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Editors

Editorial

Celebrating the arrival of 2013 on New Year's Eve, many people must have wondered why they still existed. Wasn't the world supposed to end on December 21 with the Mayan apocalypse?

You don't have to be a new age spiritualist to believe that the end of the world could have improved your circumstances. If you thought you were nearing a fiscal cliff, or if you really were entering hell itself with an Islamist soft coup, a well-placed apocalypse carries the promise of voiding all debts, so to speak: Rip up all the contracts and let's start over! This is why the Mayan prediction was welcomed by so many who thought the apocalypse would actually redeem the world by giving some concrete form or recognition to an already existing state of collapse. While you might think you have a lot to lose when the world ends, you might have even more to gain.

But in the days after December 21, with the world still there and looking exactly the same, we saw the apocalypse shrink into a proverb: apparently the Mayan calendar only predicted the end of the world as we know it—a new beginning. But this makes some sense: the apocalypse is not always synonymous with death and annihilation, as Hollywood likes to have it. The term apocalypse actually means "revelation" and "clarity"—literally "un-covering" (ἀπό, apo, or "away from," and καλύπτω, kalupto, or "to cover"). And this suggests that, rather than the end of time as such, the apocalypse actually reveals a new time, a new world.

As Hito Steyerl wrote in the April 2011 issue of e-flux journal, while you are in free fall, whole societies around you may be falling just as you are, and it may feel like perfect stasis—as if history and time have ended and you can't even remember that time ever moved forward. And the sense that everything is collapsing under you may in fact come from the laws of gravity in the new world the Mayans predicted. And all of these disparate nosedives into oblivion will be revealed as having a totality, a clarity, and a face—even if there is no ground. I've already fallen off the fiscal cliff and I've never felt better—I'm finally free! After all, what are worlds made of, if not gravity and consciousness? A tiny rearrangement in their logic can be transformative. It can be apocalyptic.

—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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Khalil Rabah

The End of Neonationalism: On The Comparative Certainty of Extraterrestrial Life and its Significance for Humankind (Earth and the Solar System Sectio

Nearly 4.6 billion years ago, within a vast cloud of interstellar space, a small pocket of gas and dust collapsed under its own gravity and our solar system was born. As part of this system, our Earth is always in flux and is constantly remolded by powerful forces. These forces can often appear as sudden and unexpected phenomena. Our popular Earth and Solar Systems Gallery displays rocks, sediments, meteorites, and volcanic debris, allowing visitors to explore the dynamic forces that formed and are continually reforming the Earth and our solar system.

Our most recent exhibition examines one such dynamic force: the sedimentation of chauvinist attitudes resulting from the misrecognition of similar creatures as otherwise. This fetish of difference, wherein the slightest superficial irresemblence is made to obscure the overwhelming truth of HUMANKIND's natural solidarity, appears as a force of nature. The less verifiable difference there is, the more aggressively the remainder is mobilized against the conscious recognition of a scientific fact: that the Earth is home to a single human community.

PALESTINE—as the name of a place that is unavailable where it exists, a pastime that is also the future—is also the name of the absent self-consciousness of HUMANKIND, its NATURAL HISTORY.

As detailed knowledge of the cosmos increases day by day, it has become a relative certainty that other life exists outside of our solar system. This realization, as it disseminates, ought perhaps to have a clarifying effect. Our exhibit anticipates this revelation, asking after its real, material ramifications. Someday, when the blazing sun fills the streets with the color of blood, the Earth will be brand new, never before seen, not like this. The stones, piled up where we lived, will have a meaning, and they will have been put there for no other reason but to explain it. This Earth on which we have lived and with whose good people we have spent years of defeat will be something new. It is just a beginning. HUMANKIND doesn't know why. HUMANKIND imagined that the main street on the way back home was only the beginning of a long, long road. Everything on this Earth throbs with a sadness that is not confined to weeping. It is a challenge.

No, my friend, we won't leave, and we have no regrets. No. And nor will we finish what we began together in childhood. This obscure feeling that you had as you left, this small feeling must grow into a giant one, deep within you. It must expand; you must seek it in order to find yourself, here among the ugly debris of defeat. We won't come to you. But you must return to us! Come back, to learn what life is and what existence is worth. We are all waiting for you.

Evidence 21 [BDc/21G1995], Earth and the Solar System Department Collection

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From the 2011 issue of THE PALESTINIAN MUSEUM OF NATURAL HISTORY AND HUMANKIND NEWSLETTER, the departure point for Khalil Rabah's exhibition "Pages 7, 8, 9," on view at e-flux in New York from February 2–April 20, 2013.

Keti Chukhrov

Epistemological Gaps between the Former Soviet East and the "Democratic" West

1. The Traps of Transitioning to "Democracy"

The Soviet Union is considered to be a classic example of a disciplinary society, and we are used to regarding it as a backward social system in comparison to the post-disciplinary societies of liberal democracy.

What for the Western states took place as a gradual development towards post-disciplinary conditions after the Second World War became shock therapy for the former Soviet states after 1989. The entrance into the "civilized democratic world" had to be accomplished via measures that were often extreme and exceptional; these entailed monetizing the commonwealth, cancelling social guarantees, imposing a forceful shift to a market economy, and permitting the spread of criminal businesses.

Such vicious features of the post-Soviet "transition to democracy" were often eradicated by severe and authoritarian measures; these measures were taken either in the name of integration into the world of "Western liberal democracy" (as was the case with Georgia during the presidency of Mikheil Saakashvili), or (as was the case with Russia in the 2000s), they were taken to control and nationalize businesses whose complete economic freedom and social irresponsibility led to a drastic impoverishment of the population. Nevertheless, the early post-Soviet criminal economy, as well its eradication, were equally violent and hardly democratic; furthermore, they coincided with neoliberal shifts in Western governments. So the pursuit of Western social democracy in post-socialist states turned out to be somewhat belated, since the social democracy programs in the Western neoliberal societies themselves shrunk and became obsolete. Here one has to face the fact that, while promoting the social democratic agenda or the socially engaged legacies of avant-garde art in post-Soviet regions, Western non-governmental and cultural institutions claimed to export and disseminate something that they themselves were no longer able to practice or believe in.

As the result, the drive to become a transparent and modernized society manifests in the features of control and in the police state far more in post-Soviet societies than in Western democracies. It is for this reason that the memory of a disciplinary society with its shadowy backdrop might paradoxically seem more attractive and desirable for many. This is the reason why, since the late 1990s, the enlightened neoliberal technocracy in the West has had little effect on Russia's paternalist oligarchy. Legalized, "civilized" capitalism seems far harsher than the domestic, corrupt clans of the post-Soviet economy. It would seem that some amount of corruption keeps things more "human," less alienated—an apparent excuse for the rampant corruption that characterized the shadow economy of the Soviet and post-Soviet period.[1]

As Slavoj Zižek often repeats, autocratic systems

U.S. Vice President Richard Nixon and Soviet Premier Nikita Khrushchev at the opening of the American National Exhibition in Moscow on July 24, 1959, which exhibited a fully equipped American kitchen. The rare debate between the two, contrasting values and technological innovations, was latter to be known as the "Kitchen Debate."

presuppose the hidden perverse within society, while the permissiveness of post-disciplinary control—which allows for the open and democratic disclosure of perversions and the violations within them—is much more ruled and governed. Foucauldian research into neoliberal control societies has also revealed precisely how the transparent control society internalizes the exposure of perverse or subversive elements. Contemporary art practices also thematize how subversive, transgressive gestures or critical tactics are folded into the rhetoric and ideology of the Western liberal open society.

Interestingly, however, in post-Soviet societies such subversive practices or the exposures of trauma are very rare. Even in the case of actions by the art-groups Voina or Pussy Riot, the result of intervention is quite different from Western art-practices of subversion. The actions of Voina, in fact, reproduce the perversion inherent in Russian political power itself. Likewise, while Pussy Riot's intervention at the Christ the Savior cathedral seems at first sight to be a classic gesture of violating the frames of established power and sanctity, it is rather the power itself here that is already transgressive and perverse; and the resistant practice reveals the power's perversion by mimicking it—the fake way the government or clergy pray or stage their "chastity." Furthermore, the members of the group socially and politically represent the rhetoric of democratic values and civil society, calling for transparent elections to kick out the perverse "sovereign" who declared his illegal presidency almost as a state of

exception.

This is why the question becomes: How can one subvert or transgress the force that can withstand much stronger and more sacrilegious subversion? On the one hand, we know how often criticism has been prohibited in post-Soviet countries. But at the same time, these cases of prohibition do not mean that the authority is against perversion or subversion, but rather that the authority itself must remain the principal source of such perverse acts. The Russian conceptual writer Vladimir Sorokin has shown well in his writings how the drive for perversion manifests itself in the behavior of an authoritarian and sovereign power. In this case, perversity and transgression have nothing to do with freedom, even if the stance remains quite different from the post-Fordist Western treatment of the role of subversion.

This distinction suggests vastly different genealogies and epistemologies for notions of power, freedom, and the general (the common) in, on the one hand, post-socialist and former socialist ethics, and, on the other, Western liberal democracy or even Western post-Marxist theory.

2. The Grounds for Controversial Epistemologies

Post-socialist critical studies associates too many features of the former socialist societies with totalitarianism and its vices. The critique of modernism in Soviet aesthetics, and the mistrust of psychoanalysis or post-structuralism, are regarded as the result of prohibitions imposed on culture by the party, or of Marxist-Leninist dogma. But all those restrictions that we condemn in historical socialism have deeper roots; they do not stem simply from authoritarian limitations against freedom, but from different historical paradigms of emancipation that the socialist East, on the one hand, and the liberal capitalist West, on the other, adhered to.

I will dwell at least on a few of these epistemological differences. But before I do that I would like to mention a discussion initiated by Boris Buden, who claims that the post-communist condition is over.[2] This claim is very important for the former socialist Eastern European countries to precipitate their integration into the united Europe, into what Buden calls "the only possible modernity" as against the erroneous Eastern socialist modernity. The Western modernity, being rather time than space—is able to sublate all identities and even make all other discourses on modernity and emancipation appear local. Historical socialism in case of such approach – despite its discourses of equality, modernity and universality—is regarded as the local and peripheral case of modernity.

Termination of the post-communist condition facilitates overcoming the endless political immaturity and not yet readiness for democracy in which the post-socialist regions are constantly blamed. According to Buden via ending the post-communist narratives of transition the East could at last stop catching up with the West, so that both—"East" and "West"—would find themselves in one temporal regime of historical development. But is not such stance, while criticizing the implicit colonialism of Western democracy, acknowledging it as the only paradigm of development, for the sake of which all the legacies and experiences of historical socialism have to be sublated and put null and void?

As a result—from the point of view of both pro-Western quasi-democratic politics and leftist critique—the former Soviet states are obliged to completely reject their memories or practices of emancipation that were actively pursued in former Soviet societies—despite authoritarian policies of historical socialism. They are to be swept away on behalf of Western democratic governmental policies, but also on behalf of the Western critical and leftist micro-political practices.

This is due to the fact that historical socialism is predominantly associated with nothing more than Russian imperialism, with Stalinism and its command economy, with censorship in culture, repressive cultural politics, and so forth. Little attention is paid to the fact that numerous breakthroughs in science, culture, and education, or the discrete features of an unsegregated society, were concomitant with the nonprofit economy and with the very ethical and political premises of socialism itself.

In the end, the imperative to install a post-Soviet amnesia in relation to historical socialism turns out to be neocolonial—on the part of Western governments, but also on the part of the Western leftist, critical emancipatory discourse. Even more strangely, during the rise of postcolonial theory, the attitude of the West to its former colonies was much more permissive and less categorical. While in the post-socialist experience, cultures that were not completely identitarian were simultaneously labeled as a local identity and condemned for the ferocity of their universalism and idealism.

Such attitudes evacuate the post-Soviet states' social democratic agendas—both in the parliamentary system and the civic and intellectual sphere. If the Eastern European cultural and political framework was epistemologically quite close to the critical discourses of resistance in the Western 1960s, and could somehow reconstruct them in the mode of the post-1989 left-liberal agenda (as in case of *Krytyka Polityczna* in Warsaw), the former Soviet states were detached from both the Western political and cultural practices of the 1960s and the emancipatory features of their own cultural legacy. This is why neoliberal "democrats" or nationalist-conservative elites turned out to be the main political agents in post-Soviet politics. In the meantime, the left agenda has been appropriated by party

Voina group, Dick captured by KGB, 2011. Graffito opposite to the former KGB headquarters in St. Petersburg.

bureaucrats like Gennady Zyuganov in Russia, or has dispersed into smaller movements.

notions of consciousness, the unconscious, power, culture, psychics, the idea, the ideal, the common, and freedom.[3]

Taschen Perestroika themed recipe book for an event night, circa 1990.

In such conditions, it becomes important to develop an analysis that evades both Cold War discourse and nostalgia alike. While Foucault's cultural archeology did this for Western European disciplinary societies, this kind of work—apart from certain sporadic efforts—has not fully addressed post-Soviet societies. Why is it necessary? Why can't we simply claim to be part of the global pro-Western democracy, where even terms such as "Former West" are used to describe itself?

The ethical differences between historical socialism and Western liberal democracy or its critical traditions arise not so much from ex-socialist authoritarian Politbureau decisions as from deeply different epistemological interpretations and treatments of crucial philosophical

There are concrete examples of how certain notions that appeared in Western philosophy were accepted through one interpretation in the West, while the post-revolutionary socialist project took up another. For example, we all remember how socialist culture mistrusted the concept of the unconscious. With the emergence of psychoanalysis in Europe, it was never clear whether psychoanalysis studied the unconscious to tame it, to crystallize it via language, to enable the subject to analyze her/his own self and thus clarify its uncontrolled forces—as Thomas Mann believed—or, on the contrary, to access the non-rational and the unconscious as freedom.

