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Editorial

When Hurricane Sandy tore through the Eastern US on the eve of the presidential elections, it seemed that a certain fatigue had found a strange mirror image in the libidinal force of completely absurd weather patterns, that a tired resignation to a lack of options in the political sphere had actually mutated into an apocalyptic revolution in the atmosphere. It was as if a negative omen had come with the prospect that the next global insurgency could arrive by way of non-human forces altogether—totally external to markets, but also to people.

In this issue, we return to an essay by Jodi Dean from 2009, before the Arab Spring and the Occupy movement, in which the political theorist warns against the deep pitfalls of taking democracy for granted as the absolute horizon of leftist political thought. For Franco "Bifo" Berardi in this issue, it is through the deployment of language as poetry that we can resist capture. Bifo has often traced the current sense of doom back further, to a death of the future that accompanied the economic stagnation of the 1970s. For Bifo, crucially, the future in the mercantile West was always pegged to economic growth and the promise of increasing wealth. But even in the case of the state-controlled economies in the East whose future prosperity was pegged to popular social and economic ideology, the future arrives as a kind of absolute currency. It is poetry that reactivates another sensation of time in the singular vibration of the voice.

Here we can also look to the resilience and sublime integrity of the works of Michael Asher (1943–2012), who passed away in October. In this issue, Michael Baers remembers Asher as his mentor at CalArts and through a final, unfinished work on the adaptive re-use of industrial factories by contemporary art institutions. Also in this issue, Mark Beasley reflects on Mike Kelly's music projects as a search to recapture a popular voice offensive to the piety of tradition, but also to the formatting of the popular. And Jalal Toufic looks back to find a form of life that surpasses the terms of death in the story of Christ: "What is impossible for Jesus Christ as the life? Is it to "heal the sick" and "raise the dead" (Matthew 10:8)? No, such actions are possible for a God who is the life; therefore they are not miracles for him. What is impossible for Jesus Christ, the life, is to die … "

Also, and this is a message from the future in December 2013: e-flux journal *no. 39 now contains an essay by Cédric Vincent that should have been published in this issue, but was only conceived and written some months later. It focuses on an announcement sent on November 6, 2012 for one, or two, biennials in Benin and that showed how information spins the globalized art world in many directions simultaneously, for better or for worse.*

—Julieta Aranda, Brian Kuan Wood, Anton Vidokle

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Franco “Bifo” Berardi

Emancipation of the Sign: Poetry and Finance During the Twentieth Century

Money and language have something in common: they are nothing and yet they move everything. They are nothing but symbols, conventions, *flatus vocis*, but they have the power to persuade human beings to act, to work, and to transform physical things:

> Money makes things happen. It is the source of action in the world and perhaps the only power we invest in. Perhaps in every other respect, in every other value, bankruptcy has been declared, giving money the power of some sacred deity, demanding to be recognized. Economics no longer persuades money to behave. Numbers cannot make the beast lie down and be quiet or sit up and do tricks. Thus, as we suspected all along, economics falsely imitates science. At best, economics is a neurosis of money, a symptom contrived to hold the beast in abeyance … Thus economics shares the language of psychopathology, inflation, depression, lows and heights, slumps and peaks, investments and losses, and economy remains caught in manipulations of acting stimulated or depressed, drawing attention to itself, egotistically unaware of its own soul. Economists, brokers, accountants, financiers, all assisted by lawyers, are the priests of the cult of money, reciting their prayers to make the power of money work without imagination.[1]

Financial capitalism is based on the autonomization of the dynamics of money, but more deeply, on the autonomization of value production from the physical interaction of things.

The passage from the industrial abstraction of work to the digital abstraction of world implies an immaterialization of the labor process.

Jean Baudrillard proposed a general semiology of simulation based on the premise of the end of referentiality, in the economic as well as the linguistic field. In *Le miroir de la production* (1973), Baudrillard writes: “In this sense need, use value and the referent ‘do not exist.’ They are only concepts produced and projected into a generic dimension by the development of the very system of exchange value.”[2]

The process of the autonomization of money is a particular aspect of this general trend, but it also has a long history, according to Marc Shell in *Money, Language, and Thought:*

> Between the electrum money of ancient Lydia and the electric money of contemporary America there occurred a historically momentous change. The exchange value of the earliest coins derived wholly

> from the material substance (electrum) of the ingots of which the coins were made and not from the inscriptions stamped into these ingots. The eventual development of coins whose politically authorized inscriptions were inadequate to the weights and purities of the ingots into which the inscriptions were stamped precipitated awareness about the relationship between face value (intellectual currency) and substantial value (material currency). This difference between inscription and thing grew greater with the introduction of paper moneys. Paper, the material substance on which the inscriptions were printed, was supposed to make no difference in exchange, and metal or electrum, the material substance to which the inscriptions referred, was connected with those inscriptions in increasingly abstract ways. With the advent of electronic fund-transfers the link between inscription and substance was broken. The matter of electric money does not matter.[3]

The dephysicalization of money is part of the general process of abstraction, which is the all-encompassing tendency of capitalism. Marx's theory of value is based on the concept of abstract work: because it is the source and the measure of value, work has to sever its relation to the concrete usefulness of its activity and product. From the point of view of valorization, concrete usefulness does not matter. In a similar vein, Baudrillard speaks of the relation between signification and language. The abstraction process at the core of the capitalist capture (subsumption) of work implies abstraction from the need for the concreteness of products: the referent is erased.

> The rational, referential, historical and functional machines of consciousness correspond to industrial machines. The aleatory, nonreferential, transferential, indeterminate and floating machines of the unconscious respond to the aleatory machines of the code … The systemic strategy is merely to invoke a number of floating values in this hyperreality. This is as true of the unconscious as it is of money and theories. Value rules according to the indiscernible order of generation by means of models, according to the infinite chains of simulation.[4]

The crucial point of Baudrillard's critique is the end of referentiality and the (in)determination of value. In the sphere of the market, things are not considered from the point of view of their concrete usefulness, but from that of their exchangeability. Similarly, in the sphere of communication, language is traded and valued according to how it *performs*. Effectiveness, not truth value, is the rule of language in the sphere of communication.

Pragmatics, not hermeneutics, is the methodology for understanding social communication, particularly in the age of new media.

Retracing the process of dereferentialization in both semiotics and economics, Baudrillard speaks of the emancipation of the sign:

> A revolution has put an end to this classical economics of value, a revolution of value itself, which carries value beyond its commodity form into its radical form. This revolution consists in the dislocation of the two aspects of the law of value, which were thought to be coherent and eternally bound as if by a natural law. Referential value is annihilated, giving the structural play of value the upper hand. The structural dimension becomes autonomous by excluding the referential dimension, and is instituted upon the death of reference … from now on signs are exchanged against each other rather than against the real (it is not that they just happen to be exchanged against each other, they do so on condition that they are no longer exchanged against the real). The emancipation of the sign.[5]

The emancipation of the sign from its referential function may be seen as the general trend of late modernity, the prevailing tendency in literature and art as well as in science and politics.

Symbolism opened a new space for poetic praxis, starting from the emancipation of the word from its referential task.

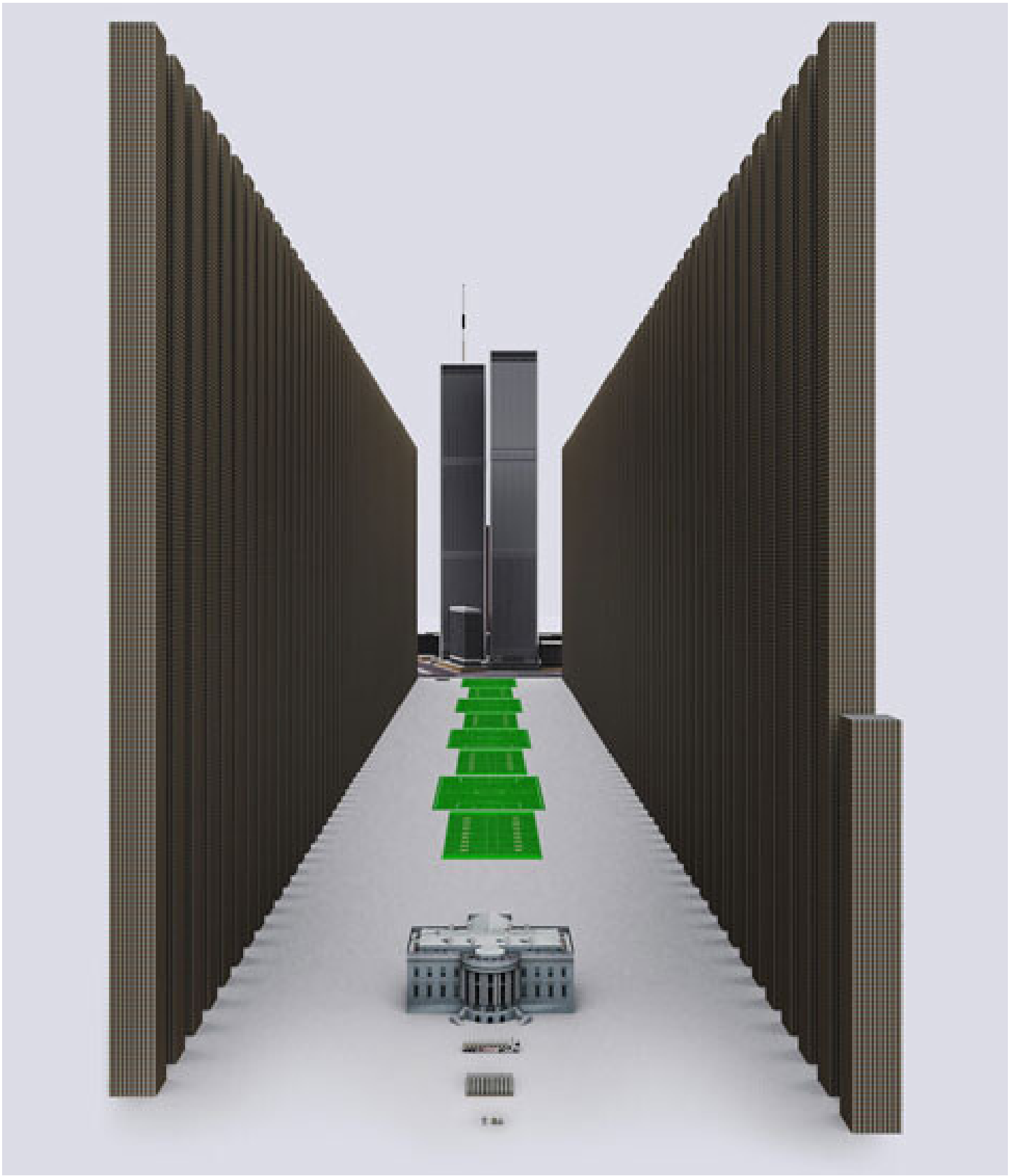
The emancipation of money—the financial sign—from the industrial production of things follows the same semiotic procedure, from referential to non-referential signification.

But the analogy between economy and language should not mislead us: although money and language have something in common, their destinies do not coincide, as language exceeds economic exchange. Poetry is the language of non-exchangeability, the return of infinite hermeneutics, and the return of the sensuous body of language.

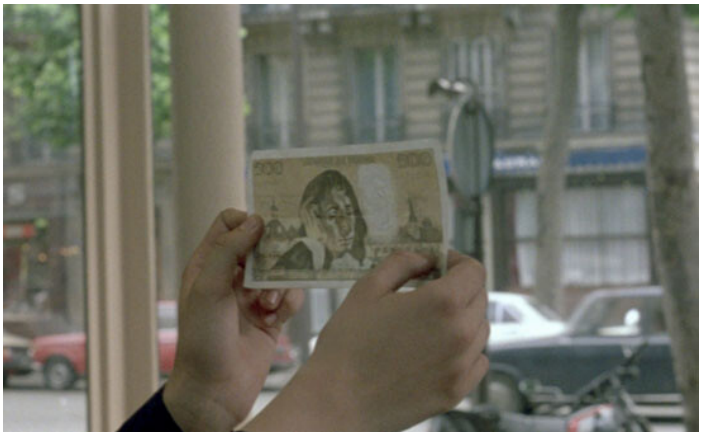
I'm talking of poetry here as an excess of language, as a hidden resource which enables us to shift from one paradigm to another.

Connection and Sensibility in a Place We Do Not Know

Sensibility is the ability to understand what cannot be verbalized, and it has been a victim of the precarization



Visualization of the top nine biggest banks' derivative exposure in crates of $100 dollar bills. These are represented in the image as stacks to the left and right of the White House and WTC. See →



Film still from Robert Bresson's movie L'Argent, 1983.

and fractalization of time. In order to reactivate sensibility, we must gather together art, therapy, and political action.

