophisticated passwords and data protection systems. Today, subjectivity has become a technical construction: the contemporary subject is defined as an owner of a set of passwords that he or she knows—and that other people do not know. The contemporary subject is primarily a keeper of a secret. In a certain sense, this is a very traditional definition of the subject: the subject was long defined as knowing something about itself that only God knew, something that other people could not know because they were ontologically prevented from "reading one's thoughts." Today, however, being a subject has less to do with ontological protection, and more to do with technically protected secrets. The internet is the place where the subject is originally constituted as a transparent, observable subject—and only afterwards begins to be technically protected in order to conceal the originally revealed secret. However, every technical protection can be broken. Today, the *hermeneutiker* has become a hacker. The contemporary internet is a place of cyber wars in which the prize is the secret. And to know the secret is to control the subject constituted by this secret—and the cyber wars are the wars of this subjectivation and desubjectivation. But these wars can take place only because the internet is originally the place of transparency.

What does this original transparency mean for artists? It seems to me that the real problem with the internet is not the internet as the place for the distribution and exhibition of art, but the internet as the place for working. Under the museum regime, art was produced in one place (the atelier of the artist) and shown in another place (the museum). The emergence of the internet erased this difference between the production and the exhibition of art. The process of art production insofar as it involves the use of the internet is always already exposed—from its beginning to its end. Earlier, only industrial workers operated under the gaze of others—under the kind of permanent control so eloquently described by Michel Foucault. Writers or artists worked in seclusion, beyond panoptic, public control. However, if the so-called creative worker uses the internet, he or she is subjected to the same or even greater degree of surveillance as the Foucauldian worker. The only difference is that this surveillance is more hermeneutic than disciplinary.

The results of surveillance are sold by the corporations that control the internet because they own the means of production, the material-technical basis of the internet. One should not forget that the internet is owned privately. And the profit comes mostly from targeted advertisements. Here we confront an interesting phenomenon: the monetization of hermeneutics. The classical hermeneutics that searched for the author behind the work was criticized by the theoreticians of structuralism and "close reading," who thought that it made no sense to chase ontological secrets that are, by

Aram Bartholl, Dead Drops, 2010. Dead Drops is an anonymous, offline, peer to peer, file-sharing network in public space. Courtesy of DAM Gallery.

definition, inaccessible. Today, this old, traditional hermeneutics is reborn as a means of economic exploitation on the internet, where all secrets are revealed. The subject here is no longer concealed behind his or her work. The surplus value that such a subject produces and that is appropriated by internet corporations is this hermeneutic value: the subject not only does something on the internet, but also reveals itself as a human being with certain interests, desires, and needs. The monetization of classical hermeneutics is one of the most interesting processes to emerge in recent decades.

At first glance, it seems that for artists, this permanent exposure has more positive aspects than negative. The re-synchronization of art production and art exposure through the internet seems to make things better, not worse. Indeed, this re-synchronization means that an artist no longer needs to produce any final product, any artwork. The documentation of the art-making process is already an artwork. Art production, presentation, and distribution coincide. The artist becomes a blogger. Almost everyone in the contemporary art world acts as a blogger—individual artists, but also art institutions, including museums. Ai Weiwei is paradigmatic in this respect. Balzac's artist who could never present his masterpiece would have no problem under these new conditions: documentation of his efforts to create a masterpiece would be his masterpiece. Thus, the internet functions more like the Church than the museum. After Nietzsche famously announced, "God is dead," he continued: we have lost the spectator. The emergence of the internet means the return of the universal spectator. So it seems that we are back in paradise and, like saints, do the immaterial work of pure existence under the divine gaze. In fact, the life of a saint can be described as a blog that is read by God and remains uninterrupted even upon the saint's death. So why do we need secrets anymore? Why do we reject this radical transparency? The answer to these questions depends on the answer to a more fundamental question concerning the internet: Does the internet effectuate the return of God, or of the *malin g é nie*, with its evil eye?

I would suggest that the internet is not paradise but, rather, hell—or, if you want, paradise and hell at the same time. Jean-Paul Sartre said that hell is other people—life under the gaze of others. (And Jacques Lacan said later that the eye of the other is always an evil eye.) Sartre

Film still from Jean Cocteau's The Blood of a Poet, 1930.