Later studies in post-structuralism showed the unconscious to be synonymous with creative practices

and their irrational backgrounds, as well as with political potentialities. The unconscious as a Freudian clinical category acquired its ontological grounds in Lacan's studies and came to stand for political and creative potency in works by Foucault, Derrida, Lyotard, Deleuze, and Butler. Lyotard discovered the libidinal unconscious of the capitalist economy, marking the inevitable libidinal impact of creative production in the conditions of capitalism. For Deleuze, schizophrenia and the unconscious are also inherent to capitalist production, just as the unconscious can also develop machines of subversive resistance in an expanded field for creative productivity. And let us not forget the affirmative role of insanity in Foucault's studies and the role of individual psychology in articulating the subversive potentiality of gender in Butler's theories.

Lacan's psychoanalysis declared that the unconscious was organized like a language, but could also enable a transgressive break beyond language, beyond power, beyond consciousness. Even in post-Marxist theory, the idea that language sustains certain pre-linguistic drives has come under attack. In his book *Multitude: Between Innovation and Negation*, for example, Paolo Virno criticizes the notion of language as the function of a rational apparatus hampering instinctive pre-linguistic, pre-individual, pre-conscious drives that can only generate utter collectivity and emancipation.[4] For him, these pre-individual drives initiating intersubjectivity, political emancipation, and artistic and performative innovation are beyond linguistic and cultural acquisition. They are produced in the neurobiological pre-rational sphere, in the biological realm of reflex and instinct.

And what do we see in Marxist Soviet philosophy, in works by Evald Ilyenkov, for instance, but a completely different treatment of the unconscious and of consciousness?[5] The potentiality for freedom does not reside in the unconscious, but rather in consciousness, which can only enable an individual to connect with the general (the common) and the ideal. Freedom is not something acquired via subversive or contingent moves, but complements a will towards effort and labor. Ilyenkov, not unlike the post-structuralists, tries to reflect on what comes before and beyond language. However, for the post-structuralists, language happens to be a cultural order, a metaphysical structure, a restraint. For Ilyenkov, language is, on the contrary, empirical—much more so than idea or thought. When he claims that thinking is possible before and without language and is not reduced to it, his argument is with language philosophy. But what he places before language is neither the unconscious nor the irrational, nor the archetypes or the instinctive, but human history, logic, thinking, and culture as potentialities of the generic and the ideal—an impossible concept for Western thinking of the 1960s and '70s.[6]

Evald Ilyenkov, date unknown.

3. Evald Ilyenkov's Materialist Notions of the Ideal and the General

The ideal, being one of the principal notions in Ilyenkov's philosophy, marks important approaches to culture, art, and social theory in the Russian-Soviet experience. Both psychoanalysis and post-structuralism locate the idea and the ideal in the superego, i.e., super-consciousness, claiming it as a metaphysical category, detached from empirical reality. Therefore, when the unconscious becomes the embodiment of creativity and freedom, the categories of the general (the universal) and the ideal are automatically rejected as redundant for political as well as artistic creativity.

In socialist aesthetics and ethics it is the contrary: the category of the ideal is not placed in the superego as some transcendental abstraction, but is part of everyday life, of communication, production, and intersubjectivity. In this case, there is no split between body and idea, since the ideal manifests itself via material externality and occupies the "body" and its empirical existence. Such an understanding of the ideal does not position it as something sublime or as superseding reality.

As a matter of fact, the material presence of the ideal in the everyday unites very different experiences of socialist culture: classical avant-garde, early socialist realism, OBERIU, Andrei Platonov's literature, and the cinematography, philosophy, and literature of the 1960s and '70s. (But it also refers to Hegel's argument about the coincidence of a thing (matter) with the notion).

Ilyenkov's point was that the teleology and genealogy of the ideal and the general (the common) come before language.[7] It precedes semiotic or linguistic realizations of thinking, culture, and history.[8] This refers to experiments of the psychologists Alexei Leontiev and Alexander Mesheriakov, who worked at an experimental school for

deaf, blind, and mute children.[9]Their experiments enabled Ilyenkov to claim that even with very limited capacities for speech or visual perception (since these children could only rely on tactile senses and muscular reflexes), it is possible to develop not only capacities for survival but the experience of the worldly, the generic. This means that pre-linguistic human motor functions can comprise the teleology of the ideal and the general even before an individual masters speech and language. And these pre-linguistic functions are not at all confined to reflexes and psychic operations.

But how can these very specific interpretations of the ideal, consciousness, and the general be understood today, especially considering how much they differ from their post-structuralist or post-operaist applications?

The Western interpretations of idealism produce the ideal as transcendental individual consciousness, as the inward form of the "I." It resides within immaterial speculative concepts, while the external world has to do with material objects. That's why the ideal is understood as the subjective and speculative idea of a thing or of a world in one's head .

But, following Marx, Ilyenkov claims something quite different. He dialectically connects thinking, consciousness, and external material reality. The ideal is not an imaginary, speculative category, because it has an available presence and exists as the objectified form of human activity, becoming the things of the outer world due to labor. The ideal is generated neither psychically, nor in the individual consciousness, but in the outer world, and is created historically via human labor. And consciousness is the effect and the outcome of such an apprehension of the ideal, not vice versa—which is to say that it is not the ideal's speculative generator.[10]

So, the ideal is the reflection of objective reality in human activity and its transformation by human activity. For example, material culture and its history are nominally material, but insofar as they exceed their nominal status they are also ideal, while also being a material "body."[11]

The dimension of the ideal is the human being's teleological correlation with outer reality via labor that is not codified biologically. For example, the fact that animals build dwellings for survival is codified biologically, but for Ilyenkov the fact that human beings eat from plates and produce plates is not codified biologically, and is thus not the consequence of a human being's bodily morphology. So the newly-born human being enters the world of social human life with her/his unformed consciousness and only acquires consciousness in interrelation with the outer world of history, culture, society, and labor. The capacity to use plates instead of eating without them is the ideal. The ideal even precedes language and its role. Thus, the world of objects produced by a human for humans via labor—i.e., objectified forms of human activity, which is culture, and not just the natural forms or genetic inheritance—generate human consciousness and will. From this standpoint, one recognizes Marx's famous statement that the social being defines consciousness.

However, the question here is why Ilyenkov, as well as other Soviet thinkers, needs the notion of the ideal to describe the social dimension of labor and culture—which in post-structuralism or post-operaism are either seen as the embodiments of horizontal, network-related, immanent experiences, or are rejected as the embodiments of power and its apparatuses.

In this way, Soviet philosophy claims the concept of the ideal—the category that is denigrated in Western philosophy of the 1960s and '70s. Yet Ilyenkov's interpretation of the ideal becomes something completely different from the classic idealistic treatment of this term. For Ilyenkov, it is what is generated in human life and existence by labor production—i.e., by the transformative social activity that he regards as teleological.

In discussing teleology—which is often erroneously identified with totality or holism—Ilyenkov uses the following example: a building cannot be reduced to its constituent bricks or material elements. A building is its material, concrete, and other empirical elements, but it would be impossible without pre-empirical projection.[12] This pre-empirical, teleological element is always there in the objects produced by labor, as well as labor actions. Labor is teleological because it presupposes the projection of a thing to be produced, and this is what makes it ideal.[13] Bricks and their constellation are the empirical elements here, while the building is the concreteness of the ideal. So it is not an abstract horizon that recedes as one tries to approach it. On the contrary, it is material—but so much so that it instigates the move towards realization. Ilyenkov says that the ideal is the image of bread in the head of a baker or a hungry person.[14] This is similar to Marx's statement that even the worst architect, as opposed to the bee, first builds the hive in the head.

Interestingly, teleology is evacuated from many post-operaist labor theories for being a return to truth claims or metaphysics. Ilyenkov meanwhile insists on the correlation of labor and culture precisely for being teleological activities—and this correlation is very characteristic of socialist thought. In fact, recent Western philosophy interprets both notions quite negatively—with the creative aspects of labor, whether voluntary or not, considered automatically alienated or absorbed by cognitive capital, and culture as just the fossilized, digested remainder of once lively artistic activity. Also in the modernist tradition, labor and culture typically belong to different realms of social life, with labor considered to

Dmitry Gutov, Ten Days that Shook the World, 2003. Oil on canvas.

be low and associated with routine, with the commodity, means, or with mediation. Culture is meanwhile something valuable, albeit mostly for a bourgeois elite. This is why a contemporary artist is in a position to profane both culture and labor, to transgress them in order to discover fields of new experiments and experiences that evade culture and labor alike.

But for Ilyenkov, labor, culture, the ideal, and the general are very close to each other. Culture is not just a legacy of valuable products and labor is not only a technical medium to produce something. Socialism is actually the space where culture and labor can overlap—where labor is not alienated and divided, and where culture is not merely a superstructure of the economy and its surplus, not a supplement to labor's routine and boredom, but the creative activity of a post-economic society with little to no surplus value. Culture is not reduced to the everyday, but rather everyday labor is "elevated" to society's ethical needs. It sounds quite utopian, but in fact this approach was developed in the works of Soviet thinkers such as Ilyenkov, Jurij Davydov, and Mikhail Lifshitz, and shared by the majority of cultural workers of the period.

Culture, for Ilyenkov, is not an archive of past achievements, a record of different traditions and lifestyles, or acquired knowledge that makes its owner socially privileged. Rather, it has to do with the urgent necessity for non-utilitarian values in the life of a society. It is something that rests on the premises of ethics much more than aesthetics, or rather it makes the two inseparable. For Ilyenkov and other Soviet aestheticians, culture is not something opposite to art, but is the condition that makes art possible, since it is synonymous with the human aspiration for the general.

The notion of the general often suggests the analogous, similar features of the many, but can also be seen as a primary resource from which different branches stem, not unlike the notion of the universal. It can also be the nominal sum of something or somebody—an individual, for instance. In civil rights, the general in often understood this way, as the common.[15]

But for Ilyenkov, the general or the common is not individual consciousness repeated many times, whether concatenated or united. Neither is it an entity or unity understood as the principal invariant or example of less important empirical cases and details. Rather, it is the dimension of the non-individual present within the individual—separate from her/his nominal involvement in communicative or collective practice. It is in fact due to this non-individuality in the individual that collective practice can be productive in the first place.

Thus the general is a category of logic and ethics rather than of mathematics or metaphysics. It presupposes being for the other—not only for human beings but things as well. For example, two chairs are less general than a chair and table together, or the reader and the book, or the employer and the employees. So that generality—commonality—is not just a sharing or collecting of something, but is rather a connection of two or more things brought together by their mutual lack, and thus their mutual need. Generality connects to amplify one's lack in the other. And such an interpretation of the notion of the general is an important invention of Ilyenkov, influenced by Hegel's notion of non-self being.

The notions of the unconscious, consciousness, the general, and the ideal touched upon above are actively applied, or disputed, in post-industrial theories. It is therefore important to mark the differences in their epistemological genealogies within socialist and non- or post-socialist contexts. Revisiting historical socialism in this way is not an act of nostalgia, but rather a means of marking the contradictions endemic in Western discourses of modernity, post-modernity, and anti-modernity from the 1960s to the present.

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That is probably the reason for the results of the recent elections in Georgia, with the pro-Kremlin oligarch taking over the former president's team and the neoliberal technocrats defining their political program as pro-Western democratic modernization.

2
Boris Buden, *Zone des Übergangs: Vom Ende des Postkommunismus* (*Zones of Transition: On the End of Post-communism*), (Zuhrkamp, 2009).

3
Such epistemological incompatibility marks the gaps not only between historical socialism or Western democracy and Western left theory. It is also the kind of epistemological rupture that exists between Hegel and Deleuze, Badiou and Virno, Marx and Heidegger.

4
P. Virno, *Multitude*: *Between Innovation and Negation* (Los Angeles: Semiotext(e), 2008), 169–189.

5
Evald Ilyenkov, Soviet-Russian philosopher (1924-1979). He used Marxist theory to develop materialist interpretations of Hegel. See English translations at http://www.marxists.org/archive/ilyenkov/index.htm . Among his works are "Dialectics of the Ideal" (ca. 1960), *Dialectics of the Abstract and Concrete* (1960), and *The Universal* (1974).

6
E. Ilyenkov, "Dialectics of the Ideal," in *Philosophy and Culture* (Moscow: Political Literature, 1991), 229-–270, 262–267.

7
In the English translation, this notion of "vseobshee" (or, in German, "Allgemein") is translated as "the Universal." However, "the genera" or sometimes "the common" would fit the Russian notion of "vseobshee" (as well as Hegel's "Allgemein") better.

8
The difference with Virno here is that Virno, while locating the common in the sphere of neurophysiology and reflexes (as the pre-linguistic and pre-rational category) interprets it in favor of pre-rational, pre-cultural physiological and instinctual contingency, while for Ilyenkov the pre-linguistic realm can be symbolic and ideal.

9
Alexei Nikolaevich Leontiev, Soviet psychologist (1903–1979), disciple of A. Luria and L. Vygotsky. Author of the books *On the Consciousness of the Learning* (1947), *Intellectual Development of a Child* (1950), *Activity, Consciousness, Person* (1977), and *Will* (1978). Alexander Ivanovich Mesheriakov, Soviet psychologist (1923–1974), disciple of A. Luria and I. Sokoliansky. In 1960 he founded a laboratory for the research of teaching methods for the deaf, blind, and mute children at the Institute of Defectology in the Academy of Sciences, and in 1963 opened a school for deaf, blind, and mute children in Zagorsk. He is the author of *The I mage in the Psychics of a Blind and Deaf Child* (1960), *Psychic D evelopment in the Conditions of Sensor Defects* (1965), and *The D imension of Probability in the Signal Perception of the Deaf and Blind Children* (1970).