In the last century, the century that trusted the future, art was essentially involved in the business of acceleration. Futurism defined the relation between art, the social mind, and social life. The cult of energy marked the artistic zeitgeist, up to the saturation of collective perception and the paralysis of empathy. Futurist rhythm was the rhythm of info-acceleration, of violence and war.

Now we need *retournels* that disentangle singular existence from the social game of competition and productivity: *retournels* of psychic and sensitive autonomization, *retournels* of the singularization and sensibilization of breathing, unchained from the congested pace of the immaterial assembly line of semiocapitalist production.

Once upon a time, pleasure was repressed by power. Now it is advertised and promised, and simultaneously postponed and deceived. This is the pornographic feature of semioproduction in the sphere of the market.

The eye has taken the central place of human sensory life, but this ocular domination is a domination of merchandise, of promises that are never fulfilled and always postponed. In the current conditions of capitalist competition, acceleration is the trigger for panic, and panic is the premise of depression. Singularity is forgotten, erased, and cancelled in the erotic domain of semiocapitalism. The singularity of voice and the singularity of words are subjected to the homogenization of exchange and valorization.

Social communication is submitted to techno-linguistic interfaces. Therefore, in order to exchange meaning in the sphere of connectivity, conscious organisms have to adapt to the digital environment.

In order to accelerate the circulation of value, meaning is reduced to information, and techno-linguistic devices act as the communicative matrix. The matrix takes the place of the mother in the generation of language.

But language and information do not overlap, and language cannot be resolved into exchangeability. In Saussure's parlance, we may say that the infinity of the *parole* exceeds the recombinant logic of the *langue*, such that language can escape from the matrix and reinvent a social sphere of singular vibrations intermingling and projecting a new space for sharing, producing, and living.

Poetry opens the doors of perception to singularity.

Poetry is language's excess: poetry is what cannot be reduced to information in language, what is not exchangeable, what gives way to a new common ground of understanding, of shared meaning—the creation of a new world.

Poetry is a singular vibration of the voice. This vibration can create resonances, and resonances can produce common space, the place where:

> lovers, who never
> Could achieve fulfillment here, could show
> Their bold lofty figures of heart-swings,
> Their towers of ecstasy.

The following verses from Rilke's "Fifth Elegy" can be read simultaneously as a metaphor for the condition of precarity, and as an annunciation of a place that we don't know, that we have never experienced: a place of the city—a square, a street, an apartment—where lovers, who here (in the kingdom of valorization and exchange) never "could achieve fulfillment," suddenly toss their last ever-hoarded, ever-hidden, unknown to us, eternally valid coins of happiness:

> But tell me, who are these vagrants, these even a little
> more transitory than we, these from the start
> violently wrung (and for whose sake?)
> by a never-appeasable will? But it wrings them,
> bends them, slings them and swings them,
> throws them and catches them; as if from an oily,
> more slippery air they come down
> on the carpet worn thinner by their eternal leaping,
> this carpet lost in the universe.
> Stuck there like a plaster, as if the sky
> Of the suburb had hurt the earth.[6]

There is no secret meaning in these words, but we can read in them a description of the frail architectures of

collective happiness: "pyramids that long since, where there was no standing-ground, were tremblingly propped together."[7]

This place we don't know is the place we are looking for, in a social environment that has been impoverished by social precariousness, in a landscape that has been desertified. It is the place that will be able to warm the sensible sphere that has been deprived of the joy of singularity. It is the place of occupation, where movements are gathering: Tahrir Square in Cairo, Puerta del Sol in Madrid, and Zuccotti Park in New York City.

We call poetry the semiotic concatenation that exceeds the sphere of exchange and the codified correspondence of the signifier and signified; it creates new pathways of signification, and opens the way to a reactivation of the relation between sensibility and time, as sensibility is the faculty that makes possible the singularity of the enunciation.

Viktor Shklovsky, the Russian formalist theorist, says that the specificity of literary language lies in its ability to treat words according to an unrepeatable singular procedure. He calls this procedure *priem* in Russian. It is an artificial treatment of verbal matter generating effects of meaning never seen and codified before. This poetical procedure is a form of estrangement (*ostranenie* in Russian) that carries the word far away from its common use.

"Art is not chaos," say Deleuze and Guattari in *What is Philosophy?* It is rather "a composition of chaos: chaosmos."[8] The relation between the organism and the environment is disturbed by the acceleration of info-stimuli in the infosphere, by semiotic inflation, and by the saturation of attention and the conscious sensitive sphere of subjectivity. Art is the recording and detecting of this dissonance—and the simultaneously creation of the aesthetic conditions for the perception and expression of new modes of becoming.

Relative to schizoanalysis, art acts in two ways: it diagnoses the infospheric pollution of the psychosphere, but it also provides treatment to the disturbed organism. The *retournel* is the sensitive niche where we can create a cosmos that elaborates chaos.

Social movements can be described as a form of *retournel*: movements are the *retournel* of singularization, as they act to create spheres of singularity on the aesthetic and existential levels. In the process of singularization that the movement makes possible, production, need, and consumption can be semiotized again, according to a new system of world expectations.

Changing the order of expectations is one of the main social transformations that a movement can produce: this change implies a cultural transformation but also a change in sensitivity, in the opening of the organism to the world and to others.

Insurrection is a *retournel* helping to withdraw the psychic energies of society from the standardized rhythm of compulsory competition-consumerism and to create an autonomous collective sphere. Poetry is the language of the movement as it tries to deploy a new *retournel*.

Bowl with Arabic Inscription, Samanid period (819–1005), 10th century. Iran, Nishapur. Earthenware; white slip with black-slip decoration under transparent glaze. Collection of the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York.

The Limits of the World

In the chapter of *Chaosmosis* on the aesthetic paradigm, Guattari speaks of the new modes of submission and standardization that subjectivity undergoes—modes produced by network technologies and neoliberal globalization. Simultaneously, he tries to find new pathways of autonomous subjectivation.

Regarding the first side of the problem, he writes:

> Subjectivity is standardized through a communication which evacuates as much as possible trans-semiotic and amodal enunciative compositions. Thus it slips towards the progressive effacement of polysemy, prosody, gesture, mimicry and posture, to the profit of a language rigorously subjected to scriptural machines and their mass media avatars. In its extreme contemporary forms it amounts to an exchange of information tokens calculable as bits and reproducible on computers ... In this type of deterritorialized assemblage, the capitalist Signifier, as simulacrum of the imaginary of power, has the job of overcoding all

> the other Universes of value.[9]

Digital technology cancels the singular enunciative composition of polysemy, gesture, and voice, and tends to produce a language that is subjected to linguistic machinery. While analyzing the standardization of language, Guattari simultaneously looks for a line of escape from informational submission (*assujettissement*):

> An initial chaosmic folding consists in making the powers of chaos co-exist with those of the highest complexity. It is by a continuous coming-and-going at an infinite speed that the multiplicities of entities differentiate into ontologically heterogeneous complexions and become chaotized in abolishing their figural diversity and by homogenizing themselves within the same being-non-being. In a way, they never stop diving into an umbilical chaotic zone where they lose their extrinsic references and coordinates, but from where they can re-emerge invested with new charges of complexity. It is during this chaosmic folding that an interface is installed—an interface between the sensible finitude of existential Territories and the trans-sensible infinitude of the Universes of reference bound to them. Thus one oscillates, on one hand, between a finite world of reduced speed, where limits always loom up behind limits, constraints behind constraints, systems of coordinates behind other systems of coordinates, without ever arriving at the ultimate tangent of a being-matter which recedes everywhere and, on the other hand, Universes of infinite speed where being can't be denied anymore, where it gives itself in its intrinsic differences, in its heterogenetic qualities. The machine, every species of machine, is always at the junction of the finite and infinite, at this point of negotiation between complexity and chaos.[10]

Guattari here questions the relation between the finite and the infinite in the sphere of language. He maps the territory of the informational rhizome that was not yet completely discovered when *Chaosmosis* was written. The ambiguity of the info-rhizomatic territory is crystal clear: info-technology standardizes subjectivity and language, inscribing techno-linguistic interfaces that automatize enunciation.

We are tracing here the dynamic of a disaster, the disaster that capitalism is inserting into hypermodern subjectivity, the disaster of acceleration and panic. But simultaneously, we have to look for a rhythm that may open a further landscape, a landscape beyond panic and the precarious affects of loneliness and despair.

In the chapter on the aesthetic paradigm in *Chaosmosis*, Guattari rethinks the question of singularity in terms of sensitive finitude and the possible infinity of language.

The conscious and sensitive organism, living individuality and walking towards extinction, is finite. But the creation of possible universes of meaning is infinite. Desire is the field of this tendency of the finite towards a becoming-infinite:

> To produce new infinities from a submersion in sensible finitude, infinities not only charged with virtuality but with potentialities actualisable in given situations, circumventing or dissociating oneself from the Universals itemized by traditional arts, philosophy, and psychoanalysis ... a new love of the unknown ...[11]

The finitude of the conscious and sensitive organism is the place where we imagine projections of infinity, which are not only virtual but also a potentiality of life, and which can be actualized in situations.

We are on the threshold of a deterritorialized and rhizomatic world, realizing the anti-oedipal, schizoform dream. However, this dream is becoming true in the form a global nightmare of financial derealization. On this threshold, we have to imagine a politics and an ethics of singularity, breaking our ties with expectations of infinite growth, infinite consumption, and infinite expansion of the self.

In the preface to his *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, Wittgenstein writes: “In order to draw a limit to thinking we should have to be able to think both sides of this limit (we should therefore have to be able to think what cannot be thought).”[12]

And he also writes:

> The limits of my language mean the limits of my world. Logic pervades the world: the limits of the world are also its limits. So we cannot say in logic, “The world has this in it, and this, but not that.” For that would appear to presuppose that we were excluding certain possibilities, and this cannot be the case, since it would require that logic should go beyond the limits of the world; for only in that way could it view those limits from the other side as well. We cannot think what we cannot think; so what we cannot think we cannot say either.[13]

And finally, he writes: “The subject does not belong to the world: rather, it is a limit of the world.”

When Wittgenstein says that the limits of language are the limits of the world, this should be read in two ways. First, he is saying that what we cannot say we cannot do, we cannot experience, we cannot live, because only in the sphere of language can we interact with the reality of Being. But he is also saying that because the world is what resides within the limits of our language, what therefore lies beyond the limits of language will only be experienced once our language is able to elaborate the sphere of Being that lies beyond the present limit.

In fact, Wittgenstein writes: "The subject does not belong to the world, rather it is a limit of the world."[14] The potency and extension of language depends on the consistency of the subject, on its vision, its situation. And the extension of my world depends on the potency of my language.

Guattari calls the process of going beyond the limits of the world "resemiotization"—the redefinition of the semiotic limit, which is simultaneously the limit of what can be experienced. Scientists call this effect of autopoietic morphogenesis "emergence": a new form emerges and takes shape when logical linguistic conditions make it possible to see and name it. Let's try to understand our present situation from this point of view.

Digital financial capitalism has created a closed reality, which cannot be overcome using the techniques of politics—of conscious organized voluntary action and government. Only an act of language can allow us to see and create a new human condition, where we now see only barbarianism and violence. Only an act of language that escapes the technical automatisms of financial capitalism will enable the emergence of a new form of life. This form of life will be the social and pulsional body of the general intellect, a body which is suppressed by the present conditions of financial dictatorship.

Only the reactivation of the body of the general intellect—the organic, existential, and historical finitude that embodies the potency of the general intellect—will allow us to imagine new infinities.

At the intersection of the finite and infinite, the point of negotiation between complexity and chaos, it will be possible to untangle a degree of complexity greater than the one financial capitalism manages and elaborates.

Language has an infinite potency, but the exercise of language happens in finite conditions of history and existence. Thanks to the establishment of a limit, the world comes into existence as a world of language. Grammar, logic, and ethics are based on the establishment of a limit. But infinity remains immeasurable. Poetry is the reopening of the indefinite, the ironic act of exceeding the established meaning of words.

In every sphere of human action, grammar is the establishment of limits that define a space of communication. Today, the economy is the universal grammar traversing the different levels of human activity. Language is defined and limited by its economic exchangeability. This reduces language to information, incorporates techno-linguistic automatisms into the social circulation of language.

Nevertheless, while social communication is a limited process, language is boundless: its potentiality is not restricted to the limits of the signified. Poetry is language's excess, the signifier disentangled from the limits of the signified.

Irony, the ethical form of the excessive power of language, is the infinite game words play to create, disrupt, and shuffle meaning. A social movement, at the end of the day, should use irony as semiotic insolvency, as a mechanism to untangle language, behavior, and action from the limits of symbolic debt.