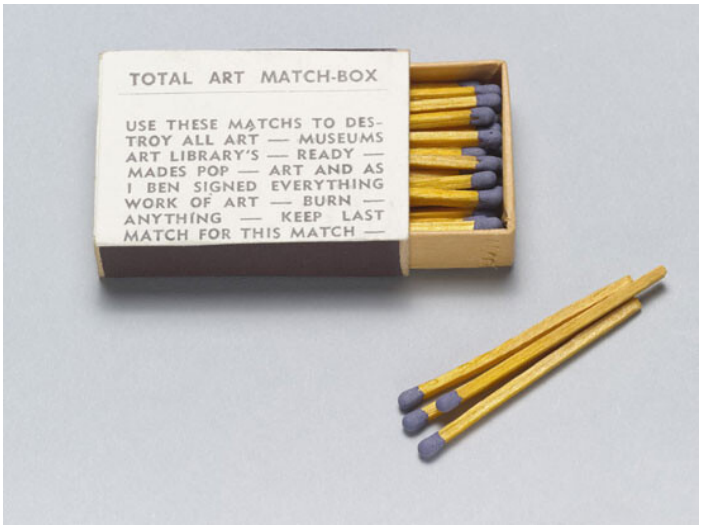
argued that the gaze of others "objectifies" us—and in this way negates the possibility of change that defines our subjectivity. Sartre defined human subjectivity as a "project" directed towards the future—and this project has an ontologically guaranteed secret because it can never be revealed here and now, but only in the future. In other words, Sartre understood human subjects as struggling against the identity that was given to them by society. That explains why he interpreted the gaze of others as hell: in the gaze of others, we see that we have lost the battle and remain a prisoner of our socially codified identity.

Thus, we try to avoid the gaze of others for a while so that we can reveal our "true self" after a certain period of seclusion—to reappear in public in a new shape, in a new form. This state of temporary absence is constitutive of what we call the creative process—in fact, it is precisely what we call the creative process. André Breton tells a story about a French poet who, when he went to sleep, put on his door a sign that read: "Please be quiet—the poet is working." This anecdote summarizes the traditional understanding of creative work: creative work is creative because it takes place beyond public control—and even beyond the conscious control of the author. This time of absence could last for days, months, years—or even a whole lifetime. Only at the end of this period of absence is the author expected to present a work (maybe found in his papers posthumously) that would be then accepted as creative precisely because it seemed to emerge out of nothingness. In other words, creative work is the work that presupposes the desynchronization of the time of work from the time of the exposure of its results. Creative work is practiced in a parallel time of seclusion, in secrecy—so that there is an effect of surprise when this parallel time gets re-synchronized with the time of the audience. That is why the subject of art practice traditionally wanted to be concealed, to become invisible, to take time out. The reason was not that artists had committed some crime or concealed some dirty secret they wanted to keep from the gaze of the others. We experience the gaze of others as an evil eye not when it wants to penetrate our secrets and make them transparent (such a penetrating gaze is rather flattering and exciting)—but when it denies that we have any secrets, when it reduces us to what it sees and registers.

Artistic practice is often understood as being individual and personal. But what does the individual or personal mean? The individual is often understood as being different from others. (For example: In a totalitarian society, all are alike. In a democratic, pluralistic society, all are different, and respected as being different.) However, here the point is not so much one's difference from others but one's difference from oneself—the refusal to be identified according to the general criteria of identification. Indeed, the parameters that define our socially codified, nominal identity are completely foreign to us. We did not choose our names, we were not consciously present at the date and place of our birth, we did not choose the name of the city or street where we live, we did not choose our parents, our nationality, and so forth. All these external parameters of our existence have no meaning for us—they do not correlate to any subjective evidence. They indicate how others see us but they are completely irrelevant to our inner, subjective lives.

Modern artists revolted against the identities imposed on them by others—by society, state, school, parents. They wanted the right of sovereign self-identification. Modern art was the search for the "true self." Here the question is not whether the true self is real or merely a metaphysical fiction. The question of identity is not a question of truth but a question of power: Who has the power over my own identity—I myself or society? And more generally: Who has control over the social taxonomy, the social mechanisms of identification—I myself or state institutions? This means that the struggle against my own public persona and nominal identity in the name of my sovereign persona, my sovereign identity, also has a public, political dimension, since it is directed against the dominating mechanisms of identification—the dominating social taxonomy, with all its divisions and hierarchies. That is why modern artists always said: *Do not look at me. Look at what I am doing. That is my true self*—or maybe no self at all, maybe the absence of the self. Later, artists mostly gave up the search for the hidden, true self. Rather, they began to use their nominal identities as readymades—and to organize a complicated play with them. But this strategy still presupposes disidentification from nominal, socially codified identities—in order to artistically reappropriate, transform, and manipulate them.

Modernity was the time of desire for utopia. The utopian expectation means nothing less than that one's project of discovering or constructing the true self becomes successful—and socially recognized. In other words, the



Ben Vautier, Total Art Matchbox from Flux Year Box 2, 1968.

individual project of seeking the true self acquires a political dimension. The artistic project becomes a revolutionary project that aims at the total transformation of society and the obliteration of existing taxonomies. Here the true self becomes resocialized—by creating the true society.