10
E. Ilyenkov, "Dialectics of the Ideal," 263.

11
Ibid., 250-–251. Ilyenkov claims that even such Hegelian modes of the ideal as the form of thinking, or the syntactic form, or Marx's form of cost in the economy didn't appear or develop dependent on the individual consciousness and psychics, but were molded in the objective outer world, although with the participation of human consciousness. Like present day speculative realists, Ilyenkov insists that there is a material world as it exists, independent from its mediated correlation with the social and cultural forms of the experience. But if for speculative realists such assertion means that all other elements—human, cultural, social—should be separated from the contingent immanence of the matter, Ilyenkov thinks that the material independence of the world is dialectically intertwined with the socially organized world of human culture.

12
E. Ilyenkov, "On the General," *Philosophy and Culture* (Moscow: Political Literature, 1991), 320–339.

13
This is the stance that Deleuze would never accept, because he would reject the molar definition of any activity and would not agree with superimposing any notion or term over the process of production. He would also never define any creative production as labor.

14
E. Ilyenkov, "On the Materialist Understanding of Thought as of a Subject of Logic," in *Philosophy and Culture* (Moscow: Political Literature, 1991), 223.

15
Paolo Virno, when juxtaposing the notions of the general and the universal, says that the general for him means contingent concatenation and sharing between separated singularities. Pascal Gielen and Sonja Lavaert, "The Dismeasure of Art," interview with Paolo Virno, *Foundation Art and Public Space* . See http://www.skor.nl/article-4178-nl.html?lang=en .

Hito Steyerl

Freedom from Everything: Freelancers and Mercenaries

In 1990, George Michael released his song "Freedom '90." It was a time when everybody was deliriously singing along with Beethoven's "Ode to Joy" or the Scorpions' "Winds of Change," celebrating what people thought was the final victory of liberty and democracy after the fall of the Berlin Wall. Most abysmal of all these sing-along songs was David Hasselhoff's live rendition from on top of the Berlin Wall of "Looking for Freedom," a song describing the trials and tribulations of a rich man's son trying to make his own fortune.

But George Michael did something entirely different. For him, freedom was not some liberal paradise of opportunity. Instead,

> It looks like the road to heaven
> But it feels like the road to hell.[1]

What sort of freedom does George Michael's song describe? It is not the classic liberal freedom defined by an ability to do or say or believe something. It is rather a negative freedom. It is characterized by absence, the lack of property and equality in exchange, the absence even of the author and the destruction of all props suggesting his public persona. And this is why the song feels much more contemporary than all the odes to liberty from a bygone age of the end of history. It describes a very contemporary state of freedom: the freedom from everything.

We are accustomed to regarding freedom as primarily positive—the freedom to do or have something; thus there is the freedom of speech, the freedom to pursue happiness and opportunity, or the freedom of worship.[2] But now the situation is shifting. Especially in the current economic and political crisis, the flipside of liberal ideas of freedom—namely, the freedom of corporations from any form of regulation, as well as the freedom to relentlessly pursue one's own interest at the expense of everyone else's—has become the only form of universal freedom that exists: the freedom from social bonds, freedom from solidarity, freedom from certainty or predictability, freedom from employment or labor, freedom from culture, public transport, education, or anything public at all.

These are the only freedoms that we share around the globe nowadays. They do not apply equally to everybody, but depend on one's economic and political situation. They are negative freedoms, and they apply across a carefully constructed and exaggerated cultural alterity that promotes: the freedom from social security, the freedom from the means of making a living, the freedom from accountability and sustainability, the freedom from free education, healthcare, pensions and public culture, the loss of standards of public responsibility, and in many places, the freedom from the rule of law.

As Janis Joplin sang, "Freedom's just another word for nothing left to lose." This is the freedom that people in many places share today. Contemporary freedom is not primarily the enjoyment of civil liberties, as the traditional liberal view has it, but rather like the freedom of free fall, experienced by many who are thrown into an uncertain and unpredictable future.

These negative freedoms are also those that propel the very diverse protest movements that have emerged around the world—movements that have no positive focal point or clearly articulated demands, because they express the conditions of negative freedom. They articulate the loss of the common as such.

Negative Freedom as Common Ground

Now it's time for the good news. There is nothing wrong with this condition. It is of course devastating for those who are subject to it, but at the same time, it also reshapes the character of opposition in a very welcome way. To insist on speaking about negative freedom opens the possibility of claiming more negative freedoms: the freedom from exploitation, oppression, and cynicism. This means exploring new forms of relationships between people who have become free agents in a world of free trade and rampant deregulation.

One particularly pertinent aspect of the condition of negative freedom today: the condition of the freelancer.

What is a freelancer? Let's look at a very simple definition.

1. A person who sells services to employers without a long-term commitment to any of them.
2. An uncommitted independent, as in politics or social life.
3. A medieval mercenary.[3]

The word "freelance" derives from the medieval term for a mercenary soldier, a "free lance," that is, a soldier who is not attached to any particular master or government and can be hired for a specific task. The term was first used by Sir Walter Scott (1771–1832) in *Ivanhoe* to describe a "medieval mercenary warrior" or "free-lance," indicating that the lance is not sworn to any lord's services. It changed to a figurative noun around the 1860s and was recognized as a verb in 1903 by authorities in etymology such as the *Oxford English Dictionary*. Only in modern times has the term morphed from a noun (a freelance) into an adjective (a freelance journalist), a verb (a journalist who freelances) and an adverb (she worked freelance), as well as the noun "freelancer."[4]

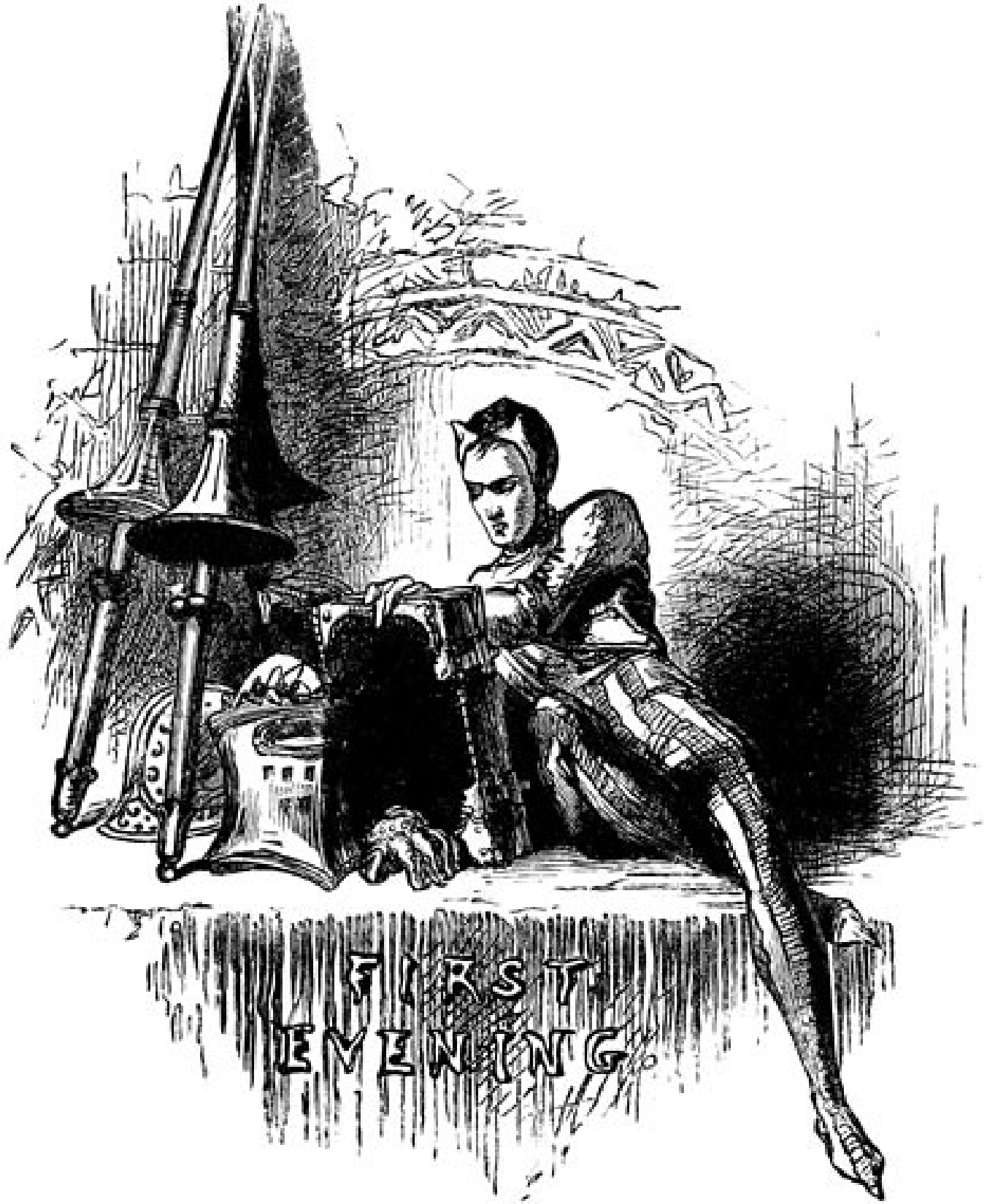
While today's lance-for-hire takes on many different forms—from stone crushers, shovels, baby bottles, and machine guns to any form of digital hardware—the conditions of employment do not appear to have changed as dramatically as the lance itself. Today, that lance—at least in the case of writers—has most likely been designed by Steve Jobs. But perhaps labor conditions have changed as well—the factory now seems to be dissolving into autonomous and subcontracted microunits that produce under conditions that are not far from indentured and day labor. And this widespread, though by no means universal, reversal to historical forms of feudalist labor could mean that, indeed, we are living in neo-feudal times.[5]

In Japanese cinema, there is a long tradition of portraying the figure of the itinerant freelance. This character is called the "ronin," a wandering samurai who knows no permanent master. He has lost the privileges of serving a single master and now faces a world characterized by the Hobbesian warfare of all against all. The only thing he has left are his fighting skills, which he rents out. He is a lumpen samurai, downsized, degraded, but with key skills nevertheless.

The classic freelancer film is Akira Kurosawa's *Yojimbo* (1961), which also became popular in the West because it was adapted as a so-called spaghetti western by Italian director Sergio Leone.

A Fistful of Dollars (1964) launched both Clint Eastwood and the superwide super-close-up, usually of sweaty males staring each other down before decisive shoot-outs. But the original Japanese version is much more interesting. In its opening sequence, we are faced with a surprisingly contemporary situation. While the freelancer walks through a windswept and barren landscape, he approaches a village and meets people in different degrees of anguish and destitution. The closing shot of the introduction is of a dog who strolls past with a human hand in his mouth.

In Kurosawa's film, the country is transitioning from a production-based economy to a consumption-and speculation-based one. The village is ruled by two rival warlord-capitalists. People are giving up their manufacturing businesses to become brokers and agents. At the same time, textile production—a profession deeply associated with the creation and development of capitalism—is being outsourced to housewives. Hookers abound, as do the security personnel to whom they cater. Sex and security are valuable commodities, as are coffins, which, apart from textile production, seem to be the main industry in town. In this situation, the freelancer appears on the scene. He manages to pit the warlords against each other and liberates the villagers.



The romantic free lance as portrayed in the book "A Festival of Song: A Series of Evenings with the Greatest Poets of the English Language," 1876.

The Hollywood adaptation of Akira Kurosawa's 1961 film Yojimbo starred Clint Eastwood. Clint Eastwood's character, originally a freelance samurai, was adapted by Sergio Leone to be a cowboy in his spaghetti western Dollar Trilogy.

The Mercenary

While the story of the ronin is a fitting allegory for the conditions of contemporary freelancers, the mercenary is not just an allegorical or historical figure—it is a very contemporary one. Indeed, we are living in an age in which the use of mercenary forces has made a surprising comeback, especially during the second Iraq War, which—as we may have already forgotten—started out as "Operation Iraqi Freedom."

The question of whether private security contractors can

be called mercenaries under international law was hotly debated during the Iraq War. While US military contractors perhaps did not satisfy all the criteria for being called mercenaries according to the Geneva Convention, the use of about 20,000 such personnel during the occupation highlights the increasing privatization of warfare and the lack of state control over the actions of these private soldiers.

As many political scientists have noted, the privatization of warfare is a symptom of an overall weakening of the structure of the nation-state—a sign of a loss of control over military power, which undermines accountability and the rule of law. It calls into question the state's so-called monopoly on violence and undermines state sovereignty, replacing it with what has been called "subcontracted sovereignty." We thus have two figures, which complement each other and figure prominently in the scenario of negative freedom: the freelancer in an occupational sense and the mercenary or private security contractor in the military occupational sense.

Both freelancers and mercenaries lack allegiance to traditional forms of political organization, like nation-states. They engage in free-floating loyalities that are subject to economic and military negotiation. Thus, democratic political representation becomes an empty promise, since traditional political institutions only give negative freedoms to freelancers and mercenaries: the freedom from everything, the freedom to be outlaws or, as the beautiful expression goes: free game. Free game for the market; free game for the forces of deregulation of states, and, in the last instance, also the deregulation of liberal democracy itself.