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From "A Place We Do Not Know" in Franco Berardi's new book *The Uprising: On Poetry and Finance*, published by Semiotext(e), 2012.

Franco Berardi, aka "Bifo," founder of the famous "Radio Alice" in Bologna and an important figure of the Italian Autonomia Movement, is a writer, media theorist, and media activist. He currently teaches Social History of the Media at the Accademia di Brera, Milan. His last book titled *After the Future* is published AKpress.

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Marc Shell, *Money, Language, and Thought: Literary and Philosophic Economies from the Medieval to the Modern Era,* (Berkeley, CA: Univ. of California Press, 1982), 1.

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13
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14
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Jodi Dean

Democracy: A Knot of Hope and Despair

As Good as it Gets

A commonplace of media punditry in the twenty-first century concerns the deep divide in American politics. Whether in terms of political parties, red states and blue states, support or opposition to US militarism in Afghanistan and Iraq, or the ongoing culture war between the religious right and the secular left, the United States is depicted as a nation split in its fundamental ethico-political self-understanding.

This depiction is misleading. Each side of the divide appeals to democracy. The administration of George W. Bush presented itself as actively engaged in bringing democracy to the Middle East and as encouraging countries throughout the world to strengthen their democratic institutions. To this extent, it repeated the rhetoric of the twentieth century's two world wars as well as its cold war, positioning itself and its allies as democracies (as if Germany had not been a democracy on the eve of each of the European wars) and its enemies as, well, not democracies (as authoritarians, fascists, communists, terrorists, and, briefly, Islamo-fascists). The left, although seemingly opposed to the Bush administration, also appeals to democracy as that which it wishes to restore, redeem, or reach.

Since the left enabled the ideal of socialism to wither away with the Soviet state, what democracy might mean, or the range of possibilities democracy is meant to encompass, remains unclear, to say the least. The economic and social guarantees fundamental to social democracy and the welfare state don't feature prominently in most left discussions of democracy. More pronounced are themes of participation and deliberation, immanence and inclusion, ideals that are necessary but impossible, perpetually deferred, forever to come.

Why does the left continue to appeal to democracy? Is democracy, as Slavoj Zižek asks, the ultimate horizon of political thought?[1] Is reiterating the ideological message of communicative capitalism the best the left can do in the face of neoliberal hegemony and the collapse of socialism? Is democracy the fall back position for left politics, all that is left of our wounded and diminished political aspirations? Or does the hope its evocation promises mark instead a pervasive left despair? Is this as good as it gets?

Real existing constitutional democracies privilege the wealthy. As they install, extend, and protect neoliberal capitalism, they exclude, exploit, and oppress the poor, all the while promising that everybody wins. The present value of democracy relies on positing crucial determinants of our lives and conditions outside the frame of contestation in a kind of "no-go zone." These suppositions regarding growth, investment, and profit are politically off-limits, so it's no wonder that the wealthy and privileged

Richard Marquis, American Acid Capsule with Cloth Container, 1969-70. Glass and cloth (container by Nirmal Kauer [Barbara Brittell]). Collection of the Metropolitan Museum of Art.

evoke democracy as a political ideal. It can't hurt them. The expansion and intensification of networked communications technologies that was supposed to enhance democratic participation integrates and consolidates communicative capitalism. Nevertheless, the left continues to present our political hopes as aspirations to democracy.

Despite democracy's inability to represent justice in the wake of political submission to a brutalized, financialized, punishing global market, left political and cultural theorists appeal to arrangements that can be filled in, substantialized, by fundamentalisms, nationalisms, populisms, and conservatisms diametrically opposed to social justice and economic equality. Calling for democracy, leftists fail to emphasize the divisions necessary for politics, divisions that should lead us to organize against the interests of corporations and their stockholders, against the values of fundamentalists and individualists, and on behalf of collectivist arrangements designed to redistribute benefits and opportunities more equitably. With this plea, leftists proceed as if democracy was the solution to contemporary political problems rather than symptomatic of them—that is the name of the impasse in which we find ourselves.

To the extent that the left—whether mainstream Democrats, deliberative democrats, radical democratic theorists and activists, or the typing left blogging and publishing in print media—accepts globalized neoliberal capitalism and acquiesces to a political arrangement inadequate to the task of responding to the gross inequality, immiseration, and violence this capitalism generates, it will fail to provide a viable alternative politics. Accordingly, this text explores the limitation of democracy as a contemporary political ideal, demonstrating how this organizational form and polemical concept serves highly particular interests and stands in the way of universalization.[2] It clicks on the links between contemporary theories of deliberative democracy (the most prominent democratic theories today) and the political arrangements of real existing democracy, arrangements that include activists and elected officials. While Hubertus Buchstein and Dirk Jörke present a persuasive account of the disconnect between highly professionalized (and commodified) academic democratic theory and everyday references to and identifications with democracy, I highlight the overlap among these

invocations of democracy, the coincidence between actual and ideal participation that ultimately undermines dynamic, responsive left politics.[3]

Theories of deliberative democracy tend to focus on the justification of democratic principles and practices. More than building models of democratic governance, they provide grounds that support claims for the superiority of democracy over other political arrangements. These grounds, moreover, have an interesting status. They are raised both in academic and popular debate, or, more precisely, *as both academic and popular debate*. Theories of deliberative democracy prioritize not simply claims regarding deliberation but actual practices of deliberation. For democratic theorists, then, there is a *necessary* link between theories and practices, a *necessary* connection to real life. Practices are legitimately democratic not when their outcomes can be imagined as the result of deliberation but when the practices are *actually* deliberative. Legitimacy follows from realization, from deliberative practice. And for democratic theorists the opposite holds as well: deliberative and democratic are the standards themselves determining legitimacy.

For example, crucial to Jürgen Habermas's principle of universalization is the idea that normative claims to validity are actually debated, that the justification of norms requires and results from the actual discourses of actual people.[4] With Habermas's emphasis on constitutional forms, on the one side, and the corresponding alliance between liberal and deliberative democrats, on the other, we have a contemporary theory that finds justificatory elements in real life political practices. Rather than providing rational reconstructions of everyday practices, the contemporary theory of deliberative democracy uses everyday practices as justifications for the validity of deliberative procedures.[5] Both normative and descriptive accounts of democratic procedures thus play key roles in theorists' accounts of deliberative democracy.

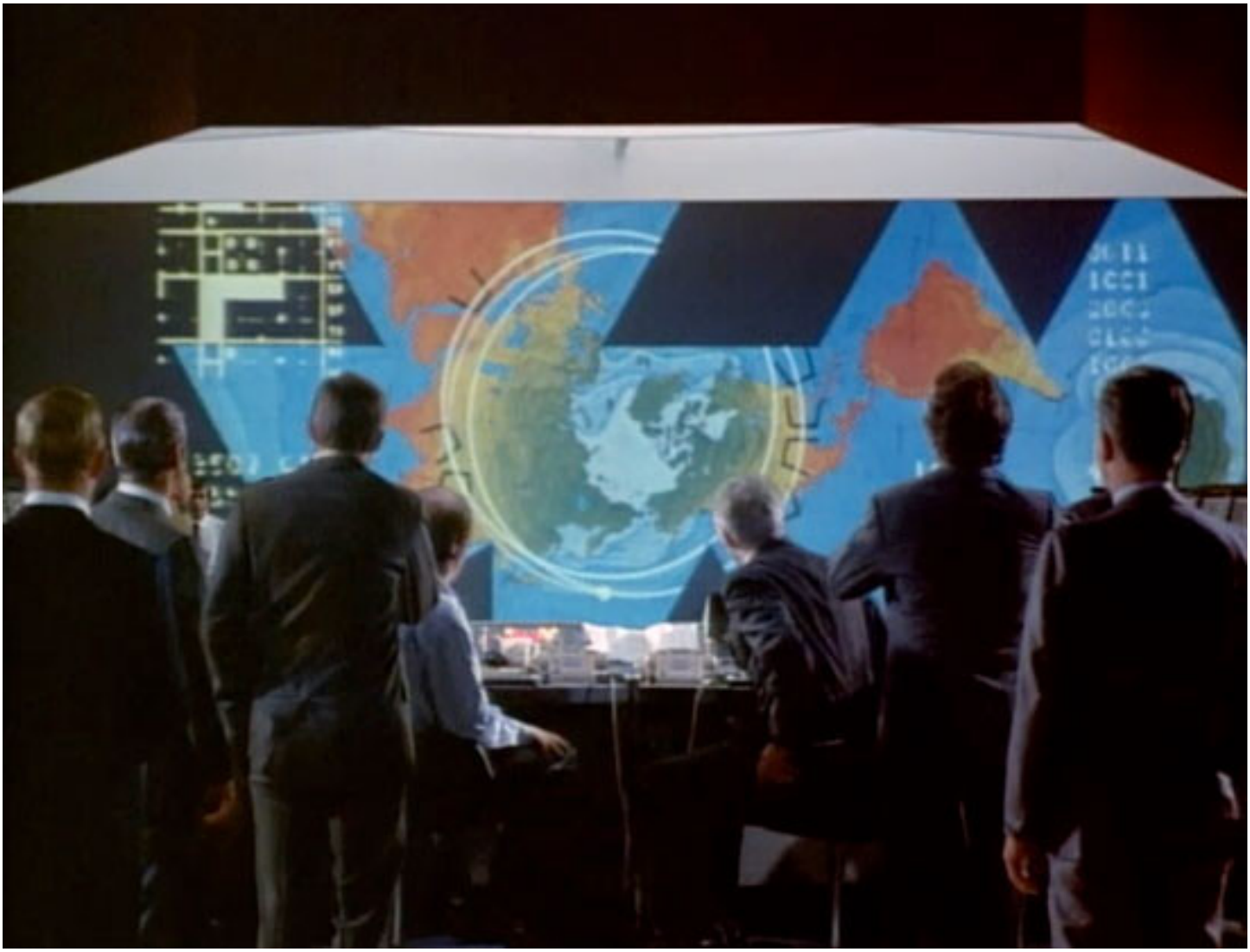
As it occupies this in-between space, one between facticity and validity, democratic theory presents ideals and aspirations as always already present possibilities. In so doing, it brings utopia inside, eliminating it as an external space of hope. Yet by internalizing the hope that things might be otherwise, democratic theory destroys that same hope: potential problems are solved in advance, through democratic channels. *We already know how to get there. We already have the procedures. Anything else is mere tweaking*. Despite all our problems with democracy, democracy is the solution to all our problems.[6] The idea that democracy marks an empty place where things can be otherwise, that democratic procedures incorporate already the keys to revising and reforming the practice of democracy, becomes the conviction that there is nothing but, no alternative to, democracy. To this extent, democratic theory presents democracy as realized, as adequate to its notion. If this is the case, the problem is in the notion.

Invoking Democracy

Democracy as a radical ideal was invoked by a sign posted in a coffee shop in Trumansburg, New York in early 2005. The sign urged people to "take back democracy." It advertised the showing of a film about Al Jazeera, *Control Room*, and called upon people to come inform themselves, discuss the film, and presumably, organize future actions. President George W. Bush invoked democracy as a political practice in a speech he gave in 2003. He proclaimed the role of the United States in spreading democracy across the globe, his strategy for democracy in the Middle East, and his hopes for the future of a democratic Iraq.[7] Citing the lessons of World War II and the Cold War, lessons that teach us that sacrifices made for the sake of democracy are worthwhile, Bush noted that "now we must apply that lesson in our own time. We've reached another great turning point—and the resolve we show will shape the next stage of the world democratic movement." In their well-known and influential description of the current academic consensus around deliberative democracy, Amy Gutmann and Dennis Thompson invoke democracy as a theoretical justification for rule. They define deliberative democracy "as a form of government in which free and equal citizens (and their representatives), justify decisions in a process in which they give one another reasons that are mutually acceptable and generally accessible, with the aim of reaching conclusions that are binding in the present on all citizens but open to challenge in the future."[8] As an example, albeit an admittedly imperfect one, Gutmann and Thompson refer to George W. Bush's recognition of a need to justify his decision to go to war, his persistence in making the case for preventive war against Iraq.

What might we make of these three invocations of democracy? A first pass might say that they are not talking about the same thing, that democracy, an empty signifier, is filled in with differing contents in each case. Here one might emphasize the differences between the protestors hailed by the sign in the coffee shop, the leader of a hegemonic power, and academics elucidating a second order account of legitimacy in politics. Yet even with these differences is it not the case that in each invocation democracy is somehow missing, outside the frame? That democracy is standing in for aspirations to something lacking in the present, something more than what we have?