The museum system is ambivalent towards this utopian desire. On the one hand, the museum offers the artist a chance to transcend his or her own time, with all its taxonomies and nominal identities. The museum promises to carry the artist's work into the future—it is a utopian promise. However, the museum betrays this promise at the same moment that it fulfills it. The artist's work is carried into the future—but the nominal identity of the artist becomes reimposed on his or her work. In the museum catalogue, we read the same name, date and place of birth, nationality, and so forth. That is why modern art wanted to destroy the museum. However, the internet betrays the search for the true self in an even more radical way: the internet inscribes this search from its beginning—and not only at its end—back into nominal, socially codified identity. In turn, revolutionary projects become historicized. We can see it today, as former Communist mankind becomes re-nationalized and reinscribed in Russian, Chinese, and other national histories.

In the so-called postmodern period, the search for the true self and, accordingly, the true society in which this true self could be revealed, was proclaimed to be obsolete. We therefore tend to speak about postmodernity as a post-utopian time. But this is not quite true. Postmodernity did not give up the struggle against the subject's nominal identity—in fact, it even radicalized this struggle. Postmodernity had its own utopia—a utopia of the subject's self-dissolution in infinite, anonymous flows of energy, desire, or the play of signifiers. Instead of abolishing the nominal, social self by discovering the true self through art production, postmodern art theory invested its hopes for complete loss of identity through the process of reproduction: a different strategy pursuing the same goal.

The postmodern utopian euphoria that the notion of reproduction provoked at the time can be illustrated by the following passage from the book *On the Museum's Ruins* by Douglas Crimp. In this well-known book, Crimp claimed, with reference to Walter Benjamin, that

> through reproductive technology, postmodernist art dispenses with the aura. The fiction of the creating subject gives way to the frank confiscation, quotation, excerptation, accumulation, and repetition of already existing images. Notions of originality, authenticity, and presence, essential to the ordered discourse of the museum, are undermined.[1]

The flow of reproductions overflows the museum—and individual identity drowns in this flow. The internet became for some time the place where these postmodern utopian dreams were projected—dreams about the dissolution of all identities in the infinite play of signifiers. The globalized rhizome took the place of Communist mankind.

However, the internet has become not a place for the realization of postmodern utopias, but their graveyard—as the museum became a graveyard for modern utopias. Indeed, the most important aspect of the internet is that it fundamentally changes the relationship between original and copy, as described by Benjamin—and thus makes the anonymous process of reproduction calculable and personalized. On the internet, every free-floating signifier has an address. The deterritorializing data flows become reterritorialized.

Walter Benjamin famously distinguished between the original, which is defined through its "here and now," and the copy, which is siteless, topologically indeterminable, lacking a "here and now." Contemporary digital reproduction is by no means siteless, its circulation is not topologically undetermined, and it does not present itself in the form of a multiplicity as Benjamin described it. Every data file's address on the internet accords it a place. The same data file with a different address is a different data file. Here the aura of originality is not lost, but instead substituted by a different aura. On the internet, the circulation of digital data produces not copies, but new originals. And this circulation is perfectly traceable. Individual pieces of data are never deterritorialized. Moreover, every internet image or text has not only its specific unique place, but also its unique time of appearance. The internet registers every moment when a

Google data servers

certain piece of data is clicked, liked, un-liked, transferred, or transformed. Accordingly, a digital image cannot be merely copied (as an analogue, mechanically reproducible image can) but always only newly staged or performed. And every performance of a data file is dated and archived.

During the epoch of mechanical reproduction, we heard a lot about the demise of subjectivity. We heard from Heidegger that *die Sprache spricht* ("the language speaks"), and not so much that an individual uses the language. We heard from Marshall McLuhan that the medium is the message. Later, Derridian deconstruction and Deleuzian machines of desire taught us to get rid of our last illusions concerning the possibility of identifying and stabilizing subjectivity. However, now our "digital souls" have became traceable and visible again. Our experience of contemporaneity is defined not so much by the presence of things to us as spectators, but rather by our presence to the gaze of the hidden and unknown spectator. However, we do not know this spectator. We have no access to its image—if this spectator has an image at all. In other words, the hidden universal spectator of the internet can be thought only as a subject of universal conspiracy. The reaction to this universal conspiracy necessarily takes the form of a counter-conspiracy: one will protect one's soul from the evil eye. Contemporary subjectivity can no longer rely on its dissolution in the flow of signifiers because this flow has become controllable and traceable. Thus, a new utopian dream emerges—a truly contemporary dream. It is the dream of an unbreakable code word that can forever protect our subjectivity. We want to define ourselves as a secret that would be even more secretive than the ontological secret—the secret that even God cannot discover. The paradigmatic example of such a dream can be found in WikiLeaks.