Arguably, both freelancers and mercenaries are related to the rise of what Saskia Sassen calls the "Global City." This concept was beautifully summarized in a recent lecture by Thomas Elsaesser. He says that Global Cities are places that,

> due to a number of distinct factors, have become important nodes in the global economic system. The idea of the Global City therefore implies thinking of the world in terms of networks that come together at certain points, in cities whose reach and reference go beyond a single nation, thus suggesting transnationality or post-nationality.[6]

Global Cities thus express a new geography of power that is intrinsically linked to economic globalization and its many consequences, which have substantially transformed the role of the nation-state and its political institutions, such as representative democracy. This means that traditional modes of democratic representation are deeply in crisis. This crisis was not brought about by the interference of some culturally alien Other. It was brought about by the system of political representation itself, which has, on the one hand, undermined the power of the nation-state by rolling back economic regulations, and, on the other hand, inflated the power of the nation-state through emergency legislation and digitized surveillance. The liberal idea of representative democracy has been deeply corrupted by the unrestrained forces of both economic liberalism and nationalism.

At this point a new negative freedom emerges: the freedom not to be represented by traditional institutions, which refuse any responsibility for you but still try to control and micromanage your life, perhaps by using private military contractors or other private security services. So what is the freedom to be represented differently? How can we express a condition of complete freedom from anything, from attachment, subjectivity, property, loyalty, social bonds, and even oneself as a subject? And how could we even express it politically?

Maybe like this?

Lose the Face Now, I've Got to Live...

In 2008, the Guy Fawkes mask was appropriated by the hacker group Anonymous as its public face for a protest against Scientology. Since then it has spread as a viral visual symbol of contemporary dissent. But it is virtually unknown that this is an appropriation of the face of a mercenary.

Guy Fawkes was not only the person who got executed because he wanted to blow up the British Parliament. He was also a religious mercenary, fighting for the cause of Catholicism all over the European continent. While his historical persona is more than dubious and frankly unappealing, the reappropriation of his abstracted likeness by Anonymous shows an interesting if certainly unconscious reinterpretation of the role of the mercenary.

But the new mercenary—who is supposedly free from everything—is no longer a subject, but an object: a mask. It is a commercial object, licensed by a big corporation and pirated accordingly. The mask first appeared in *V for Vendetta* , a film about a masked rebel named V who fights a fascist British government of the future. This explains why the mask is licensed by Time Warner, which released *V for Vendetta*. So anticorporate demonstraters who buy the official version of the mask help enrich the kind of corporation they protest against. But this also triggers counteractions:

> [One] London protester said his brethren are trying to counter Warner Bros.' control of the imagery. He

claims that Anonymous UK has imported 1,000 copies from China, and the distribution goes "straight into the pockets of the Anonymous beer fund rather than to Warner Brothers. Much better."[7]

This overdetermined object represents the freedom not to be represented. A disputed object of copyright provides a generic identity for people who feel they need not only anonymity to be represented, but can only be represented by objects and commodities, because, whether free lances or even mercenaries, they themselves are free-floating commodities.

But look at other uses of masks or artificial personas to see how the trope of the mercenary can be taken even further. The Russian punk bank Pussy Riot used neon-colored balaclavas to conceal their faces during highly publicized appearances on Red Square in Moscow, where they told president Putin in no uncertain terms to go packing. Apart from its use value in (at least

temporarily) concealing faces, the balaclava also references one of the most famous icons of good-humored militancy of recent decades: the pipe-puffing subcomandante Marcos, unofficial spokesperson for the EZLN, also know as the Zapatista movement.

And this also shows us how to flip the figure of the mercenary into the figure of the guerrilla. Indeed, historically both are intimately linked. During the second half of the twentieth century, mercenaries were unleashed on insurgent groups throughout the world, particularly in postcolonial conflicts in Africa. But paramilitary "advisors" were also deployed against guerrilla movements in Latin America during the dirty proxy wars to maintain US hegemony in the region. In some sense guerrillas and mercenaries share similar spaces, except for the fact that guerrillas usually do not get paid for their efforts. Of course it is not possible to characterize all guerrilla movements along these lines—they are much too diverse. While in many cases their structure is similar to that of mercenaries and paramilitary groups deployed against them, in other cases they reorganize this paradigm and reverse it by taking up negative freedom and trying to break free from dependency; from occupation in all its ambiguous meanings.

As figures of contemporary economic reality, mercenaries and free lancers are free to break free from their employers and reorganize as guerrillas—or to put it more modestly, as the gang of ronin portrayed in Kurosawa's masterpiece *Seven Samurai* (1954). Seven free lancers team up to protect a village from bandits. In situations of complete negative freedom, even this is possible.

The Mask

And now we can come back to George Michael. In the video for "Freedom '90," all the elements mentioned above are vividly expressed. With its unabashed and over-the-top veneration of heteronormative celebrities, the video looks as silly now as it did when it was first released.

George Michael never appears in the video. Instead, he is represented by supercommodities and supermodels, who lip-synch his song as if they were human mics. All the insignia of his stage persona—the leather jacket, the jukebox, and the guitar—are destroyed in explosions, as if they were the British Parliament blown apart. The set looks like a foreclosed house in which even the furniture has been pawned and nothing remains but a sound system. There is nothing left. No subject, no possession, no identity, no brand, with voice and face separated from each other. Only masks, anonymity, alienation, commodification, and freedom from almost everything remain. Freedom looks like the road to heaven—but it feels like the road to hell, and it creates the necessity to change, to refuse to be this subject who is always already framed, named, and surveilled.

So here is the final good news. Only when you accept that there is no way back into the David Hasselhoff paradigm of freedom, with its glorification of self-entrepreneurship and delusions of opportunity, will the new freedom open up to you. It may be terrifying like a new dawn over a terrain of hardship and catastrophe—but it doesn't exclude solidarity. It says clearly:

> Freedom: I won't let you down.
> Freedom: I will not give you up. You got to give what you take.

In our dystopia of negative freedom—in our atomized nightmares—nobody belongs to anybody (except banks). We don't even belong to ourselves. Not even in this situation will I give you up. Will I let you down. Have some faith in the sound. It's the only good thing we got. Just like Kurosawa's free lancers and mercenaries, who form bonds of mutual support in situations of Hobbesian warfare, feudalism, and warlordism, there is something we are free to do, when we are free of everything.

The new freedom: you've got to give for what you take.

X

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Hito Steyerl is an artist and writer from Berlin.

1
George Michael, “Freedom ’90”: I won't let you down / I will not give you up / Gotta have some faith in the sound / It's the one good thing that I've got / I won't let you down / So please don't give me up / Because I would really, really love to / stick around, oh yeah / Heaven knows I was just a young boy / Didn't know what I wanted to be / I was every little hungry schoolgirl's / pride and joy / And I guess it was enough for me / To win the race? / A prettier face! / Brand new clothes and a big fat place / On your rock and roll TV / But today the way I play the game is not the same / No way / Think I'm gonna get myself some happy / I think there's something you should know / I think it's time I told you so / There's something deep inside of me / There's someone else I've got to be / Take back your picture in a frame / Take back your signing in the rain / I just hope you understand / Sometimes the clothes do not make the man / All we have to do now / Is take these lies and make them true somehow / All we have to see / Is that I don't belong to you / And you don't belong to me, yeah yeah / Freedom, freedom, freedom / You've gotta give for what you take / Heaven knows we sure had some fun boy / What a kick just a buddy and me / We had every big-shot good time band / on the run boy / We were living in a fantasy / We won the race, got out of the place / I went back home got a brand new face / For the boys on MTV / But today the way I play the game has / got to change, oh yeah / Now I'm gonna get myself happy / I think there's something you should know / I think it's time I stopped the show / There's something deepd inside of me / There's someone I forgot to be / Take back your picture in a frame / Take back your signing in the rain / I just hope you understand/ Sometimes the clothes do not make the man / Freedom, freedom, freedom / You've gotta give for what you take / Freedom, freedom, freedom / You've gotta give for what you take / Freedom, freedom, freedom / You've gotta give for what you take / Well it looks like the road to heaven / But it feels like the road to hell / When I knew which side my bread was / buttered / I took the knife as well / Posing for another picture / Everybody's got to sell / But when you shake your ass, they notice fast / And some mistakes were built to last / That's what you get, that's what you get / That's what you get, I say that's what / you get / I say that's what you get for changing / your mind / That's what you get, that's what you get / And after all this time / I just hope you understand / Sometimes the clothes do not make the man / All we have to do now, is take these lies / And make them true somehow / All we have to see is that I don't belong to you / And you don't belong to me, yeah, yeah / Freedom, freedom, freedom / You've gotta give for what you take / Freedom, freedom, freedom / You've gotta give for what you take,/ yeah / May not be what you want from me / Just the way it's got to be / Lose the face now / I've got to live.

2
On the distinction between positive and negative freedom, see Isaiah Berlin’s “Two Concepts of Liberty” (1958). There is also a tradition of debate around negative freedom as defined by Charles Taylor, whose concept is different than the one in this essay.

3
See https://www.thefreedictionary.com/freelance , s.v. “freelance.”

4
See Wikipedia, s.v. “freelancer.”

5
“In as abstract sense, the multifaceted political geography of the feudal order resembles today’s emerging overlapping jurisdictions of national states, supranational institutions, and novel private global regimes. This is, indeed, one of the prevalent interpretations in globalization scholarship.” Saskia Sassen, Territory, Authority, Rights: From Medieval to Global Assemblages (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2006), 27

6
Thomas Elsaesser, “Walter Benjamin, Global Cities, and ‘Living with Asymmetries’” (lecture, 3rd Athens Biennale, December 2011).

7
Tamara Lush and Verena Dobnik, “‘Vendetta’ mask becomes symbol of Occupy protests,” November 4, 2011, Associated Press.

Alan Gilbert

Allegories of Art, Politics, and Poetry

1. Shifting the Landscape

Politics without the imagination is bureaucracy, but the imagination is never a neutral category.

The shantytowns built on the outskirts of Lima, Peru, are the product of civil war, economic turmoil, ethnic struggle, and ecological crisis. Populated by underemployed laborers from the city and displaced peasants from the Andes, frequently of indigenous descent, a number of these shantytowns were originally constructed in the 1970s.[1] In 2002, one of these shantytowns, named Ventanilla, was home to more than seventy thousand people without plumbing, electricity, paved roads, or other basic infrastructure. The surrounding landscape is desert. To move a mountain on this landscape, Francis Alÿs gave each of five hundred volunteers from Ventanilla a shovel and asked them to stand side by side and slowly work their way up the dune, or as he described it in an interview published in *Artforum*: "This human comb pushed a certain quantity of sand a certain distance, thereby moving a sixteen-hundred-foot-long sand dune four inches from its original position."[2] This combination of poetic vagueness and precise instruction is central to Alÿs's storytelling approach to artmaking.

Many of Alÿs projects are about leaving a rumor, a story, or even a myth in the landscape as opposed to fashioning an object. In a piece from 1997 entitled *The Rumor*, Alÿs went into a town in Mexico and told a story about a man who disappeared from a local hotel. The rumor quickly spread through the town. However, once a police sketch was made—i.e., an accompanying object created—Alÿs ended his involvement in the piece. In *The Green Line (Sometimes Doing Something Poetic Can Become Political and Sometimes Doing Something Political Can Become Poetic)* from 2005, he casually carried a can of green paint with a hole in the bottom and walked the now-erased original boundary line of the state of Israel following the 1948 Arab-Israeli War.

A Belgian living in Mexico who travels often, freedom of movement is an important component in Alÿs's artwork. However, his brand of itinerancy—determined as it is by financial resources and post-September 11th legal circumscriptions—is in marked contrast with forced exile and involuntary migration. What interests me about *When Faith Moves Mountains* is the line that Alÿs's disenfranchised workers drew in the sand. If anything, it reminds me of the line in Santiago Sierra's *160 cm Line Tattooed on 4 People ...* (2000). Unlike dominant strategies in socially engaged art, Sierra's material practices don't aim to draw audiences into a vague consensual sociability.[3] Rather, viewers are strongly provoked to recognize systems of economic, social, and representational exploitation in which they—meaning, you and I—likely participate, however indirectly.

Upon entering a large room at Sierra's exhibition in 2000 at Ace Gallery in New York, I saw a set of oversized cardboard boxes, possibly for shipping appliances. Boxes in grids of any sort signal Minimalist art, and particularly the work of Donald Judd, but before I could get very far along this art-historical tangent, the back of my neck began to tingle. It was clear that I wasn't alone in the room, even though I appeared to be alone in the room. At a certain point, and without it being indicated by noise or movement, I realized that there were people inside those boxes. Sierra's title for the piece summarizes it succinctly: *Remunerated People to Stay in the Interior of Cardboard Boxes*. On the way out, I asked the gallery attendant for more information, and she said that Sierra had solicited unemployed immigrants in various situations of financial duress to sit inside the boxes for money, and that some did, but others found the work too degrading, and so only about half the boxes were occupied at any given time. Information, stories, rumors are always unreliable. Nevertheless, the point of my implication in vast systems of exploitation, however inadvertent in this instance, had been made in a way that was both metaphorical and totally real, i.e., more than skin deep.