Democracy is missing from the protestors' sign when we imagine them saying that their voices have not been heard, that Bush's decision to go to war violated American constitutional principles. The Bush administration violated democratic norms in going to war against the wishes of the majority. Yet, protestors are contesting this decision, saying that it was not in their name, that they do not authorize it, and that this lack of authorization is a lack of democracy. Democracy is outside Bush's frame when we



recognize his self-image as a bringer of democracy, an instrument of the future. He looks outside of a present America, sees a global absence that threatens the United States, and acts to fill it. Democracy is missing from Guttman's and Thompson's account insofar as the argument they make is normative, a theory of how things ought to be, as opposed to how they are.

Guttman and Thompson summarize the most widely accepted view of democratic legitimacy, synthesizing decades of work by John Rawls and Jürgen Habermas. Although disagreements among democratic theorists remain, which Gutmann and Thompson rehearse in detail, the general idea is that democracy is properly conceived not in terms of the collective will of the people but in terms of the quality of collective will formation. Democracy, then, does not rely on a simple identity between government and the governed, sovereign and subject, but consists in a mediated relation between the two. Democracy, in this sense, is a matter of finding the proper procedures. For Guttman and Thompson, political theorists have failed to install these procedures and get them to work. They merely establish what these proper procedures *should be* if democracy is to hold.

But is the matter of missing democracy really so simple? Does it make sense to render each of the three cases above in terms of a democracy to come, as a missing utopia? What if instead we consider each case in terms of the presence or realization of democracy, as what an existing, real, democracy looks like,? When we do, we realize that protestors invoke a democracy imagined as resistance. They appeal to practices of constitutionally protected questioning and critique. The organizers showing the Al-Jazeera film are democratically engaged, active citizens. Like the protestors, Bush, too, is following and invoking a democratic script, carrying out his mandate. He is executing a decision which, while necessarily in excess of the complex string of reasons and knowledge bearing upon it, takes place nonetheless within a space of power opened up and guaranteed by democratic procedures. And here, Gutmann and Thompson return as providers of insight into the knowledge of democracy. They don't decide to go to war

or contest the decision of going to war. Rather they set out the procedures through which decisions should be made. And from their perspective, from the perspective of the neutral knowledge of the university, democracy is proceeding apace. This is what democracy looks like.

According to Gutmann and Thompson, the practices of the Bush administration exemplify the fundamental characteristic of deliberative democracy—the requirement to give reasons. They point out that the administration "recognized an obligation to justify their views to their fellow citizens" and that it gave reasons for preemptive war. These reasons, Gutmann and Thompson claim, "laid the foundation for a more sustained and more informative debate *after* the US military victory."[9] As a commenter on my blog put it, it is as if they are saying "One good thing you can say about the war is despite all the death and destruction, it reinvigorates the postwar political debriefing process."[10] Gutmann and Thompson concede that the administration did not exhaust non-military options before shocking and awing the Iraqi people. Nevertheless, they marvel that "the remarkable fact is that even under the circumstances of war, and in the face of an alleged imminent threat, the government persisted in attempting to justify its decision."[11] They add that it is likely certain that "no amount of deliberation would have prevented the war."[12]

The Lack of Democracy

Both the missing and the present democracy readings are unsatisfying. Nevertheless, they are useful for elaborating a certain epistemological impasse in deliberative democracy, especially once we reread them in light of the different positions of enunciation at work in each explanation.[13] If we frame the issue as one of missing democracy, the protestors seem to take on the position of hysterics. Why? Because they address their claims to a master, challenging his authority as they say, one, we need democracy, democracy is not what we have, and, two, because the demands they make seem fantastic, incapable of being filled by the master they address.

The claim that democracy is missing is difficult to take seriously. An anti-war position was there, in the streets, vividly stated by the millions all over the world on February 15, 2003. A democratically elected Congress voted to authorize the President to carry out military operations should diplomacy fail. Where, then, is the failure of democracy? The emptiness of the concept of democracy is a problem insofar as it isn't clear what, exactly, the protestors might be demanding. What do they really want? Is it democracy or something else? And insofar as it isn't clear what the protestors are demanding, it seems impossible to give them what they do want.

We should also ask whether the screening of the film is really intended to inspire democratic debate. Are pro-torture, anti-Islamists expected and encouraged to attend? Is this an opportunity for Christian conservatives to explain the benefits of Fox News or try to organize those at the screening to evict anti-American tenured radicals from the university? Since the answer to these questions is obviously "no," the appeal to democracy seems disingenuous, a way of avoiding the true, partisan, position of the protestors, of masking the fact that their appeal is actually ruptured by a certain excess of power or desire that they can't fully acknowledge. The organizers of the screening don't really seek an inclusive conversation. They want organized political resistance, but they don't state this directly. Instead, they appeal to democracy, shielding themselves from taking responsibility for the divisiveness of politics.

Ultimately, insofar as the protestors address their demands to a master and fail to assume their own claim to power, they end up reinforcing rather than subverting the master's authority.[14] They don't confront Bush as an equal in political debate. They issue demands that the former president may accept or reject from his very position as their presupposed master. It is this very issuing of demands, moreover, which installs Bush into the position of master. Instead of screening a movie and demanding democracy, protestors could acknowledge the division between their position and that of the government—and at least half of American citizens at the time—and work toward building a militant counter movement or joining existing movements. They could refuse to play by the apparent rules of American political discourse and eschew the legitimizing shelter of the term "democracy."

If democracy is missing in the Middle East and Bush is the instrument through which it can be installed, his discourse is perverse and his position of enunciation that of the pervert.[15] Despite the demands of the hysterics, Bush is not a master. Or differently put, the demands of the hysterics demonstrate how the position of the master is always that of a fraud. His words fail to coincide with his position. And here, to an extent, Guttman and Thompson are not wrong to emphasize the importance of continued questioning and argument for democracy. Such questions and arguments can expose the fact that the master is not a master; that his authority is a result of his position. And in this sense, it is relational rather than absolute.

The innovation of democracy is to draw attention to the distinction between the occupant and the place of power. As Claude Lefort argues, the key element of democratic invention is the assertion that the place must remain empty.[16] Principles of right and law guarantee this emptiness, maintaining the gap between the place of power and whoever occupies it. So, when Bush speaks he does not fully occupy the place of power. His word is not law. Rather, it is law who speaks and Bush carries it out. His position of enunciation is as an instrument of the law. Thus, he carries out the will and desires of others, not his own, in accordance with law. To do so, he too has to

View of New York's Financial District from Governor's Island.

presuppose that he knows these desires. Here, we might think of Bush's frequent invocations of the Iraqi people and their desires for freedom and democracy. He too acts in behalf of them, to realize their desire for liberty. In helping them do so, he, like America, is a tool in the hands of nature and history. As Bush declared in his 2006 State of the Union Address, "We are the nation that saved liberty in Europe, and liberated death camps, and helped raise up democracies, and faced down an evil empire. Once again, we accept the call of history to deliver the oppressed and move this world toward peace."[17]

Read in terms of the pervert's discourse Bush's aim to spread democracy around the world relies on an excess of power, on a point of decision. As he stated when pressed by reporters to justify retaining Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld after six retired generals called for the Secretary's resignation, "I'm the decider."[18] It is this position that is supported by the knowledge he claims to subject himself to as he carries out its mandate to spread democracy.

I can now clarify how Bush's position as an instrument of a future democracy resists the exchange of reasons: insofar as he is merely the executor, he doesn't speak for himself or participate in the exchange of reasons. These reasons, or knowledge, already underpin his decision and are subject to his servicing of them. Bush addresses the subject, the protestors and the hysterical split subject of democracy, from his position as instrument. As such, the protesters' questioning misses the mark. He does not offer them knowledge; he offers them action. He therefore reiterates his decisiveness, his conviction, his resolve, his action in the service of a cause, principle, and design of nature that is incommensurate with his will. And as we have seen, this hysterical process produces, but does not depend on, the authority of the master. The pervert doesn't recognize himself in the address of the hysteric because he is merely an instrument.[19]

There is a way, however, that this reading of the protestors and Bush in terms of the discourses of the hysteric and the pervert is too rigid. Their positions are too fixed and are thus unable to account for the overlap in their claims regarding democracy's absence. Upon closer analysis, the fact that the two positions share a lack means that they each pass into the other.[20] With respect to the protestors' and Bush's examples, what occurs is the passing of questioning into decision, of inclusivity into division, and back again.

Zižek's discussion of Hegel helps clarify this shared lack. Zižek emphasizes that "antithesis" is "what the 'thesis' *lacks* in order to 'concretize' itself."[21] He writes, "the 'thesis' is itself *abstract*: it presupposes its 'mediation' by the 'antithesis'; it can attain its ontological consistency only by means of its opposition to the 'antithesis.'"[22] The protestors lack the power to execute their demands. Thus, their discourse only achieves consistency as a demand for power, that is, for what they in fact lack. They slide into their opposite in positioning themselves as vehicles for the realization of a democracy to come, in making their activities the practices constitutive of democracy, decisively excluding torturers, war mongers, and right-wing Christians from the democratic imaginary they thereby produce. These exclusions need to be emphasized, brought to the fore as such, as they are the very limits establishing the protestors' political ideal. To avow such exclusion, however, would shoot the fantasy of an inclusive, undivided democracy in the foot. As its own kind of political violence, such a decisive exclusion would force the protestors to abandon their stance as beautiful souls. Nonetheless, as hysterics, they refuse to acknowledge this element of their discourse, preferring instead to continue to question the master.

What about Bush? If he is simply the perverse instrument or executor of a larger law beyond himself, or of a greater will, how does his discourse achieve consistency? Via the insertion of questioning, via a hystericization—but not toward the protestors. Its relation to the latter is not complementary as the two sides of a synthetic whole. This lack of complementarity is clear when we recall that in neither the discourse of the hysteric nor that of the pervert are there claims made to some sort of equal. These discourses are not structured in terms of the exchange of reasons. Rather Bush's discourse is hystericized in relation to a different position, from its point of symbolic identification, which is the point it sees itself from.[23] And this point is clearly that of its opponent, "Islamic fundamentalism" or terrorism, which the discourse itself elides. In effect, underlying Bush's position is a challenge to his opponent that both neurotically asks "are we who you say we are?" and perversely proclaims "we are not soulless, weak, materialist, consumerist, decadent, capitalist, imperialists." *There is more to us than reality television, McDonalds, and net porn. The, US, too, is resolute, strong, willing to fight to death, able to stay the course in a long, struggle with no end in sight. We are righteous. And I, as President, am the unwavering instrument of the higher law.*

For now, what is important is the gaze Bush imagines watching him when he speaks. The Other he imagines looking at, judging, the United States. In the 2006 State of the Union address, Bush avows, "By allowing radical Islam to work its will—by leaving an assaulted world to fend for itself—we would signal to all that we no longer believe in our own ideals, or even in our own courage. But our enemies and our friends can be certain: The United States will not retreat from the world, and we will never surrender to evil." Before this imagined gaze—primarily that of the enemy, the terrorist who would receive the signal that the US is sending—the willingness to die for freedom demonstrates that American freedom is not simply a market freedom, a decadent freedom to shop or choose from a wide array of colors, but something more, something as powerful as the conviction driving the so-called terrorist.

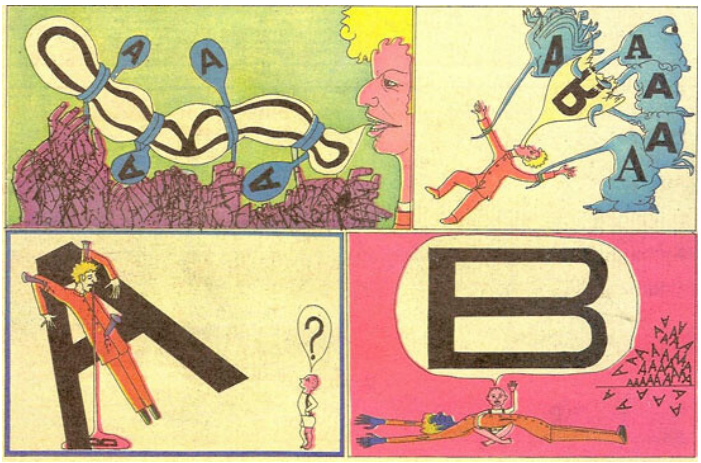


Plate from Alejandro Jodorowsky's Fábulas Pánicas, a weekly sunday cartoon designed by the artist for the El Heraldo between 1967-1973.

Present Democracy

The idea that democracy is present, at least in its notion, took hold in the nineties. Socialism, the only apparent alternative to democracy, seemed barren, exposed as a costly, deadly, failed experiment. Expansions in networked communications technologies seemed to realize in material form the conditions necessary for deliberation. With more and more people able to increasingly access information, to register their opinions and participate in deliberation, how could any form of government but democracy even be possible? Of course, matters are not so simple. Some of the most repressive nations (Singapore, Indonesia) are some of the most heavily networked. Extensions in communication have been accompanied by, indeed rooted in, amplifications in capitalism.