The goal of WikiLeaks is often seen as the free flow of data, as the establishment of free access to state secrets. But at the same time, the practice of WikiLeaks demonstrates that universal access can be provided only in the form of universal conspiracy. In an interview, Julian Assange says:

> So if you and I agree on a particular encryption code, and it is mathematically strong, then the forces of every superpower brought to bear on that code still cannot crack it. So a state can desire to do something to an individual, yet it is simply not possible for the state to do it—and in this sense, mathematics and individuals are stronger than superpowers.[2]

Transparency is based here on radical non-transparency. The universal openness is based on the most perfect closure. The subject becomes concealed, invisible, takes time out to become operative. The invisibility of contemporary subjectivity is guaranteed insofar as its encryption code cannot be hacked—insofar as the subject remains anonymous, non-identifiable. It is password-protected invisibility alone that guarantees the subject's control over its digital operations and manifestations.

Here I am of course discussing the internet as we know it now. But I expect that the coming cyber wars will change the internet radically. These cyber wars have already been announced—and they will destroy or at least seriously damage the internet as a dominant marketplace and means of communication. The contemporary world looks very much like the nineteenth-century world. That world was defined by the politics of open markets, growing capitalism, celebrity culture, the return of religion, terrorism, and counter-terrorism. World War I destroyed this world and made the politics of open markets impossible. In the end, the geopolitical and military interests of individual nation states showed themselves to be much more powerful than economic interests. A long period of wars and revolutions followed. Let us see what is waiting for us in the near future.

I would like to close with a more general consideration of the relationship between utopia and the archive. As I have tried to show, the utopian impulse is always related to the desire of the subject to break out of its own historically defined identity, to leave its place in the historical taxonomy. In a certain sense, the archive gives to the subject the hope of surviving one's own contemporaneity and revealing one's true self in the future because the archive promises to sustain and make accessible this subject's texts or artworks after his or her death. This utopian or, at least, heterotopian promise is crucial to the subject's ability to develop a distance from and critical attitude towards its own time and its own immediate audience.

Archives are often interpreted as a means to conserve the

Susan Hiller, Witness, 2000. Installation compiling several hundred descriptions of UFO sightings across the world.

past—to present the past in the present. But at the same time, archives are machines for transporting the present into the future. Artists always do their work not only for their own time but also for art archives—for the future in which the artist's work remains present. This produces a difference between politics and art. Artists and politicians share the common "here and now" of public space, and they both want to shape the future. That is what unites art and politics. But politics and art shape the future in different ways. Politics understands the future as a result of actions that take place here and now. Political action has to be efficacious, to produce results, to transform social life. In other words, political practice shapes the future—but it disappears in and through this future, it becomes totally absorbed by its own results and consequences. The goal of politics is to become obsolete—and to give way to the politics of the future.

But artists do not work only within the public space of their time. They also work within the heterogeneous space of art archives, where their works are placed among the works of past and future. Art, as it functioned in modernity and still functions in our time, does not disappear after its work is done. Rather, the artwork remains present in the future. And it is precisely this anticipated future presence of art that guarantees its influence on the future, its chance to shape the future. Politics shapes the future by its own disappearance. Art shapes the future by its own prolonged presence. This creates a gap between art and politics—a gap that was demonstrated often throughout the tragic history of the relationship between left art and left politics in the twentieth century.

Our archives are of course structured historically. And our use of these archives is still defined by the nineteenth century's tradition of historicism. We thus tend to re-inscribe artists posthumously into the historical contexts from which they actually wanted to escape. In this sense, the art collections that preceded the historicism of the nineteenth century—the collections that wanted to be collections of instances of pure beauty, for example— seem only at first glance to be naive. In fact, they are more faithful to the original utopian impulse than their more sophisticated historicist counterparts. It seems to me that today we are beginning to be more and more interested in the non-historicist approach to our past. We are becoming more interested in the decontextualization and reenactment of individual phenomena from the past

than in their historical recontextualization, more interested in the utopian aspirations that lead artists out of their historical contexts than in these contexts themselves. And it seems to me that this is a good development because it strengthens the utopian potential of the archive and weakens its potential for betraying the utopian promise—the potential that is inherent in any archive, regardless of how it is structured.

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1
Douglas Crimp, *On the Museum's Ruins* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1993), 58.

2
Hans Ulrich Obrist, "In Conversation with Julian Assange, Part I," *e-flux journal* 25 (May 2011). See https://pdf.e-flux-systems.com/journal/in-conversation-with-julian-assange-part-i/ .