Perhaps in response to the antagonisms and absolutisms of political strife—from the war between the Shining Path and the Peruvian government to the misnomered "clash of civilizations" in the wake of the September 11th attacks, six months or so before the opening of the Lima Bienal, which commissioned *When Faith Moves Mountains* —what's notable about Alÿs's piece is that while it may be a line drawn in the sand, it's a shifting one, and one influenced by both environmental and human-social forces. In this sense, it would be interesting to revisit the location of the work in the way scholars, conservators, and art tourists have done with Robert Smithson's *Spiral Jetty* (1970), which itself has been the subject of its own set of environmental and human-social forces. Specifically, *Spiral Jetty* has been threatened with the construction of solar evaporation ponds that would drain the water surrounding it, and also with the proposed building of nearby oil wells, which would potentially spoiled its "viewshed."[4] In other words, the art-world institutionality that Smithson and other Land art practitioners tried to escape by going deep into the American West—that most mythic of places—has been redrawn on a much larger canvas to include multinational corporations and global ecology.

Plenty of artists, designers, and architects are parachuted into sites in order to create works meant to engage with the surrounding landscape (Frank Gehry's Guggenheim Museum Bilbao being among the most famous examples), but Alÿs turns the landscape into an allegory that is local, global, and—the only thing that might be more powerful than both—climatological. As he says in the *Artforum* interview: " *When Faith Moves Mountains* is my attempt to deromanticize Land art … Here, we have attempted to create a kind of Land art for the land-less, and, with the help of hundreds of people and shovels, we created a social allegory."[5] Work and workers are in a battle with the elements, which, again, are never exactly natural—be they economic or environmental. It's not a coincidence that the words "economy" and "ecology" share the ancient Greek word *oikos* [οἶκος], or "house."

2. Poetry

In a world where a fundamental strategy of ruling ideologies is to make themselves appear natural, the absurd can be its own form of critique. "Allegories are, in the realm of thoughts, what ruins are in the realm of things," Walter Benjamin writes in *The Origin of German Tragic Drama.*[6] Allegories need time to unfold, but all time is scented with death—to use a description in the spirit of Benjamin's analysis of the German baroque. The danger with allegory is that it so easily turns into myth when lifted out of time and history. Hence Benjamin's desire to keep allegory directed toward death and ruins.

In a post to the Verso blog about the then-burgeoning Occupy Wall Street phenomenon, McKenzie Wark wrote: "So what the occupation is doing is taking over a little (quasi) public square in the general vicinity of Wall Street in the financial district and turning it into something like an allegory."[7] Wark goes on to equate allegory with the abstract, but that's not quite right if, per Benjamin, allegories are deeply temporal phenomenon. Wark then compares the occupation to symbols, which, as Paul de Man's "The Rhetoric of Temporality" instructed those of us raised on deconstruction in the late 1980s, are definitely not the same as allegories.[8] What Wark might mean instead is "poetic," though there are very few words in the English language as misunderstood as this one. From the Greeks and Romans until the rise of Romanticism, poetry was inseparable from the category of rhetoric, which, among other things, meant that poetry was understood to have a social impact. Since Romanticism—and here I'm speaking of a specific European-US tradition—the "poetic" has come to signify the opposite of that. This historical situation—after all, any aesthetics is a product of a particular history, as is the concept of aesthetics itself—was ironically confirmed by the twentieth-century avant-garde's obsession with non-instrumental art and language. Everything else is kitsch, or so the story goes.

But what deconstruction taught is that *all* texts are rhetorical constructs—pre- and post-Romantic. This insight is both a blessing and a curse—a blessing because it teaches a rigorous mode of analyzing the internal contradictions, and therefore inherently self-defeating authority, of any text, by which is meant much more than just writing; a curse because when I watch someone like Glenn Beck pontificating, I can't help but think it's all a ridiculous rhetorical performance, and that Beck himself

Francis Alÿs, When Faith Moves Mountains, 2002. Performance, Ventanilla, Peru.

knows this.[9] This is what used to be meant by rhetoric. And this is also related to what Occupy Wall Street does so well: it builds a self-deflating authority into its own ideology and organizational modes. Its signifiers slide. It foregrounds rhetorical performance in a self-conscious way that at the same time is deadly serious. It believes that bodies are material signs. In other words, it might be a kind of poetry.

People get impatient with the poetic. I'm a poet, and I get impatient with the poetic, as I got impatient with deconstruction for its endless discursive hairsplitting. At this point, I may be something of a reformed Foucauldian, because the only thing left to be privatized is our bodies. Yet if police responses to Occupy encampments around the United States prove anything, it's that beneath all the soft power is a powerful police arsenal, much of it overfunded in the wake of September 11th, waiting, even eager, to be deployed, however clumsily.

The way in which we are subjects, the way in which we are governed, is more intensely personal now, which both Foucault and second-wave feminism realized almost simultaneously. The slogan "We are the 99%" is an attempt to elude this intensely scrutinized subjectivity, or to put it in the words of the French anarchist collective Tiqqun: "There is no 'revolutionary identity.' Under Empire, it is instead non-identity, the fact of constantly betraying the predicates that THEY hang on us, that is revolutionary."[10] In seeking this anonymity, Occupy Wall Street has stirred up debates within the Left between broad-based social movements and identity-oriented political struggle, a dialectic perhaps impossible to resolve. But as anyone who went to Zuccotti Park during the two months that Occupy Wall Street had a physical presence there might have noticed, the core group of protesters did diversify, even if the encampment itself was eventually riven with social, cultural, and class tension to the point that a few of the lead organizers were actually grateful for New York City Mayor Bloomberg's heavy-handed, middle-of-the-night clearing of the park.

While some might argue that political indoctrination occurs via the state and its affiliate apparatuses, and others might claim that it happens through the corporate media, it's clear that what's been hijacked aren't our thoughts per se but our desires. The service industry is predicated on capturing desire in a way that a

Santiago Sierra, 160 cm Line Tattooed on Four People, 2000.

manufacturing economy, with its checklist of items to buy, never was. It's why design is superseding manufacturing (or outsourcing the latter), and why interactivity precedes content, especially in digital media, but increasingly in more traditional commodity culture as well.[11]The most perverse part is that these developments will be hidden behind the façade of interactivity, of choice, of guided desire. If that sounds depressing, it's not. There's an aimlessness and entropy and creative wisdom that even the most efficient systems can never account for or contain. Occupy Wall Street was instigated by what can only be considered an advertisement published in *Adbusters*, an anti-corporate magazine that doesn't take ads. By not formulating a set of clear talking points, Occupy Wall Street has allowed people to project their own desires onto it. There's something poetic in this too.

Placing a story into a landscape has the potential to make a difference, and maybe that difference occurs to the extent that the story resembles a poem. Think of the significant impact made on artistic practice this past decade by Walid Raad's imaginary and fictional documentaries of the Lebanese Civil Wars. The allegory that Occupy Wall Street tells is still unfolding, even if its archive has become an important concern for preservation. In its very structure, allegory is a combination of critique and hope. I want my physical interfaces to be seamless, but not my intellectual and ideological ones. I'm skeptical of poetry by design because it always has something to sell, even if poetry itself doesn't sell.

3. Public Space

Another favorite recent artwork of mine also involved a story inserted into a landscape. On the morning of November 12, 2008, commuters in various US cities, though mostly in New York City, were handed 80,000 free copies of a special edition of the *New York Times* with the banner headline "Iraq War Ends"—except that it was dated July 4, 2009, was only fourteen pages long, and the Gray Lady's famous motto had been changed from "All the News That's Fit to Print" to "All the News We Hope to Print." Otherwise, it looked identical to the *New York Times*, right down to the layout, typeface, and ads. Article titles included "Nationalized Oil to Fund Climate Change Efforts"[12]on the front page, "National Health Insurance Act Passes"[13] in the "National" section, and "New York Bike Path System Expanded Dramatically"[14] in the "New York" section. Ads that carefully replicated the look of their real *New York Times* counterparts included ones for De Beers diamonds, HSBC, and Exxon Mobil, but with modified text so that, for instance, the De Beers ad read: "Your purchase of a diamond between now and 2026 will help fund the creation, fitting, and maintenance of a prosthetic for an African whose hand was lost in one of that continent's brutal conflicts over diamonds."[15]

Produced by social-art/activist group the Yes Men in collaboration with many other individuals and organizations, this fake *New York Times* might be understood as a public art project for the information age and its pervasive mediascape. The Yes Men have spent a decade inserting into this fuzzy public sphere sometimes absurd though always historically specific and corporate-focused counter-narratives, which have targeted Dow Chemical, the World Trade Organization, Chevron, and so on. These counter-narratives are frequently performance-based, more interested in concrete as opposed to abstract social bodies, and sometimes involve a subtle camping of male heteronormativity. "Site-specific" used to mean how deeply something was embedded in a place; now it refers to how thoroughly you're being data-mined. It's very difficult to define public art when there's so little public space anymore, and the general public itself seems like an increasingly outdated concept. At the very least, following Nancy Fraser and feminist critiques of Jürgen Habermas's notion of the public sphere, it might be more useful to think in terms of many publics, alternative publics, and counter-publics.[16] In any case, public space is becoming indistinguishable from a contested mediascape; similarly, the commons is becoming virtual as part of the internet era's version of expropriation.

Occupy Wall Street's lack of a traditional political platform is directly related to its role as a media intervention, as a meme, as an ideological contagion. This isn't at all to deny the necessity of more conventional forms of activism or to ignore the fact that it was Occupy Wall Street's physical presence at Zuccotti Park, its willingness to fill New York City jails, and videos of its bodies being billy-clubbed and pepper-sprayed that significantly raised the movement's profile. But to then demand from it a coherent political program is to somewhat miss the point of its political imagination and frustration with business as usual writ large across the US political and economic system. The Occupy movement is proposing a different paradigm of viral politics and radical, participatory democracy. At another level, as Glenn Greenwald and others have pointed out, protesters simply want to see the law upheld and enforced, particularly around financial practices.[17] Those who think Occupy Wall Street should be the Left equivalent of the Tea Party are welcome to line up some billionaire backers, start their own influential news outlet to serve as a mouthpiece, and handpick some candidates.

I probably wouldn't have said this ten years ago, or maybe even five, but it's important to recognize imagination as a social and political force to reconfigure the real. We need to acknowledge how much innate creativity, and its direct relationship to desire, is challenged and threatened by the products of the culture industry, which includes parts of the art world. Confronted with the latest Hollywood blockbuster or Katy Perry release or Damien Hirst dot painting, it sometimes seems difficult to compete.

Steve Lambert and Andy Bichlbaum (The Yes Men), A Celebration, 2008. False New York Times newspaper issue. This periodical was a collaboration which included, besides the two authors, thirty writers, fifty advisors, around 1000 volunteer distributors, CODEPINK, May First/People Link, Evil Twin, Improv Everywhere, and Not An Alternative.

But of course, it does occur: we make cultures, and the culture industry dips into us as much as we dip into it. According to one report on the earliest days of Occupy Wall Street, it was "'artistic activities' that ultimately jump-started the occupation—yoga practices, poetry readings, and the like."[18] Perhaps the first of the Occupy Wall Street occupations was organized by a proto-arts and culture committee, and included poetry and music near the New York Stock Exchange. This took place on September 1, 2011, seventeen days before the initial main protest march. About a dozen people attended, most of whom were arrested.[19] Topics such as the elimination of student debt, the right to assemble, and freedom of speech were discussed. In other words, the stage had been set.

As a form of public art, as a kind of social sculpture, Alÿs's *When Faith Moves Mountains*, the Yes Men and affiliate organizations such as CODEPINK's fake *New York Times*, and Occupy Wall Street each combine critique with a durational, progressive, and performative sense of hope. These projects understand that all art is public, even when it's not public art. With the relentless privatization of everyday life, whether shared or solitary, the idea of a public going to a public space to see a public work of art is obsolete, and may, in fact, have never been more than a dream. Combined with recent threats to the First Amendment right to peaceably assemble, there's a paradigm shift occurring in how to reconceive the public sphere. Nevertheless, the public is everywhere, even if many of its physical gathering places have been taken away (especially in the so-called Western "democracies"). Moreover, new publics arise all the time when a previously silenced or disenfranchised group seizes the opportunity to speak, which oftentimes takes a cultural form as much as a traditionally political one. Usually more so. This is part of the politics of the imagination.

A critique of present conditions; the imagination of alternative realities; and collective, sustainable methods seem like a good approach to grounding current artistic, political, and pedagogical practice. At the same time, it's necessary to continue examining, and self-examining, to find internal contradictions: in critique (for instance, our

David Hammons, Concerto in Black and Blue, 2002. Installation view with artist.

complicity with power even as we confront it), in hope (the disappointment lodged in every hope, the unhappiness fastened to every joy), and in just how sustainable our practices really are and to what degree they instigate new social formations as opposed to replicating community as exclusion. Any solutions will be temporary, any spaces transitory. Publics are constantly morphing, and the battles they wage with those seeking to contain them are now over technology as much as over territory. This is part of the politics of transmission, in which art and poetry have always played a role.

X

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1
With their complex, precarious, and improvisational approach to architecture and infrastructure, as well as their alternative economies, shantytowns around the world are increasingly being studied by urban geographers, social theorists, and architectural scholars alike. Some see these communities as creative in their employment of recycled materials, sustainable practices, and new modes of social relations, while others—and here I'm thinking specifically of Mike Davis's *Planet of Slums* (London: Verso, 2006)—view these expanding metropolises of the poor as excrescences of global neoliberalism and creative mostly in the unimaginable systems of brutality and exploitation existing within them.

2
Saul Anton, "A Thousand Words: Francis Alÿs Talks about *When Faith Moves Mountains* ," *Artforum* Vol. 10, No. 40 (Summer 2002): 146–147.

3
Claire Bishop similarly contrasts Bourriaud and Sierra in her influential essay "Antagonism and Relational Aesthetics," *October* 110 (Fall 2004): 51–79.