As Gutmann and Thompson make clear, the idea that democracy is present justifies Bush's decision. He is acting out a mandate, exercising the people's will, carrying out the law. But what about the sign in the coffee shop? If we say that democracy is present, then the protestors' appeal to democracy makes no sense: why are they fighting for something that they have? Are they saying, "More of the same! More of the same!"? Clearly this is not what they are after and this is why their appeal to democracy is fruitless: it is an appeal to the status quo for more of the same, with an emphasis, however, on more—more information, more participation, more deliberation—as if sheer quantity could bridge the gap and produce a different outcome. To this extent, it falls into the traps of communicative capitalism, strengthening the very structures it ostensibly aims to change.

The protestors (and the left more generally) appeal to democracy because they look at it themselves from the same position of their opponents, the Bush administration (or the right more generally), just as the Bush administration looks at itself from the position of its opponent, the so-called Islamic fundamentalist or terrorist. And just as the Bush administration adopts the tactics of its opponent to try to fill the lack it sees—political will, moral rectitude, the resolve to name and confront evil—so does the left try to live up to, respond to, right versions of its failures. Avoiding the extremes, it puts itself in the middle. It isn't partisan, one-sided, or politically correct but fair and democratic, not a special interest group but in tune with mainstream American values. It isn't socialist (and really doesn't favor the welfare state), but instead committed to economic growth and free markets.

As the appeal to democracy presupposes democracy is the solution to its problems, because it incorporates in advance any hope things might be otherwise as its fundamental democratic promise and provision beforehand, it is a dead-end for left politics. Entrapped by such an appeal, left and progressive contestation remains suspended between the discourse of the hysteric and the discourse of the university. Such suspension fails to break free of the continued workings of the discourse of the pervert as hysterical contestation affirms the position of the master. Moreover, the appeal to democracy remains unable to elaborate a convincing political alternative because it accepts the premise that we already know what is to be done—critique, discuss, include, and revise. Left reliance on democracy thus eschews responsibility not only for current failures (*look, democracy isn't perfect*) but also for envisioning another politics in the future.

X

Originally written in 2009, this essay is excerpted from Jodi Dean's book *Democracy and Other Neoliberal Fantasies: Communicative Capitalism and Left Politics*, published by Duke University Press.

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1
For a thorough discussion of Zižek's critique of democracy, see Jodi Dean, *Žižek's Politics* (New York: Routledge, 2006).

2
I am drawing here from Ernesto Laclau's discussion of universalization under conditions of uneven power relations; see Laclau, "Stucture, history, and the political,"182-212; and Judith Butler, Ernesto Laclau, and Slavoj Zižek, *Contingency, Hegemony, Universality, Universality* (London: Verso, 2000). Laclau argues that when power relations are uneven, universality depends on particularity, on the possibility of a particular element coming to stand for something other than itself. The supposition of democracy disavows the incommensurability necessary for universality as it presumes itself to be the solution to its problems—the answer to any problem with democracy is more democracy. For elaboration of this point, see Jodi Dean, "Secrecy Since September 11th," *Interventions* 6, 3 (2004) 362-380.

3
Hubertus Buchstein and Dirk Jörke, "Redescribing Democracy," *Redescriptions* 11 (2007) 178-201.

4
Jürgen Habermas, "Discourse Ethics: Notes on a Program of Philosophical Justification," in *Moral Consciousness and Communicative Action* , trans. Christian Lenhardt and Shierry Weber Nicholsen (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 1990) 66.

5
See, for example, Simone Chambers, *Reasonable Democracy: Jurgen Habermas and the Politics of Discourse* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1996).

6
This point applies to theories of radical democracy such as Laclau's and Mouffe's as well.

7
See, for example, "Remarks by the President at the 20th Anniversary of the National Endowment for Democracy," (November 2003), at http://www.whitehouse.gov/news/releases/2003/11/20031106-2.html

8
Amy Gutmann and Dennis Thompson, *Why Deliberative Democracy?* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2004) 7.

9
Ibid., 2-3.

10
See http://jdeanicite.typepad.com/ , 2/28/05.

11
Amy Gutmann and Dennis Thompson, *Why Deliberative Democracy?* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2004), 2.

12
Ibid., 2.

13
For the sake of clarity, I've omitted the specific Lacanian formulae for each of these discourses. A thorough elaboration appears in *Žižek's Politics* .

14
Slavoj Zižek, *Iraq: The Borrowed Kettle,* (London: Verso, 2004,) 133-145.

15
Diane Rubenstein also reads Bush's relation to law as perverse. See *This Is Not A President* (New York: New York University Press, 2008), 193-196.

16
Claude Lefort, *Democracy and Political Theory* , trans. David Macey (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1988).

17
Text of address available here http://www.whitehouse.gov/news/releases/2006/01/20060131-10.html

18
"Bush: 'I'm the decider' on Rumsfeld," (April 18, 2006). Available at http://www.cnn.com/2006/POLITICS/04/18/rumsfeld/ .

19
In Joan Copjec's words, "The pervert is a pure, pathos-less instrument of the Other's will," *Imagine There's No Woman* (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 2002) 229.

20
See Slavoj Zižek, *Tarrying with the Negative* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1993) 122-124.

21
Ibid,, 122.

22
Ibid., 122.

23
For a more thorough argument on this point see Jodi Dean, "Enemies Imagined and Symbolic," *Philosophy and Social Criticism* 31, 4 (June 2005), 499-509.

Jalal Toufic

The Resurrected Brother of Mary and Martha: A Human Who Resurrected God!

"Six days before the Passover, Jesus came to Bethany, where Lazarus lived, whom Jesus had raised from the dead. Here a dinner was given in Jesus' honor. Martha served, while Lazarus was among those reclining at the table with him. Then Mary took about a pint of pure nard, an expensive perfume; she poured it on Jesus' feet and wiped his feet with her hair. And the house was filled with the fragrance of the perfume. But one of his disciples, Judas Iscariot, who was later to betray him, objected, 'Why wasn't this perfume sold and the money given to the poor? It was worth a year's wages.' ... 'Leave her alone,' Jesus replied. 'It was intended that she should save this perfume for the day of my burial'" (John 12:1–7). Hearing this, the resurrected brother of Mary and Martha, who knew that when "some of the Pharisees and teachers of the law said to Jesus, 'Teacher, we want to see a sign from you,'" Jesus answered, "A wicked and adulterous generation asks for a sign! But none will be given it except the sign of the prophet Jonah. For as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of a huge fish, so the Son of Man will be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth" (Matthew 12:39–40), must have thought that Jesus would be buried alive[1] (and then lifted up to heaven three days and nights later: hadn't Jesus said, "... when I am lifted up from the earth" [John 12:32]?), muttering, "Our Lord Jesus Christ will fall asleep dreamlessly, and then I'll go to his tomb to wake him up." Soon after, an acquaintance of his sent word to him, "The one you love has been sentenced to be crucified." When he heard this, he promptly headed to Golgotha. In front of the cross on which Jesus Christ was crucified, the resurrected brother of Mary and Martha, the disciple whom Jesus loved,[2] soothed Jesus' mother thus: "This crucifixion will not end in death." But no sooner had he finished saying these words than he was confounded, for "when Jesus saw his mother there, and the disciple whom he loved standing nearby, he said to her, 'Woman, here is your son,' and to the disciple, 'Here is your mother'" (John 19:26–27).[3] What is impossible for Jesus Christ as one of the hypostases of the Holy Trinity? Is it to "cleanse those who have leprosy" and "drive out demons" (Matthew 10:8)? Is it to come down from the cross and save himself ("Those who passed by hurled insults at him, shaking their heads and saying, 'You who are going to destroy the temple and build it in three days, save yourself! Come down from the cross, if you are the Son of God!'" [Matthew 27:39–41])? No. What is impossible for Jesus Christ as the life? Is it to "heal the sick" and "raise the dead" (Matthew 10:8)? No, such actions are possible for a God who is the life; therefore they are not miracles for him. What is impossible for Jesus Christ, the life, is to die, so either, as the Qur'ân asserts ("They slew him [the Messiah, Jesus son of Mary, Allâh's messenger] not nor crucified him, but it appeared so unto them ..." [4:157]), he did not die on the cross, and the one who died on the cross was a simulacrum of him,[4] or he could and did die on the cross only miraculously, by a miracle he performed and not as a result of the action of his ostensible executioners. The same way that, according to Rilke, "however much the farmer toils and sows, / never

will he reach the transformation / of the seed into summer. Earth *bestows*,"[5] however much the executioners of the life may torture him and however long they may crucify him, never will they reach the transformation of the life into death;[6] it is the Christ who miraculously accomplishes and offers his death. Only a madman would have cried, "Whither is God? I will tell you. *We have killed him*—you and I,"[7] in relation to the crucifixion of a God who was "the life." What most fits life is to resurrect the dead: Jesus Christ's resurrection of Lazarus (and two [or three?] others); and what is impossible for it, therefore what it can accomplish only miraculously, is to die: Jesus Christ's death on the cross. In relation to *life and death*, Jesus Christ, as the life, did what is possible for him in resurrecting Lazarus, and did, miraculously, what is impossible for him in dying (on the cross)—the latter was, strictly speaking, his one miracle. "About three in the afternoon Jesus cried out in a loud voice, ' *Eli, Eli, lema sabachthani?*' (which means 'My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?')…. And when Jesus had cried out again in a loud voice, he gave up his spirit" (Matthew 27:46–50; cf. Mark 15:34–37).[8] Deeply moved in spirit and troubled, the resurrected brother of Mary and Martha exclaimed: "The Christ died, truly he died!" The brother of Mary and Martha underwent both nights of the world, the Hegelian one and the Nietzschean one. He underwent the Hegelian one insofar as he was a mortal before his resurrection by Jesus Christ, the life, that is, insofar as he was dead even while still physically alive, and, more unreservedly, when he died physically the first time, as an undead: "The human being is this Night, this empty nothing which contains everything in its simplicity—a wealth of infinitely many representations, images, none of which occur to it directly, and none of which are not present. This [is] the Night, the interior of [human] nature, existing here— *pure Self*—[and] in phantasmagoric representations it is night everywhere: here a bloody head suddenly shoots up and there another white shape, only to disappear as suddenly. We see this Night when we look a human being in the eye, looking into a Night which turns terrifying. [For from his eyes] the night of the world hangs out towards us[9]"[10]; and he, like all those living then, underwent, whether aware of this or unawares, the Nietzschean one, which was foreshadowed by the unnatural night *in* the world that occurred while Jesus Christ was still alive on the cross ("From noon until three in the afternoon darkness came over all the land" [Matthew 27:45]) and that made some of those present then wonder, "Do we not need to light lanterns in the morning?" and which held sway between (the Son of) God's (miraculous) death on the cross and his resurrection. Jesus Christ's two cries in quick succession mark, respectively, the points when he first intuited and then when it became quite clear to him, who was then on the verge of dying miraculously, that if he were to be resurrected, it would not be through the direct action of God the Father. It is on hearing the words of Jesus' first cry on the cross, " *Eli, Eli, lema sabachthani?*" that the resurrected brother of Mary and Martha first had an uneasy inkling of his incredible task. Between (the Son of) God's (miraculous) death on the cross and his resurrection, his fate depended in an essential manner on a human, the resurrected brother of Mary and Martha. That was the incredible stake that was being played: the death of God in the figure of Jesus Christ could have proved to be irreparable, freeing humans from (one of the hypostases of) God,[11] or ushering in *the night of the world* (in a Nietzschean, if not a Hegelian sense: "Is not night continually closing in on us? Do we not need to light lanterns in the morning? … God is dead! God remains dead!"[12]) in case they failed to become themselves gods (Nietzsche: "What was holiest and mightiest of all that the world has yet owned has bled to death under our knives … Is not the greatness of this deed too great for us? Must we ourselves not become gods simply to appear worthy of it?"[13]). God, who had incarnated to teach man (about) the miraculous, made the life of his Son depend on whether man would accomplish the miraculous, more specifically the resurrection of Him who made miracles possible and through whom miracles are possible, God. The resurrected brother of Mary and Martha did not at all consider burying the dead Jesus Christ—instead, he returned with Mary to his home in Bethany. Given that Jesus had instructed his followers to "let the dead bury their own dead" (Matthew 8:22), Jesus' burial had to be left to one who, as a mortal, was dead (while physically still alive). And so it was: Joseph of Arimathea (according to the Synoptic Gospels), assisted by Nicodemus (according to the Gospel of John), laid Jesus' body in a tomb.[14] Thomas said to the ten other remaining, ostensible disciples, "Let us … die with him." I assume that by this he meant: let us, recognizing that with the death of the life we too have willy-nilly already died (symbolically), formalize this death instead of persisting in an ersatz life that is no more than a delay in the registration of our implied (symbolic) death. But the other, ostensible disciples, who had denied and/or abandoned Jesus when the latter was apprehended and crucified, dismissed his recommendation and dissuaded him from his undertaking. Thomas (also known as Didymus), who had an affinity to repetition and duplication since " *Thomas* (Aramaic) and *Didymus* (Greek) both mean *twin*,"[15] had already said the same words on a previous occasion, as Jesus was on the point of heading to Lazarus' tomb (John 11:16). Moreover, these repeated words had on that previous occasion a double meaning depending on who was referred to by "him." If Thomas considered that Jesus Christ could be killed by humans, then, given that Jesus maintained his intention to return to Judea to resurrect his beloved disciple Lazarus "for God's glory so that God's Son may be glorified through it" (John 11:4) notwithstanding his ostensible disciples' perplexed warning, "But Rabbi, a short while ago the Jews there tried to stone you, and yet you are going back?" (John 11:8), Thomas' words would have had the aforementioned meaning: let us, recognizing that were the life to die we too would willy-nilly be dead (symbolically), not persist in an ersatz life that is no more than a delay in the registration of our imminent implied (symbolic) death. If