4
See http://www.diaart.org/sites/page/59/1245 .

5
Saul Anton, "A Thousand Words," ibid.

6
Walter Benjamin, *The Origin of German Tragic Drama* , trans. John Osborne (London: Verso, 1977), 178.

7
McKenzie Wark, "How to Occupy an Abstraction," Verso blog, October 3, 2011. See http://www.versobooks.com/blogs/728-mckenzie-wark-on-occupy-wall-street-how-to-occupy-an-abstraction .

8
Paul De Man, "The Rhetoric of Temporality," in *Blindness and Insight: Essays in the Rhetoric of Contemporary Criticism* , trans. Wlad Godzich (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1983), 187–228.

9
Glenn Beck is an American conservative, television network producer, political commentator, and host of the radio talk show the Glenn Beck Program in the United States.

10
Tiqqun, *This Is Not a Program*, trans. Joshua David Jordan (Los Angeles: Semiotext(e), 2011).

11
Design has become less about objects and more about funneling people toward experiences. In this process, data-mining and the designed environment will become fused to shape people's movements through space in a way that will make architecture's historically predominant role in doing this seem feeble in comparison.

12
Steve Lambert and Andy Bichlbaum, *A Celebration,* 2008. Quoted from page A1 of the publication.

13
Ibid., A7.

14
Ibid., A12.

15
Ibid., A2.

16
Nancy Fraser, "Rethinking the Public Sphere: A Contribution to the Critique of Actually Existing Democracy," *Habermas and the Public Sphere* , ed. Craig Calhoun (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1993), 109–142.

17
Glenn Greenwald, "Immunity and Impunity in Elite America: How the Legal System Was Deep-Sixed and Occupy Wall Street Swept the Land," TomDispatch.com, October 25, 2011. See http://www.tomdispatch.com/archive/175458/ .

18
Sean Captain, "The Inside Story of Occupy Wall Street," FastCompany.com, October 7, 2011. See http://www.fastcompany.com/1785918/the-inside-story-of-occupy-wall-street .

19
Ibid.

Zdenka Badovinac, Eda Cufer, Cristina Freire, Boris Groys, Charles Harrison, Vít Havránek, Piotr Piotrowski, and Branka Stipančić

Conceptual Art and Eastern Europe: Part II

Continued from Conceptual Art and Eastern Europe, Part I

Zdenka Badovinac: What you've mentioned leads me to the question of identity versus other international questions that were being explored around 1968. How much are we forcing this Eastern European identity? This question only occurred after the Soviet regime collapsed. Before the fall of the wall, in Russia or in other Eastern and Central European countries, did artists talk about this?

Piotr Piotrowski: They did not, but intellectuals did, particularly at the end of the 1970s and the beginning of the 1980s. At this time, among Central European intellectuals there emerged a sort of identity which was perceived as original, being simultaneously Central European and against the Soviet regime. Think of Kundera, for example, or Konrád in Hungary, or Michnik in Poland. Artists did not follow this attitude, these statements, but writers did. Among them there was this striking, strong desire to construct a Central European identity, which was not exactly a Western one.

ZB: What was at the center of this discussion?

PP: An anti-Soviet stance. That was central.

ZB: Writers were interested in these questions of Eastern or Central European identity, but I would say visual artists were more occupied with ideas and questions that circulated in international space.

PP: However, that was also a reaction: to be international was not to be local or suppressed by Soviet cultural policy. The reception of international art trends, stars, and art in general—the hidden dimension of which was not to be suppressed by Soviet propaganda or its cultural politics—was pivotal. We can only define this in a very complex way.

ZB: However, what Cristina said is interesting. Brazilian artists, at the time, were really talking about Brazilian identity.

Cristina Freire: In the 1920s and 1930s.

ZB: Were Hélio Oiticica and Lygia Clark also into these questions?

CF: Yes, they were bringing up *some* such questions, but through an existential approach. I don't see this as the same thing necessarily. If until the 1930s and 1940s we

Cover illustration for the Brazilian poet Oswaldo de Andrade's book Pau Brasil, 1925. Cover art work by painter Tarsila do Amaral.

could find this national identity represented in literature and visual arts, after the 1950s it was not so anymore.

PP: It was the same in the 1930s with Hungarian and Polish visual art. This is the wave seeking national identity, the second wave of modernism. The French sought this as well.

Boris Groys: Of course, in the 1970s Conceptual art was percieved as being anti-Soviet, and the whole independent art circle was perceived as practicing anti-Soviet propaganda. Not all artists realized this, though.

CF: I think we Brazilians didn't share this stance of being against something, such as propaganda or the regime. On the other hand, we can find identities in Brazilian work of the time. It might not stricly be identity; more trying to connect what you're doing with the context.

ZB: As I remember from the work of Hélio Oiticica and Lygia Clark, wasn't it related in a certain way to the tradition of *Tropicália*?

CF: Yes, but I don't think Oiticica was searching for a certain identity. When Oiticica particpated in the Information Exhibition, he wrote in the catalogue, on the page alloted to him: "I'm not representing Brazil." He was not trying to represent Brazil, just doing his work. And in the 1970s, in the worst period of the dictatorship, he wasn't even living in the country, but in New York. Of course all his work and everything he *was* related to his origin. In this case, I don't think we can apply Western conceptualism, like in the case of the philosophy of language, to the context. It doesn't make sense. It's hard to find references. When you mention *Tropicália*, of course, the movement is related to Oiticica's environment, the architecture of favelas, music. Everything is connected to it.

Artur Barrio, "Trouxas ensanguentadas" in Situação...TT1 (Situation. . .TT1), Belo Horizonte, ribeiro Arrudas, April 21, 1970.

Charles Harrison: It seems to me that almost always in Latin America, art has a strong sense of location. Not nationality, but location.

CF: Location—that's it! For instance, Artur Barrio doesn't make works, he constructs "situations"; there's this idea of the city, of place.

ZB: Cristina, Boris, you have written about participation and collectivism. How did Conceptual artists work in groups? And how did they address people as participants and not just as viewers?

CH: I think the point Boris made about subjectivism is quite important. Collaboration in Conceptual art is a critique of subjectivism. It is an attempt to oppose the traditional stereotypes of artistic personality and individualism, and to prioritize the idea of content, intellectual content, autonomy, in the sense of what is produced, and how it suppresses individualism, personality, and subjectivism.

ZB: Boris also wrote about Russian or Eastern European collectivism in another way: there was a sense of collectivism which was, as I understood it, not just belonging to one artistic group, but to collective ideas among artists in general.

BG: I believe it's a similar situation to Brazil. In Russia, the Collective Actions Group had absolutely the same goals regarding ideas of authenticity and subjectivity, and above all, sought to erase this divide between artist and viewer. Collective Actions activities consisted of doing almost nothing and asking other people to react to this. All the "Appearances" lasted a few minutes or even seconds. Collective Actions Group invited people, performers appeared; however, the spectators almost couldn't react because it was too fast, and then it took half a year or a year to discuss that. And then they made a volume based on these discussions. Things like this were very much at the center of Moscow activities in the 1970s. I've written about fictional collectivities too, like those imagined by Kabakov, who invented them, as he invented fictional artists, presenting himself as a curator who accidentally finds this or that group of artists (ten people in one apartment, twelve people in another) and presents their work from the neutral perspective of an art historian. These collectivities compensate for the lack of real collective practices. There were different approaches and practices, but of course the whole goal was to mark the difference between "authentic" subjectivity and this kind of group activity. At the same time, this practice always reflected mechanisms of propaganda. For example, Kabakov made propaganda for his fictional artists, and the Collective Actions Group spread leaflets, wrote letters to people, announced their actions, praised themselves, and so on. It was a certain type of imitation of propaganda practices.

Eda Čufer: I think collectivism also had a functional dimension, creating a circle where you could build a parallel society that prevented you from being instrumental as an individual. However, I believe that in the case of Art & Language, it was consciously done vis-à-vis society, capitalist society, its institutions.

BG: It was a utopian collectivity at that time. And it collapsed. Art & Language also had to build a kind of local group utopia too, although in Russia that happened in the 1960s and 1970s.

EČ: Concerning Collective Actions, I didn't hear mentioned here their desire to mirror the West. Collective Actions created, through their activities, an underground institution that led them to the idea of the seminar and the archive, although they were not officially delegated by state institutions to produce that discourse, which was supposed to be a function of society at large. We still have a lack of notions and terms, which we borrow from Western discourse because of this. This lack of knowledge production would in other instances be integrated into society.

BG: I agree. I argued something similar in my text about Russian conceptualism. The problem is that if you invent something to differentiate yourself from the West, you create the illusion of being exotic. As it is, there is something there which is Western, as there is something here in Moscow specifically Russian. As such, it is a move towards self-exoticizing, which is perhaps a good selling practice, one of the best selling practices in art—particularly in our time, where everybody looks for difference. However, I think it's a bad intellectual practice because, in fact, what is interesting about Moscow Conceptualism is its similarities with Western conceptualism. Not the fact that it is different, but the fact that it is similar. Only at the moment you realize this similarity, difference becomes also interesting. If you don't see the similarity, your intellectual claim is reduced, because then Moscow Conceptualism becomes simply exotic and a commodity coming from Moscow. In my text "Moscow Romantic Conceptualism," I tried to create a kind of tension. It is like people say Russian communism wasn't a true communism. But it was communism, nonetheless—if it wasn't, nobody would be interested in arguing whether it was true communism or not.

EČ: You mentioned in the beginning of this conversation that Russia is not *in*, that there's no motivation to write PhDs on these themes, and so on. That doesn't happen with Western conceptualism. It is still very motivating to produce PhDs on the same subject a hundred times. We still don't have it reflected. We don't have names or explanations for it. There are a lot of gaps.

BG: I said Russia was not fashionable, but conceptualism *is* fashionable, and so is Russian conceptualism. I had a course on that at New York University, which attracted a lot of people. They were looking into the notion, because it's somehow also a brand. They were looking for something that is conceptual but not very well-known because it provides a perspective of discovery. The same occurs with the Russian avant-garde, which is also an invention of the West. Nobody in Russia has ever called it avant-garde. They've called it futurism or whatever. The Russian avant-garde is something of a brand—and it was created later than it was produced. It makes no difference if Russians produced conceptualism simultaneously with other movements. Conceptualism is a relatively intelligent branding, that allows us to consider certain practices that are comparable to what happened in the West as also being conceptualist ones—this ability to be comparable to a brand is a part of the brand as such, a way of being integrated in the relevant discourse. And there is an academic interest in that. People who are not interested in Russia could be interested, for example, in narrative practices of Russian conceptualism.

Collective Actions Group, Balloon. Performance, Moscow region, Gorkovskaya railway line, Nazaryevo station, 15th June, 1977.

Vít Havránek: An important point in Sol LeWitt's text "Paragraphs on Conceptual Art" is its very accurate articulation and dialectics—a dialectics between an individual or a group and an idea. The idea question is a crucial one. Of course historically and philosophically, there are different strategies for how to imagine an idea: in terms of linguistic philosophy, in which case it's a language-idea; then again, it can be an image. From this point we can see that there are different ideologies, methodologies, and philosophical approaches embedded in this very first definition of Conceptual art. From here I would go more concretely into this dialectics of the "idea" as this rupture with modernity or, likewise, the so-called formal language of the 1950s. I think it would be interesting to speak concretely of artists such as Julius Koller, who refers a lot to the Dada movement. I think we should discuss quite carefully this moment to see the relationship with the notion of the idea as a dialectic and dynamic situation. There are very precise historical definitions of this, but we shouldn't exclude seeing the whole complex as a dynamic one, or limit it to a single definition of what an idea of the art process could or should be. This is a problem if you are looking at the past retrospectively. In this sense, applying Sol LeWitt's idea in retrospect—a lot of work fits his definition. What happens to the cases of Manzoni, Yves Klein, or even Duchamp? If you consider this idea, and its relation to the individual as a type of dialectics, then this dialectics has the potential to be seen in retrospect all the way back to its emergence.

CH: That's actually a very good point. One of the things that happened in 1967—I feel its almost that specific—is that once the central status of that modernist account of the history of aesthetics is put into question, a whole lot of practices, previously part of history albeit slightly invisible, become very visible again. Duchamp, Manzoni, Yves Klein become visible, as does early Morris. Then, people in the West start looking outside the mainstream, they start looking at Latin America, to the East, and everything opens up very fast. As if what history signifies becomes much messier and wider again, and the mainstream, basically controlled from New York, disappears. When you lose the

mainstream you lose all your regulations, the sense of standards, paradigms—and you lose the concept of art. Perhaps that loss is a good thing. A lot is put into question which is already questioned elsewhere, and then it becomes part of the larger discourse.

CF: If you look for the roots of this hegemonic history we are discussing, Sol LeWitt is not necessarily the key figure. I would tend to find in Latin America or maybe in Eastern Europe other artists who were on this frontier between art and life: Fluxus is a much stronger reference, more than this idea-based relationship.

BS: In our country, the former Yugoslavia, they used to use the term "Conceptual art" to designate a lot of art practices, almost everything that rejected modernism. That is, some Fluxus events, language works, body works. So "Conceptual art" was not just a term for work from 1967 to 1972, as it was for Art & Language, like Charles said. It was used very, very widely. Of course some people realized it was necessary to find a better term, so they used "expanded media." For example, the April meetings in Belgrade, very early in the 1970s (the first meeting was 1972 or 1973), claimed: "This is a festival of expanded media." Furthermore, when the first history of Conceptual art from 1968 to 1978 was published in Zagreb, the term used was "new art practice." They stated that it wasn't possible to use "Conceptual art" for such a variety of practices. So, I don't know how to use "Conceptual art" as a term nowadays because of its use, on the one hand, and its rejection, on the other.