Thomas thought that the life could not be killed by humans, then his words would have rather meant: let us die, then perhaps Jesus Christ, the life and the resurrection, who appears intent on resurrecting Lazarus, would resurrect us too and thus we would no longer be mortals, dead while alive, to become solely alive (given that Jesus' other ostensible disciples did not follow his recommendation, indeed dissuaded him from doing so, could it be that Thomas was the only one of the Twelve who already understood that Jesus intended to resurrect the dead Lazarus? Or was it the case that the others did understand that Jesus intended to resurrect the dead Lazarus but did not care to be raised "with him" from death by the Christ?). Bethany was less than two miles from Jerusalem, and many Jews who knew that Jesus had not only "loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus" (John 11:5) but also resurrected the latter came to comfort not only Jesus' mother but also the aforementioned three siblings in their loss. Three days and three nights after Jesus' burial, the resurrected brother of Mary and Martha told his two sisters and Mary that he was going to visit Jesus' tomb. Once in Jerusalem, he asked Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus, "Where have you laid him?" "Come and see," they replied, supposing he was going to the tomb to mourn there. The resurrected brother of Mary and Martha came to the tomb, which was in a garden. A stone was laid across the entrance to the tomb. There was a bad odor, for Jesus had been in the tomb for three days and three nights. The resurrected brother of Mary and Martha wept. Then he was reminded of the words that his sister Martha told him Jesus had said to her at Lazarus' own tomb, "Did I not tell you that if you believe, you will see the glory of God?" Now, to the resurrected brother of Mary and Martha, "if you believe …" no longer meant, "if you believe in God …" for God—in the hypostasis of the Son—was dead, but, "if you, who as a resurrected man exemplify a miracle, believe in the miraculous …" The stone was too heavy for one man to displace. Given that Jesus had asserted, "Truly I tell you, if you have faith as small as a mustard seed, you can say to this mountain, 'Move from here to there,' and it will move. Nothing will be impossible for you" [Matthew 17:20]), could the resurrected brother of Mary and Martha, who had faith, have moved it? Yes, he could have. But he intuited that he should not even try to do so, for the miracle he had to do was a different one, a far greater one (one no angel could accomplish). He wondered, "Who will roll the stone away from the entrance of the tomb?" Then he saw two angels in white. "Take away the stone," he said. So they rolled away the stone. The resurrected brother of Mary and Martha remembered Jesus Christ's words: "Truly I tell you, if you have faith … nothing will be impossible for you" (Matthew 17:20) and "Very truly I tell you, whoever believes in me will do the works I have been doing, and they will do even greater things than these …. And I will do whatever you ask in my name, so that the Father may be glorified in the Son. You may ask me for anything in my name, and I will do it" (John 14:12–14). Then, for the first time, the resurrected brother of Mary and Martha, who had until then, like his two sisters, always addressed Jesus as "Lord" ("'Take away the stone,' he [Jesus] said. 'But, Lord,' said Martha, the sister of the dead man, 'by this time there is a bad odor, for he has been there four days'" [John 11:39] …[16]), called him (in a loud voice) by his name: "Jesus, come out!" The one who was dead came out, his hands and feet wrapped with strips of linen, and a cloth around his face.[17] The resurrected brother of Mary and Martha had called upon his name and given glory to the Lord.[18] The two angels were astonished. The first Christian miracle by someone other than Jesus Christ was the resurrection of the dead Jesus Christ by the resurrected brother of Mary and Martha (Peter's walk on water was not a miracle, but a momentary walk in the redeemed world).[19] Notwithstanding their repeated descriptions of themselves as witnesses of Jesus Christ's resurrection ("Peter stood up with the Eleven, raised his voice and addressed the crowd: … 'God has raised this Jesus to life, and we are all witnesses of it'" [Acts 2:14–32]; Peter, "You killed the author of life, but God raised him from the dead. We are witnesses of this" [Acts 3:15]),[20] neither Peter nor any of the other ten ostensible disciples witnessed the resurrection itself, the act of the resurrection of Jesus Christ; only the resurrected brother of Mary and Martha did since he performed it. Lazarus' death was for "God's glory so that God's Son may be glorified through it" (John 11:4) not only because it would provide Jesus with the occasion to perform a resurrection (in the process confirming his assertion that Lazarus' "sickness will not end in death"), otherwise Jesus would have said the same thing about his resurrections of the young man from the town of Nain (Luke 7:11–16) and the only daughter of Jairus, a synagogue leader, a girl of about twelve (Luke 8:41–56); but also because the resurrected brother of Mary and Martha would resurrect the dead Jesus, who would thus have been "raised in glory" (1 Corinthians 15:43). How curious and anomalous it is for "Saint" Paul, who placed resurrection at the very core of Christianity ("And if Christ has not been raised, our preaching is useless and so is your faith" [1 Corinthians 15:14]), never to have mentioned Lazarus. And yet, when he wrote, "For if the dead are not raised, then Christ has not been raised either" (1 Corinthians 15:16), "Saint" Paul might have let slip something he intuited or knew but preferred not to declare, since it is one of those raised dead, the brother of Mary and Martha, who raised the Christ from death. The resurrected brother of Mary and Martha could feel that power had gone out from him and was exhausted as no human had ever been, incredibly exhausted (Jesus Christ, someone infinitely greater than him, felt that "power had gone out from him" when a woman was healed on touching his cloak ["A woman was there who had been subject to bleeding for twelve years…. she came up behind him in the crowd and touched his cloak …. Immediately her bleeding stopped and she felt in her body that she was freed from her suffering. At once Jesus realized that power had gone out from him" (Mark 5:24–30; cf. Matthew 9:20–21)], an infinitely lesser miracle than the one that the resurrected brother of Mary and

Martha had just accomplished). Did he fall unconscious from his incredible exhaustion? At this point, *after* resurrecting (the Son of) God, he again very much needed the assistance of the two angels. They could and did intervene then and provide him with the requisite energy. Then the resurrected Jesus Christ ordered him "not to tell anyone what had happened" (the same injunction he gave the parents of the girl of about twelve just after resurrecting her [Luke 8:56]). And so he told neither the eleven ostensible disciples, nor Mary, Jesus' (and now his) mother, nor his own two sisters. Like "many other signs," the resurrection of Jesus Christ by the resurrected brother of Mary and Martha is "not recorded in this book" (John 20:30). "Early on the first day of the week, while it was still dark, Mary Magdalene went to the tomb and saw that the stone had been removed from the entrance. So she came running to Simon Peter and the other disciple, the one Jesus loved, and said, 'They have taken the Lord out of the tomb, and we don't know where they have put him!' So Peter and the other disciple started for the tomb" (John 20:1–3). While it seems obvious why Peter would start for the tomb, why did the other disciple, the one Jesus loved, the resurrected brother of Mary and Martha, also do so? Once he was surrounded by those who were *human, all too human*, that *event*, about which the resurrected brother of Mary and Martha did not tell them anything, seemed incredible to him; indeed he could no longer believe that he could accomplish such a miracle, in a way the greatest miracle, so he, who had come to doubt that he could have resurrected someone, let alone (the Son of) God, ran to the tomb to check that what he remembered as an actual event was not some sort of hallucination. "Both were running, but the other disciple outran Peter and reached the tomb first. He bent over and looked in at the strips of linen lying there but did not go in"—for he was then sure, again, that he had actually resurrected Jesus Christ ... recently. "Then Simon Peter came along behind him and went straight into the tomb. He saw the strips of linen lying there, as well as the cloth that had been wrapped around Jesus' head" (John 20:4–7). When shortly after his resurrection, Jesus Christ appeared to his ostensible disciples, Thomas did not happen to be among them. When they reported this appearance to him, Thomas doubted their report. Why did Thomas (also known as Didymus [which means "twin" in Greek]) doubt that the one they witnessed is the resurrected Jesus Christ? Is it because while the one who performed the resurrection, the resurrected brother of Mary and Martha, was solely alive he was nonetheless not *the life* (in whose case alone one can be sure that the resurrected one is the one who died), with the consequence that one could not be sure that the one he resurrected was (the Son of) God, the Christ, and not some double of him, if not the Antichrist? Did he also reason that were the one that the other ten ostensible disciples beheld the Christ who, past his resurrection by the resurrected brother of Mary and Martha, was *glorified* by God the Father, they would have been destroyed by such witnessing, since to the resurrected Christ *in his glory* applied what applied to God (the Father) ("Then Moses said, 'Now show me your glory.' And the LORD said, '... you cannot see my face, for no one may see me and live.' Then the LORD said, '... When my glory passes by, I will put you in a cleft in the rock and cover you with my hand until I have passed by. Then I will remove my hand and you will see my back; but my face must not be seen'" (Exodus 33:18–23); cf. Qur'ân 7:143, "And when Moses came to Our appointed tryst and his Lord had spoken unto him, he said: My Lord! Show me (Thy Self), that I may gaze upon Thee. He said: Thou wilt not see Me, but gaze upon the mountain! If it stand still in its place, then thou wilt see Me. And when his Lord revealed (His) glory to the mountain He sent it crashing down" (trans. Pickthall), and Qur'ân 2:55–56, "And when ye said: O Moses! We will not believe in thee till we see Allâh plainly; and even while ye gazed the lightning seized you")?

X

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1
Jalal Toufic: "'Another disciple said to him, "Lord, first let me go and bury my father." But Jesus told him, "Follow me, and let the dead bury their own dead"' (Matthew 8:21–22). The grave problem with this is that very few dead people can legitimately assert: 'I know when one is dead and when one lives' (Shakespeare, *King Lear*, 5.3.261). The dead are far less proficient than the living at detecting whether someone is definitely dead, and hence tend on a substantial number of occasions to bury the living too. With the coming of Jesus Christ, many people became alive. Jesus Christ, 'the resurrection and the life' (John 11:25), made of burial alive at the moment of organic demise a fundamental condition. The two earliest examples are: Lazarus, since the latter, through his belief in Jesus, was alive ('He who believes in me will live, even though he die' [John 11:25]) when he was buried ('Our friend Lazarus has fallen asleep; but I am going there to wake him up' [John 11:11]); and, obviously as well as paradigmatically, Jesus Christ. 'Jesus said, "This is a wicked generation. It asks for a miraculous sign, but none will be given it except the sign of Jonah. For as Jonah was a sign to the Ninevites, so also will the Son of Man be to this generation"' (Luke 11:29–30; cf. Matthew 12:40: 'For as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of a huge fish, so the Son of Man will be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth')," "Bury Me Dead," in *Two or Three Things I'm Dying to Tell You* (Sausalito, CA: Post-Apollo Press, 2005; available for download as a PDF file at http://www.jalaltoufic.com/downloads.htm), 83–84.

2
The Gospel of John refers several times to "the disciple whom Jesus loved," for example in 21:20–23: "When Peter turned and saw that the disciple whom Jesus loved was following them … he asked, 'Lord, what about him?' Jesus answered, 'If I want him to remain alive until I return, what is that to you? …' Because of this, the rumor spread among the believers that this disciple would not die. But Jesus did not say that he would not die; he only said, 'If I want him to remain alive until I return, what is that to you?'" This disciple is not named. Who was a disciple who, properly speaking, could not have been named and about whom rumors could, indeed did spread among the believers that he would not die? A disciple who was resurrected, thus who was fully alive, no longer a mortal, that is, no longer dead while alive, therefore no longer subject to over-turns: "It never occurs to those mortals living then to call the resurrected, because, at the most basic level, he no longer needs the call since, as is the case of most animals, he faces himself in the mirror naturally, i.e., since his facing himself in the mirror is not the result of a successful interpellation, and, at a derivative level, because he happens to be facing the mortal whenever the latter needs him to be in that direction. From the time of his resurrection to his subsequent physical death, no one called the resurrected brother of Mary and Martha" (Jalal Toufic, *What Were You Thinking?* [Berlin: Berliner Kü nstlerprogramm/DAAD, 2011], 52–53; alternatively, see "The Resurrected Brother of Mary and Martha: A Human Who Lived *then* Died!" *e-flux journal*, no. 30 [12/2011], at http://pdf.e-flux-systems.com/journal/the-resurrected-brother-of-mary-and-martha-a-human-who-lived-then-died/)—referring in John 12:1–2 to the *resurrected* brother of Mary and Martha by name, by the name he had while a mortal, was a mistake. The over-turn is both one of the conditions of possibility of the call and one of its conditions of impossibility. If we view the matter through the example of the mirror, then while the over-turn is what introduces the possibility to be called, since only those who are subject to over-turns do not naturally have their faces to themselves in the mirror (a condition that would do away with the need for the call), it is also what makes us cease calling since, by undoing the addressee's turn to answer the call, it makes the caller come to the conclusion that he is mistaking the one who has his back to him with someone else who happens to have a very similar back. How come the image in the mirror that the dead or the schizophrenic (someone who died before dying) faced did not turn toward him? It was because the turn of the one in the mirror, a(n) (un)dead, to answer the *sous-entendu* call using his proper name was overturned by an over-turn; or because the one facing the mirror was then assuming other names, if not all the names of history as his name(s), and so called the one in the mirror by one of these other names, with the infelicitous consequence that the latter had no reason to turn, considered that it was another who was being called. Did Antonin Artaud at some point see himself with his back to himself in the mirror? Was it because he had at that point already died, as indicated in one of the letters of *Nouveaux Écrits de Rodez : Lettres au docteur Ferdière (1943-1946) et autres textes inédits, suivis de Six lettres à Marie Dubuc (1935-1937)* (1977), the one dated February 12, 1943 and signed by Antonin Nalpas: "Antonin Artaud est mort à la peine et de douleur à Ville-Evrard au mois d'Août 1939 et son cadavre a été sorti de Ville-Evrard pendant la durée d'une nuit blanche comme celles dont parle Dostoıevsky et qui occupent l'espace de plusieurs journées intercalaires mais non comprises dans le calendrier de ce monde-ci—quoi[que] vraies comme le jour d'ici" (Antonin Artaud died to trouble and of pain in Ville-Evrard in the month of August 1939 and his cadaver was removed from Ville-Evrard during a sleepless night like those Dostoevsky talks about and that occupy the span of several intercalary days that are not included in the calendar of this world—though they are true as the day from here)? How is it that the publisher, Gallimard, and the editor ("présentation et notes"), Pierre Chaleix, could so casually place as the epistolary book's sole author Antonin Artaud notwithstanding that some of the letters, those from the period of February 12, 1943 to August 19, 1943, are signed by Antonin Nalpas (while Nalpas is the maiden name of Artaud's mother, Artaud is clear that this is not why his surname became Nalpas: "Quant au nom de Nalpas, c'est comme je vous l'ai dit, le nom de jeune fille de ma mère … Mais ce n'est pas pour cela que j'en ai parlé, et *je m'étonne grandement de l'avoir fait* . Car ce nom a d'autre part des origines Légendaires, Mystiques et sacrées …" [As for the name of Nalpas, it is, as I've told you, the maiden name of my mother … But that's not why I spoke of it, and *I a m greatly surprised that I did* . Because this name has, on the other hand, Legendary, Mystic and sacred origins …])? The book should have been published as coauthored by Antonin Artaud and Antonin Nalpas. The change from the first name to the second followed the death of Antonin Artaud. What happened so that the later letters of the book are signed once again "Antonin Artaud"? Was Antonin Artaud resurrected (by the Christ, whom he keeps invoking in the letters [and did the latter then tell him not to disclose that he was resurrected by him?]?)? If so, then, given that the resurrected is nameless, either he improperly reassumed the name he had while a mortal, or that name was thenceforth strictly a pen name.

3
Notwithstanding Matthew 26:26–27, according to which "while they were eating, Jesus took bread, … broke it and gave it to his disciples, saying, 'Take and eat; this is my body.' Then he took a cup, … gave it to them, saying, 'Drink from it, all of you. This is my blood of the covenant,'" Jesus' words at the Last Supper were addressed mainly—exclusively?—to the disciple to whom he would say on the cross while referring to his own mother, "Here is your mother" (John 19:26–27), and who, also according to the Gospel of John, was present at that supper, indeed "was reclining next to him [Jesus]."

4
If, as the Qur'ân asserts, "they slew him [the Messiah, Jesus son of Mary, Allâh's messenger] not nor crucified him, but it appeared so unto them" (4:157), then, fatefully, the one who was crucified in Palestine in place of Jesus Christ on a day in which "the curtain of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom" and "the earth shook" (Matthew 27:51) was someone who tried his utmost not to remain *human, all too human* ; announced in a September 14, AD 1888 letter to Paul Deussen "an immeasurably difficult and decisive task which, *when it is understood* , will split humanity into two halves"; wrote in an October 18, AD 1888 letter to Franz Overbeck, "That the first book of the transvaluation of all values is finished, ready for *press*, I announce to you with a feeling for which I have no words. There will be *four* books … I am afraid that I am shooting the history of mankind into two halves"; reiterated in a December 6, AD 1888 letter to Georg Brandes, "I am readying an event, which it is highly likely will break history in two halves"; and shortly after signed some of his final (known) letters with, "The Crucified," Friedrich Nietzsche (see footnote 41 in my book *'Âshûrâ': This Blood Spilled in My Veins* [Beirut, Lebanon: Forthcoming Books,

2005; available for download as a PDF file at: http://www.jalaltoufic.com/downloads.htm]).

5
Rainer Maria Rilke, *Selected Poems* , trans. Susan Ranson and Marielle Sutherland, edited with an introduction and notes by Robert Vilain (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 195.

6
"'The Son of Man is going to be delivered into the hands of men. They will kill him, and after three days he will rise.' But they did not understand what he [Jesus] meant and were afraid to ask him about it" (Mark 9:31–32); "again he [Jesus] took the Twelve aside and told them what was going to happen to him. 'We are going up to Jerusalem,' he said, 'and the Son of Man will be delivered over to the chief priests and the teachers of the law. They will condemn him to death and will hand him over to the Gentiles, who will mock him and spit on him, flog him and kill him'" (Mark 10:32–34); "From that time on Jesus began to explain to his disciples that he must go to Jerusalem and suffer many things at the hands of the elders, the chief priests and the teachers of the law, and that he must be killed and on the third day be raised to life" (Matthew 16:21). How mistaken were the authors of the Gospels of Mark and Matthew!—properly speaking, Jesus Christ, the life, cannot be killed. And yet concerning the ones who crucified Jesus Christ, the following can be asserted: act as if you are murdering the life, and you will be treated as if you did!

7
Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Gay Science, With a Prelude in Rhymes and an Appendix of Songs* , translated, with commentary, by Walter Kaufmann (New York: Vintage, 1974; the first German edition was published in 1882), 181.

8
The death (on the cross) of Jesus Christ, the Son of God, one of the hypostases of the divine Trinity, could have functioned as a step toward returning to a strict monotheism; did the Holy Spirit also die, and if so in what circumstances?

9
Hegel's words, "The human being is this Night, this empty nothing which contains everything in its simplicity—a wealth of infinitely many representations, images ... here a bloody head suddenly shoots up and there another white shape, only to disappear as suddenly. We see this Night when we look a human being in the eye, looking into a Night which turns terrifying. [For from his eyes] the night of the world hangs out towards us," apply to human beings as mortals, thus as dead even while still physically alive. Thus, Hegel's aforementioned words apply neither to the resurrected brother of Mary and Martha, who was no longer a mortal, nor to Jesus Christ, who was never a mortal. "'And the LORD God commanded the man, saying, Of every tree of the garden [including the tree of life] thou mayest freely eat: But of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, thou shalt not eat of it: for in the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die' (Genesis 2:16–17). If the God who gave the command was the Living, then he would have expected that man would either comply with his advice not to eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil or ... eat of it only after eating from the tree of life. Mortality, not knowledge of good and evil, was the unsuspected temptation, and non-mortal man (the Hebrew *'ādam*) and woman fell for it! An unexpected, Gnostic disaster happened as man perversely chose not to eat first from the tree of life before eating from the mortality-causing tree of the knowledge of good and evil, thus introducing and unleashing a mortality that is not based on life, therefore a mortality of which God was unaware. If *we* can possibly understand that someone may choose mortality as such over life, it is because we are already fallen, mortal.... If Iblıs is a disbeliever, he is so first of all in the incredible perversity of man (and woman)—he incited man to eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, but did not specify the order in which the latter opted to do so ..." (Jalal Toufic, *(Vampires): An Uneasy Essay on the Undead in Film* , revised and expanded edition [Sausalito, CA: Post-Apollo Press, 2003; available for download as a PDF file at: http://www.jalaltoufic.com/downloads.htm], 213–214). The incarnation of the Son of God required that were men to be given the occasion to choose again, and notwithstanding the calamity of Adam and the resultant compulsion to repeat the latter's choice, some man would opt to partake of the tree of life before or without partaking of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. Such a man would not be a mortal, that is, would not be dead even while physically alive. Jesus proved to be that man (does the circumstance that Jesus made a different choice imply that God made him alone of all humans relive that primordial choice before his earthly birth? No; it implies rather that, prior to their earthly birth, all humans, including Lazarus, were given the chance to choose again, but they made the same choice as Adam, to become mortals, to be dead while alive). Even when he miraculously died physically, and even in the tomb, Jesus Christ, the life, was not a mortal and therefore was not open to *jouissance* and did not contain a night of the world in the Hegelian sense. Jesus Christ had no knowledge of Good and Evil (he had knowledge of good and bad), so when he was questioned about evil, he was reduced to quoting mortals' words about it in the Old Testament and paraphrasing the words about it uttered by the mortals he encountered.

10
Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, *Hegel and the Human Spirit, A Translation of the Jena Lectures on the Philosophy of Spirit (1805-6) with Commentary* , translation with commentary by Leo Rauch (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1983), 87.

11
A thorough death of the God of Christianity would involve at least three deaths: of the Son, which took place on the cross; of the Holy Spirit; and of the Father.

12
Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Gay Science* , 180.

13
Ibid.

14
Given that "Joseph took the body [of the dead Jesus Christ] ... and placed it in his own new tomb" (Matthew 27:59–60), he must have remained himself without burial—did he encounter the resurrected Jesus Christ and the latter resurrected him, i.e., made him, who was, as a mortal, dead while alive, fully alive, with the consequence that to him too applied Jesus Christ's response to Peter regarding the resurrected brother of Mary and Martha (the disciple he loved), "If I want him to remain alive until I return, what is that to you?"?

15
We are informed about this twice by the footnotes to John 11:16 and 20:24 in the New International Version translation of the New Testament!

16
Cf. "Martha ... came to him and asked, 'Lord, don't you care that my sister has left me to do the work by myself?'" (Luke 10:40); "So the sisters sent word to Jesus, 'Lord, the one you love is sick'" (John 11:3); "'Lord,' Martha said to Jesus, 'if you had been here, my brother would not have died'" (John 11:21); "When Mary reached the place where Jesus was and saw him, she fell at his feet and said, 'Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died'" (John 11:32).

17
There is an insistence in Acts (Acts 2:22–24: "Fellow Israelites ... you, with the help of wicked men, put him [Jesus of Nazareth] to death by nailing him to the cross. But God raised him from the dead"; Acts 2.32: "This Jesus hath God raised up, of which we are all witnesses" ...) and in the Epistles of Paul (1 Thessalonians 1:10: "... his Son from heaven, whom he raised from the dead—Jesus ..."; Galatians 1:1: "Paul, an apostle—sent not from men nor by a man, but by Jesus Christ and God the Father, who raised him from the dead— ...") that God raised His Son from the dead. Given that God the Father did not raise his Son from the dead, at least not directly—the resurrected brother of Mary and Martha did—the author of Acts and Paul "are then found to be false witnesses about God, for we have testified about God that he raised Christ from the dead" (1 Corinthians 15:15).