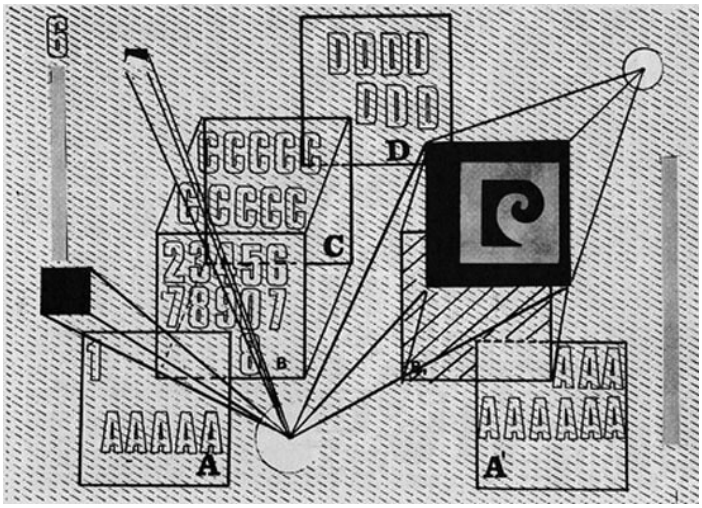
Zdenka, you've mentioned, for instance, the critique of art institutions. There are different artists who did wonderful work about this: for example, in Croatia there is Goran Trbuljak, who made very self-ironic work. I thought we could perhaps concentrate on opening the topics of interest here. I'm afraid that if we start with the theoretical, we'll be venturing into the forest.

EČ: To me, what is missing from previous work—and recent exhibitions and publications brought certain data together, so now we know more about what was going on in Czechoslovakia, Hungary, or Romania than we knew at the beginning of the 1990s—is a comparative analysis of similar art practices among different countries.

BG: Foucault spoke of paralogic in these cases: looking for differences is logical; looking for similarities is paralogical. We need a paralogical approach, and maybe then conceptualism will itself be para-conceptualism.

PP: Branka, would you consider artists like Gorgona or Mangelos to be Conceptual artists?

BS: Yes. Although when Gorgona started, they'd never heard of conceptualism. However, today we can see some



Tamara Janković, "Sesta Dimenzija 16 and Sesta Dimenzija 17," in Signal, no. 1 , 1970.

aspects of it in their work, especially in that of Josip Vaništa, the group's head, but also in Mangelos's case, who has a very specific mixture of art theory and art production. I've always thought of Gorgona as the star of this region.

CF: There were some figures in the region who were exchanging or had strong relations with Fluxus, but I think that it's interesting to see how those relations are not written about very much, not talked of enough.

CH: That's the big question: if we talk of moves outside the centrality of painting and sculpture—say, from the 1950s onwards, including Fluxus and destruction in art—those tendencies break down the centrality of modernist notions of sculpture and painting, which is very widespread. I'm sure we can find examples of these practices in Latin America, the East, and the United States itself, but then we would't need the term "Conceptual art."

BG: Maybe we do need the term, because destructivists, Fluxus, and so on didn't question the privileged position of art. They moved away from painting and sculpture, but didn't subject art to a certain kind of critique, reflection, or proclaimed superiority of theory—of theoretical interpretative text.

CH: On the contrary, they assumed all art practices were aesthetic, which is very different.

BG: Indeed, such putting forward of the theoretical and interpretive gesture as artistic work is what fundamentally connects Art & Language's practice with many others in Russia at that time. We are living in a time where differences and identities are very much stressed. If you look at exhibitions, it is always this and that identity, and,

Gorgona Group, Patrząc w niebo (Looking at the sky). Happening, Zagreb, 1966.

on the other hand there's always the repetitive stating of differences between different identities. I was very much criticized for comparing Stalinist culture with the avant-garde, and since then the problem has not disappeared. We are living in a very strange time which owes a lot to the market, the system of intellectual property, the rights to branding, and so on. The tendency to overlook and exclude similarities is deeply ingrained in our cultural consciousness because it is actually what our consciousness is based on. However, I think it would not be a wrong or false intellectual adventure to attempt to resist this almost natural urge to seek similarities beyond a seemingly very reasonable, legitimate, and understandable claim of exclusivity.

EČ: I think that Eastern art or the communist period is by default perceived as different. What we lack is a better theory of how the system functioned, to demonstrate the similarities with the present time, late capitalism.

BG: We can do that, but only if we want to. It's very dangerous to look at the differences in our time. They immediately put you in a box and you'll never come out of it, even if you love it. In the end they can be very distressing and frustrating.

CH: The problem with looking for similarities is that everything can be similar to everything else under an appropriate description.

ZB: Under a certain perspective, I hate the term "identity" more and more. The term "Eastern European" in our title implies an identity. The question of similarity is really interesting and challenging. I actually had the idea to change the term "identity" to the term "diversity." Even if everything is similar, you'll still have diversity among the similarity. Methodologically, it would be important to define how we tackle this question: The term "Conceptual

Julius Koller, Universal Futurological Question Mark (UFO), 1978.

art," which is kind of universal whether we like it or not, is about sameness in the end, isn't it?

CH: A boring logical point: unless your definition of similarity is sufficiently stringent, your identification of significant differences is meaningless.

BG: We can look at it theologically. Looking for similarities, as it was done in the Middle Ages, is theological. I'll attempt to revive the Middle Ages with the same moves, as if reflecting on the divine, but in this case, it is reflection on the artistic. Difference, diversity, identity—these latter terms are only contemporary versions or pseudonyms of modernist authenticity. The theological perspective of the Middle Ages offers the possibility of transcending that, reflecting on it, and ultimately renouncing it. For me, seeking similarities is in itself a conceptual move, one which removes us from these naturalistic attitudes and directs us towards a more general reflection and capacity to renounce our own ingrained cultural context. At least I experienced this in the 1960s and 1970s, because it was where we started from. Other people did as well. Why should we react negatively to this gesture and go back to this naturalistic or pseudo-naturalistic discourse of identities, cultural context, and determination? It's very reactionary.

CH: When you talk of modernist authenticity, do you feel that there is a specific version of authenticity that is modernist, or are you conflating the two terms: "modernism" and "authenticity"? That's to say, is there a kind of authenticity claim which is not modernist?

BG: No, I don't think so. But I think there are some parallels and similarities. There is the romantic authenticity, for example.

CH: That's my point. There have always been claims to authenticity.

BG: I don't think I'm conflating the two terms. It really starts with a kind of naturalism of a certain kind of Enlightenment. It starts with Kant.

CH: Giorgio Vasari?

BG: Vasari is much more formalistic. The idea that one can be a genius, and that nature is working through the artist, producing something in a spectacular and unconscious manner, starts in the late eighteenth century and continues today. Now it has different names, like "cultural context," "identity," "difference," and "diversity," but it's the same Kantian idea of nature or culture, which

has to do with race or nationality working in and through you. On the other hand, there is a different logical approach, much more mathematical and linguistic, which states that these things are only functions of language and cultural conventions, thus generally accessible, and have no mystery. If so, then we can speak about it in a manner that doesn't require this rhetoric of uniqueness, authenticity, identity, and so on. I would prefer it. The other kind of language, directly or indirectly, suggests some kind of naturalism and I don't like it. I believe it's not Conceptual art.

CH: What are the practical consequences of your suggestion?

BG: The consequences would be not speaking of certain artistic practices in the East and West is if they were more than they are. This means disregarding or suppressing the tendency to root them in something mysterious like, for example, Eastern European identity or Russian identity or even British identity.

CH: But on what basis do you then decide which practices to look at and which not? Or do you just look at everything?

BG: No, we are finite human beings so we can't look at everything. We just look at what we are interested in, I would say. We are a small group of people, interested in more or less the same phenomena. We cannot encompass the whole world, unfortunately, so the restriction is our objective capability. Given that we are reasonable human beings, finite in our abilities, we can just decide what is relevant.

ZB: I think we've all agreed on the term "Conceptual art," which is nevertheless problematic. My impression was that we *can* use the term, regardless of what we're going to do with it. Is that agreed?

VH: We should define it as a kind of shelter for different practices.

CH: The problem is, although we need it as a shelter, if it means absolutely anything, that won't do either.

ZB: To avoid this—a thousand things under the same umbrella term—we should have some points and agree on a basic definition. I think we've agreed at least about the deconstruction of modernism. Next, we've discussed the question of subversion, which I would put in dialogue with institutional critique in the West. The critique of ideology or the question of the subversiveness of Conceptual art would be something that could be analogous to institutional critique.

VH: I think these subjective systems are also interesting: in Polish, for instance, there is the term "system of subjective objectivity." There wasn't a general movement, only fragmented subjective critiques, a plural of subjective positions, like we are considering here.

CH: It seems to me that we've hit a potential problem. If we identify Conceptual art as a critique of authenticist subjectivism, then we've opened it to the dangerous territory where it can mean anything. I, on the other hand, understand Conceptual art as involving a kind of critique of subjectivity, crucially one which is partly based on the sense that art is language-dependant, therefore there is no authenticity in the idea of a pre-linguistic subjective expression.

ZB: However, it's crucial to start out with some points beyond any doubt which really describe Conceptual art. If we can aim at three or four, other questions and problems can come later. In general, since we have a universal term—"Conceptual art"—I think we have to have some generally valid definitions, even if only few. Deconstruction of modernism is valid in the West, in Latin America, and in Eastern Europe. And the critique of institutions can also be the critique of institution-ideology-systems, something political.

PP: This is also the critique of painting, the picture. I believe it was crucial for the Conceptual art experience in Central Europe that painting as such—the oil and the easel—was perceived as something to be critical of, because it was connected with the culture of the establishment. As such, the critique of institutions is not only the critique of real institutions, like museums and galleries within a system—in some countries, as in Hungary, there were no independent galleries at all. This of course meant that the easel painting was a symbol of this system. In this sense, it is also important, I think.

CH: As I understand it, the easel painting becomes partly a symbol of a certain kind of ownership of experience, as it were, a certain kind of privacy. So in a way, the critique of easel painting is really the critique of the authentic beholder.

ZB: I think the deconstruction of modernism could also be about the easel painting and all these issues.

CH: I seems to me Piotr is introducing a slight difference. Modernism is not always and everywhere identified with the beholder. The beholder is the paradigm spectator of the painting. It is a point which I associate specifically with Conceptual art, the critique of the beholder, the critique of the observer. It may be implied by the deconstruction of modernism, but it's not quite the same. Modernism means so many different things.

VH: We should perhaps define this modernism more precisely. Not modernism as such, but as the more object-based, formal modernist movement. This kind of

Helena Almeida, Inhabited Painting, 1975. Copyright of the artist. Courtesy: Serralves Foundation Collection.

deconstruction didn't define Conceptual art in relation to modernism itself, because deconstruction is in modernist history. It should be more precisely the deconstruction of object-based or formal modernistic movements.

PP: It is very hard to construct definitions, and I'm not sure we really need them. Modernism was recognized as something opposing socialist realism. When it appeared in the beginning of the 1960s in Poland, let's say—but also in Czechoslovakia at the end of the 1950s—modernism was perceived as the opposite of socialist realism. It was connected, of course, with easel painting, abstract painting, and so on. The next wave of artists in some countries, like Czechoslovakia, Poland, or later Romania, kept the modernist value system even when they began to critique some of the elements of modernism, such as easel painting.

ZB: If we consider the deconstruction of modernism a topic, we can present these issues and their complexity through the exhibition, and problematize them.When I started to think about the possible comparisons, I found that this could be a productive approach.

PP: Lets take, for example, the relationship between modernist painting, on the one hand, and conceptual activities, on the other. The painting *More* (The Sea) by Koller in Czechoslovakia contains text which gives it a multi-dimensional meaning. This shows the relationship between the easel painting as done by the modernists and other conceptual activities. Were you thinking of something like this?

ZB: Yes, although Art & Language is perhaps the most typical example of the kind of deconstruction of modernism through the artwork itself.

BS: Is it easier to frame it as the dematerialization of the art object, instead of the deconstruction of modernism? In our countries it's not only modernism but all variety of art, of figurative art, and so on.

ZB: For me, modernism means artwork which is based on the question of media, as opposed to Conceptual art, which deconstructed this. And another issue, which Boris mentioned, was its reaction to the kind of modernism which he framed as artists' ideas of utopia. To this point, modernist Yugoslavian abstract painters, for example, behaved as though they were dealing with universal truths through the medium and didn't care about the concrete context. In terms of artwork, I think the question of media, for me at least, is very important. But maybe its not necessary to define it just yet.

VH: We should take into consideration that it's not deconstruction, nor a negative or positive relation, but a kind of burden of different feelings, sometimes even lyrical feelings, towards modernism. A complicated relationship, although very basic for conceptualism in the beginning.

CF: I like to think in terms of strategies that artists were using in their operations to get in touch with the ideas of object or process. For instance, we talked about the political context and how information circulated. In fact, how were ideas and proposals communicated to other artists and how did this generate a kind of energy that could flow beyond these statements? The term implies media and multimedia, ways of doing things—dematerialization is a very charged idea within the history of Conceptual art and a certain moment of this recent history. Mail art was one such strategy; its history is specific to its moment. Mail art today doesn't really mean anything.

CH: This raises two points. A crucial one is the collapse of the frontiers between art and theory. The other is not dematerialization, but the critique of the unique object. So instead of art being defined in terms of the uniqueness of a signed, handmade object, you get artists who start thinking more in terms of the way a literary or musical work might be defined. For instance: What is the authentic form of a symphony? Is it the single performance, the score, and so on? Those questions get injected into the practice of art. So the whole idea that your concept of art resides in the one object in front of you—that's gone.

PP: I want to define dematerialization. It's an important factor, particularly for Eastern European art practice. Given that there was very little communication at that time, dematerialization helped to avoid many institutional traps set by the system. Dematerialization meant not only a critique of the object; it also made communication much easier. Artists were allowed to exchange art production

because it was just a piece of paper or an idea written down. It allowed them to exhibit very temporary exhibitions in private studios. So dematerialization, in my opinion, has a political dimension too, particularly in these terms and on an international level. We spoke last night of *The Net*, the manifesto made by Kozłowski and Kostolowski. The main motivation behind *The Net* was just to exchange ideas between artists, not from the West and the East, but among Eastern European countries. And it worked as such, because it was easy to send things from, say, Poznan to Budapest, from Kozłowski to Beke, to Tót, to Lakner, or Stembera. So dematerialization meant something like this too, particularly in Eastern Europe.

CF: I agree. At that time dematerialization was a kind of departure towards exchanging things, but things themselves did not dematerialize at all. That's why we can look at this history, it's here. This term applied in the 1970s, but it doesn't apply today. We have all the photos, books, and so on. These were, in fact, materialized.

PP: I remember On Kawara writing on telegrams "I'm still alive" and sending them all over the world. Dematerialization was very welcomed by the artists, because it made communication easier. It was important because communists wanted to silence communication, to control it, particularly international communication. So if it was easier to transport, it worked better. Having these pieces in an accesible substance, dematerialized, made them easier to smuggle across borders. Because of this, I would keep dematerialization a key factor in order to define Conceptual art in Eastern Europe.

I remember at the end of the 1960s and the beginning of the 1970s, dematerialization was very welcome. It was really something important for those artists in order to communicate with each other.

CH: One point about it was that it was such a graspable concept. It's significant that the essay "The Dematerialization of Art" was published in February 1968 in *Art International*, and the idea spread like wildfire. What I don't like about it is that it licenses the idea of art as a kind of avant-gardism, which, it seems to me, was a red herring in Conceptual art, whereas what was important was a move away, not from the idea of objects or materials as such, but the investment in the orthographic—the technical term is "the allographic"—towards those forms of art not invested in the single authentic touch, such as writing, music and so on. Art was moving in that direction, which to me is not dematerialization, but something slightly different. That's why I don't like the notion of dematerialization, but it was a very powerful at the time.

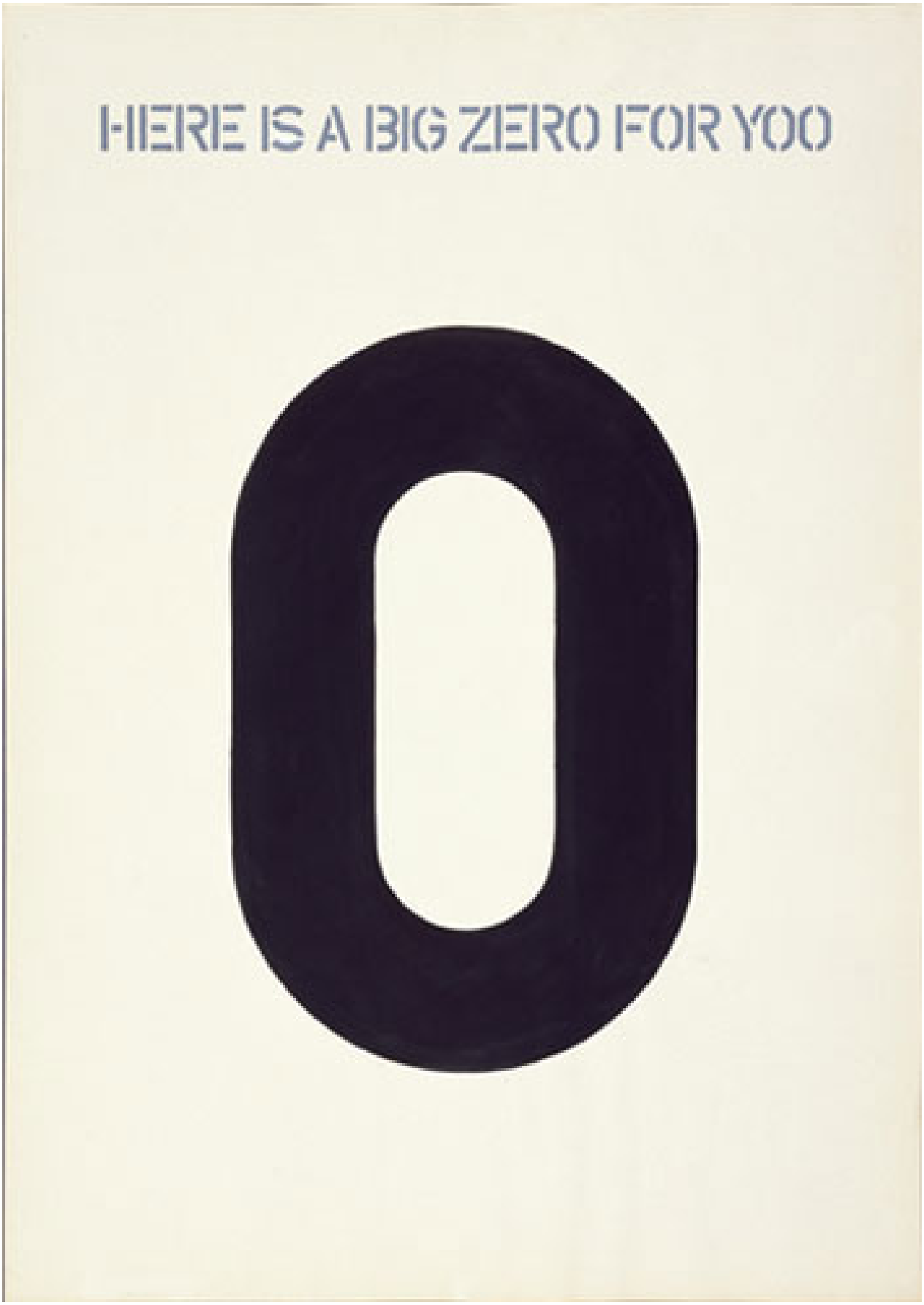
CF: It was the emphasis on communication.

BG: I also dislike the term "dematerialization" for a very clear philosophical reason: all these texts and discussions are about language, and language is material. If you look at the philosophy of the 1960s and the 1970s, the most powerful idea of linguistics from de Saussure to Derrida, if we take the continental ones, or Wittgenstein, if we consider the Anglo-Saxon tradition, is the materiality of language itself, of the linguistic sign. Language is material. I would even argue that it is precisely this recognition of the materiality of language that made way for artists to use it as material for their practice. At least my friends used language, for the first time, as they understood that language is also an object, that it is material.

PP: In that sense, yes, but I'm talking about something different. Dematerialization in the sense of avoiding the object as such. I remember, for instance, some communication strategies of Robert Rehfeldt from the German Democratic Republic. These were only possible because he used postcards, papers, and organized an exhibition in Warsaw in the 1970s, exclusively with these materials.

CH: What's complicated here, and the reason we need a term like "revision" instead of "deconstruction," is the reaction, at least in the West, against a very specific Americanized concept of modernism and autonomy, specifically associated with Clement Greenberg but also his influence, a particular reading of Clement Greenberg and the art he supported. You get other writers and artists looking back at the bits of modernist history that an Americanized version of modernism and autonomy tended to exclude, like Surrealism, Dada, Constructivism, and so forth. They're brought back into the modernist church, and when that happens Duchamp is put back in place again, as is Malevich, Dada, and so on. The central notion of painting and sculpture tends to collapse anyway, because it turns out it wasn't so central in the first place. Another factor we haven't talked about, which seems crucial, is how the form of modernist theory is predicated very powerfully on the necessity of abstract art. Abstract art is absolutely central to that autonomized sense of modernism. What happens in the late 1950s and early 1960s is that abstract art runs out of steam. It turns out it is not going to go on forever. If everybody's painting a black canvas, where can abstraction go from there? You don't have to deconstruct or critique it. It's just giving way underneath it. The mainstream stops developing there. It happened for different reasons in different places.

BG: The American construction of modernism is so narrow that it just dissolves itself. One doesn't need to deconstruct it at all.



Endre Tót, TOTalZEROS, 1971-1977. Tempera on cardboard. Photo: Dejan Habicht. Copyright: Museum of Modern Art, Ljubljana.

Collective Actions Group, Tent. Performance, Moscow region, Savyolovskaya railway line, Depot station, October, 2nd, 1976.

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To be continued in *Conceptual Art and Eastern Europe, Part III*

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Charles Harrison *(1942—2009), BA Hons (Cantab), MA (Cantab), PhD (London) was a prominent UK art historian who taught Art History for many years and was Emeritus Professor of History and Theory of Art at the Open University. In addition to being an academic and art critic he was also a curator and a member of the Art & Language Group. He curated the seminal exhibition "When Attitudes Become Form at the ICA" in 1969. And as a member of Art & Language, community of artists and critics who were its producers and users, he edited their journal Art-Language.*

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Ana Teixeira Pinto

In Memory of Aaron Swartz

Aaron Swartz killed himself on Friday, January 11 in New York City. He was twenty-six years old. In his family's official statement, they say:

> Aaron's death is not simply a personal tragedy. It is the product of a criminal justice system rife with intimidation and prosecutorial overreach. Decisions made by officials in the Massachusetts US Attorney's office and at MIT contributed to his death. The US Attorney's office pursued an exceptionally harsh array of charges, carrying potentially over 30 years in prison, to punish an alleged crime that had no victims. Meanwhile, unlike JSTOR, MIT refused to stand up for Aaron and its own community's most cherished principles.

Please don't look for comfort in the disingenuous argument that Swartz was already battling depression since 2007. Depression is as much a trigger of stress and anxiety as it is itself triggered by negative experiences, by stress and anxiety. I can imagine that being hounded by the US Justice Department and haunted by the prospect of incarceration for life is an ample source of both.

But I won't pretend that I knew much about Swartz. In fact I'd never heard that he was an early RSS software developer nor that he was one the creators of the social news site Reddit. Like many others, I first became aware of Swartz's activities when, in July 2011, he was arrested for using his Harvard subscription to download a vast array of academic articles—4.8 million we are told—from the JSTOR database, allegedly with the intention of making them publicly available.

JSTOR is a digital archive comprising over one thousand academic journals, and like most other academic databases, it is a pay-per-access provider. Its annual subscription fees can reach $50,000 while the download of a single article ranges between $19 and $39. But price is not the only restriction to access. JSTOR only accepts subscriptions from institutions. This means that any independent scholar or researcher without an institutional affiliation—or with a precarious or irregular one, which is increasingly common—are automatically denied access.

Academic paywalls are totally unjustifiable because neither the authors nor the reviewers are paid: the material published by these databases was made with the support of public research and education funding. Though most people believe that students and faculty have access to these types of databases through their own university departments, this is often not the case: many universities can't afford the subscription costs, or, due to petty academic policies, limit access within their own university to specific research groups and institutes. As a PhD student in the cultural studies department at Humboldt

University in Berlin, I was never granted access.

Needless to say, the whole edifice of academic hierarchy is based on the restriction of access to knowledge. JSTOR is a rent extraction mechanism that perpetuates fundamental inequalities—with researchers and faculty from powerful institutions being granted yet another competitive edge over those who were less fortunate, less wealthy, or simply born in the wrong place. But this is still an understatement. Paywalls constitute a denial of access to the knowledge published by US colleges and universities to the public at large. Their function is to engineer scarcity and exclusion, creating extra incentives for students to fund their education by incurring heavy debts within the Anglo-American educational and financial complex—while simultaneously exempting this complex from public scrutiny.

It is clear why Aaron Swartz targeted JSTOR, but it is harder to understand why he was himself targeted by US Attorney Carmen Ortiz's office in Boston, specifically by her lead prosecutor Steve Heymann, and charged with felonies carrying one million dollars in fines and up to 35 years in prison—Swartz was technically an authorized JSTOR user who never shared the content he downloaded.

It is plausible that the federal prosecutor's vicious distortion of justice was politically motivated, whether due to Swartz's connection with Demand Progress (which was instrumental in the defeat of SOPA and PIPA) or simply because the Department of Justice felt they needed a sacrificial lamb, and found in Swartz the civilian equivalent of Bradley Manning. Either way, a Twitter response summed the situation up by quoting Edward Gibbon: "whenever the offense inspires less horror than the punishment, the rigor of penal law is obliged to give way to the common feelings of mankind."

While paywalls are one of the most glaring blind spots of academia—with the notable exception of the #pdftribute campaign on Twitter to share academic papers—the community's conspicuous silence regarding Swartz's case has been, up to his death, deafening. According to the family, MIT—unlike JSTOR, which never pressed charges—repeatedly refused to consider any settlement.

Make no mistake, the fight over freedom of information and internet regulation is the defining political struggle of our time, and failing to choose sides may prove fatal to the future of both higher education and all other public services. At stake is the definition of what constitutes the political and what is subject to public debate, of what is withdrawn from scrutiny under the cloak of property rights or the laws of economy.

Quinn Nortaon, Aaron Swartz, date unknown. Creative Commons Attribution (2.0).

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For more info see the *Guardian* and *Aljazeera* articles.

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