18
Cf. Psalm 104:1: "Give glory to the Lord, and call upon his name."

19
"Nietzsche wrote, 'Nothing is less Christian than the *ecclesiastical crudity* ... of a "kingdom of God" that is *yet to come*, a "kingdom of heaven" in the *beyond* ...' and, 'The evangel was precisely the existence, the fulfillment, the *actuality* of this "kingdom."' Nietzsche's words have to be qualified: Jesus Christ, who had a double nature, divine and human, belonged conjointly to an unredeemed world and to a

redeemed one. In the unredeemed world, where one could encounter people possessed by demons, he sometimes performed miracles ('When evening came, many who were demon-possessed were brought to him, and he drove out the spirits with a word' [Matthew 8:16]); but in the redeemed world, he did not perform miracles—what most if not all others viewed as miraculous transgressions of natural laws should rather have been viewed by them as a vision of how the redeemed world is. 'During the fourth watch of the night Jesus went out to them, walking on the lake … Then Peter got down out of the boat, walked on the water and came toward Jesus. But when he saw the wind, he was afraid and, beginning to sink, cried out, "Lord, save me!"' (Matthew 14:25 and 14:30). For the interlude before seeing the wind and instinctively panicking or becoming apprehensive that he was back in the unredeemed world, Peter was already walking in the redeemed world. 'Immediately Jesus reached out his hand and caught him. "Why did you doubt"' (Matthew 14:31)—that 'the kingdom of heaven has come near' (Matthew 3:2, 4:17 and 10:7), indeed that you are walking in it?" (footnote 30 in my book *What Were You Thinking?* [Berlin: Berliner Künstlerprogramm/DAAD, 2011]).

20
Can someone who contributed in no small measure to the death of two people and who condoned their burial by youths from his fledgling community ("Now a man named Ananias, together with his wife Sapphira, also sold a piece of property. With his wife's full knowledge he kept back part of the money for himself, but brought the rest and put it at the apostles' feet. Then Peter said, 'Ananias, how is it that Satan has so filled your heart that you have lied to the Holy Spirit …' When Ananias heard this, he fell down and died.… Then some young men came forward, wrapped up his body, and carried him out and buried him. About three hours later his wife came in, not knowing what had happened.… Peter said to her, 'How could you conspire to test the Spirit of the Lord? Listen! The feet of the men who buried your husband are at the door, and they will carry you out also.' At that moment she fell down at his feet and died. Then the young men came in and, finding her dead, carried her out and buried her beside her husband" [Acts 5:1–10]) be considered a Christian? No; Peter is no Christian, that is, he is not a disciple of the life, who on the three occasions he encountered physically dead people characteristically resurrected them and who taught others to "let the dead bury their own dead" (Matthew 8:22).

Mark Beasley

Let All Mortal Flesh Keep Silence: The Voice in Mike Kelley's Music

Let all mortal flesh keep silence

and with fear and trembling stand
ponder nothing earthly minded.

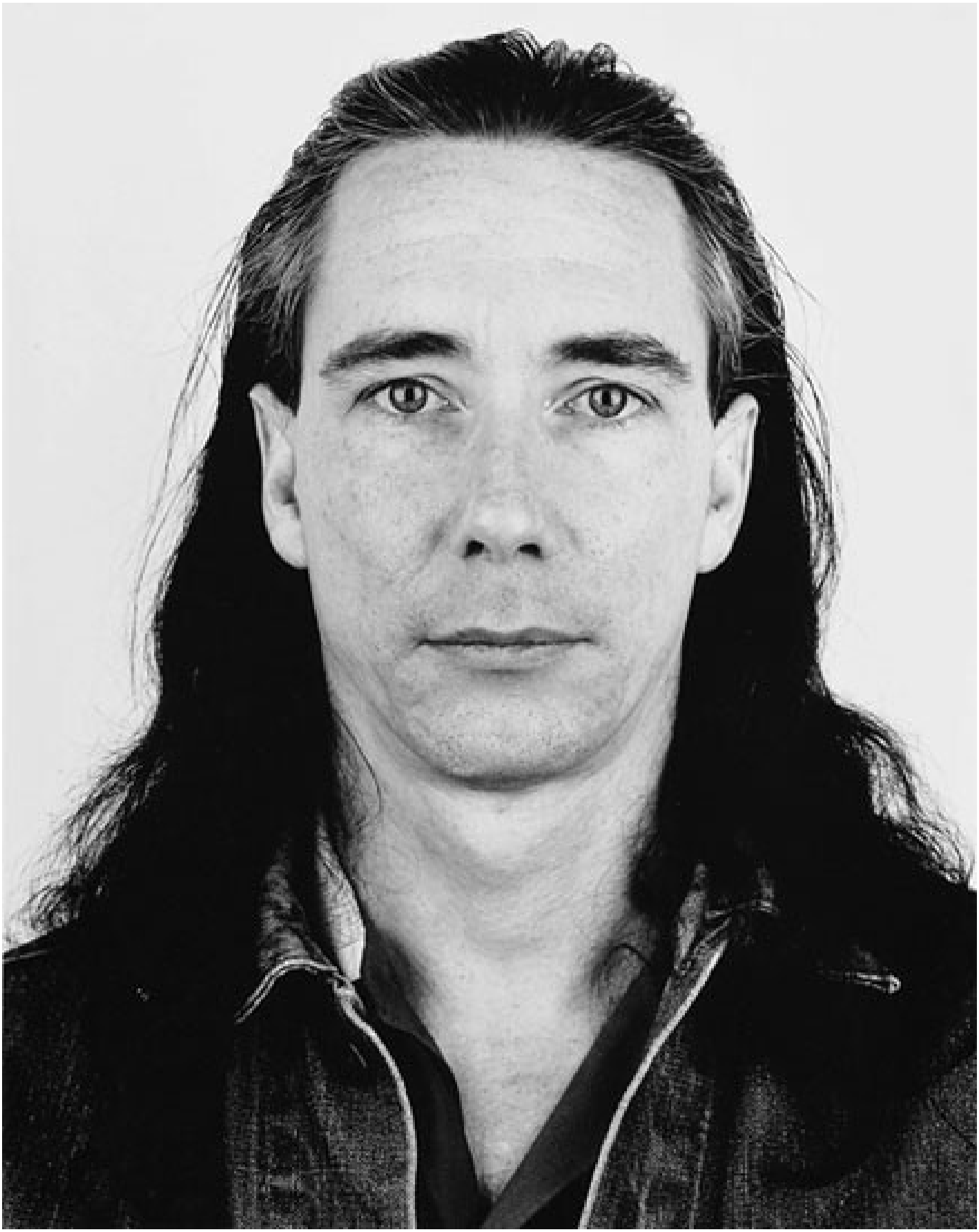
—"Let All Mortal Flesh Keep Silence," Li-tur-gy of St. James[1]

I was mediated … I was Pop.

—Mike Kelley[2]

Mike Kelley's engagement and rupture with popular music began as a teen in Detroit, in the candle-lit gloom of the Catholic Church, with such polyphonic choral chants as the revised fifth-century liturgy "Let All Mortal Flesh Keep Silence." A piece of music that in "its dark and gloomy quality set the mold for much of my [Kelley's] future musical interests." The ancient order of choral music would evolve through popular tongue and secular insertion—French rather than Latin—to threaten, through undulating voice, the Church itself. Thirteenth-century clergyman Jacob of Leige decried this new music and its singers, saying that they "bay like madmen nourished by disorderly and twisted aberrations, they use a harmony alien to nature itself."[3]

A papal bull—a charter written by the Pope, in this instance Pope John XXII—issued in 1324 listed the offences of this new music as: "doing violence to words … they intoxicate the ear without satisfying it, they dramatize the text with gestures and, instead of promoting devotion they prevent it by creating a sensuous and innocent atmosphere." It was musical innovation, the pursuit of vocal polyphony and counterpoint, that threatened the Church and its steadfast plainsong and vocal chant. New compositions relied on secular and vernacular texts in order to employ new vocal devices. Control of the voice and of text slipped away from the Church and toward those wandering singers, those poets on the loose who sang in the marketplace. Among them were the Goliards, clerical students from France, Germany, Spain, Italy, and England who protested the contradictions of the Church, from the Crusades to its financial abuses, expressing themselves through lewd performance, song, and satiric poetry. The Goliards, beloved of English writers such as Samuel Butler and Jonathan Swift—both of whom borrowed their strategies of satirical verse—were, in effect, a literary and spoken-word protest movement. By the fourteenth century, ritual and religious music, its vocalizing and text, had become a popular rather than a clerically aligned form: secular rather than sacred. The earthly mind was pondering, the flesh no longer silent!



Portrait of Mike Kelley

The history of ritual, religious, and popular music is one of successive breaks in faith through disrupted form. The Goliards employed satire, reworking Latin texts to prick at the Church and its sacraments. In their ritual and apocryphal "celebration of the ass," a clothed donkey is led to the chancel during mass. Dancing priests dressed as women sing in the choir and cense the church with the burning soles of old shoes. In response, the congregation is invited to sing a warped version of the Eucharist, a blasphemous "He Haw, Sire Ass, He haw!" The Goliard poets borrowed from church minstrelsy, their mocking, irreverent verses providing a witty commentary on the social and moral climate of medieval Europe. The precursors of modern verse, their bawdy ballads sung in beer halls celebrated the pagan rites of spring and the immemorial urges of the flesh.

Three types of Latin lyric were available to twelfth-century scholar-poets. The first, in honor of the Roman classics, employed the rhetoric of antiquity. The second, a living Christian poetry developed over centuries, employed a new rhythmic and sonorous and often intricate rhyme. The third, the lyric of the Goliards, which employed a tongue dignified by ancient usage, was frequently flippant. Their objects of attack were the Church and its followers—the uncultivated laymen, subject to theological distrust of the body. In short, they produced poetry that offended the pious. Scholars are uncertain whether the name "Goliards" refers to the biblical giant Goliath or to a personification of the sin of gluttony (Gula). Needless to state, these were both derogatory terms used to describe the *clerici vagi*, the wandering and rebellious scholars of the thirteenth century. Old molds were broken and fresh satiric forms of vocal expression were created. In 1364, medieval ears were opened to the first polyphonic setting of the mass, "La Messe de Nostro Dame," described by some as the devil's music. In effect, polyphony—pitch-against-pitch—would lead to the sonic dissonance of noise music. It is in the satiric verse and corrupting voice, in the use of text and performance to attack governing institutions, that we find Mike Kelley, the contemporary Goliard, stinking up the institutions—on occasion the Church itself (*Judson Church Horse Dance* [2009])—with his version of art, music, and voice as ritual form.

> From their lips came sweet sounds.
>
> — Papal decree[4]

It is helpful perhaps to begin with a key biographical moment, one that will start Kelley on his journey to music: the act of exclusion. Kelley was barred at an early age from music study for the crime of singing with a "bad" voice. As he described it: "There were no music classes, so occasionally students would sing religious or folk songs in a regular class, but I wasn't allowed to sing because I did not have a *harmonious* voice."[5] It would be the same when he moved to public school and later to CalArts in order to study with Morton Subotnick: "Because I had no music training, I wasn't allowed to take music theory courses. So basically, my whole life, whenever I've tried to get involved in music, I've been institutionally denied."[6] An institutional Catch 22: in order to learn about music, one has to have prior knowledge.

In many ways, Kelley's relationship to music is formed *via negativa*; he looks to become what he is institutionally denied and what he is told he has no right to be: a musician. When asked about his musical training in a magazine interview, he responded, "I am more akin to a folk musician, I have no training."[7] Kelley's experience mirrors the thirteenth-century Church's fear of choral vocal affect, or the misbehaving "bad" voice that led to a papal decree. The suggestion, in simplified terms, is that "sweet sounds" come from the compliant heart, the gravitas of history—the old texts—and the plainsong. With no recourse to academic musical study, Kelley looks elsewhere: to the musical and visual experimentation of the avant-garde—to the band Destroy All Monsters, a low-budget-sonic-horror that crept from the basement and into the world.

1. Destroy All Monsters

> This cacophony of bestial battle was what we were after. We loved the sound of Godzilla's roar—that backwards-sounding growl with a subliminal tolling bell buried in it, and the sweet cadences of the singing twins who were the consorts of Mothra. That was the dialectic we were after. Those were truly inspiring musics.
>
> —Destroy All Monsters[8]
>
> This doesn't come out of music. This comes out of art.
>
> —Destroy All Monsters[9]

Named after a 1968 Japanese B movie, Destroy All Monsters formed in Ann Arbor, Michigan in 1974. The founding members—fellow art students Cary Loren, Niagara (Lynn Rovner), Jim Shaw, and Kelley—met at the University of Michigan. Their shared and heuristically attuned sensibilities resulted in a flowering of the "most obvious popular form: a band."[10] Post-hippy and pre-punk, DAM inherited the end of the utopian dreams of the sixties and served it back in a mocking sonic form that prefigured the Sex Pistols and those punks to come. Harbingers of a coming storm, they were, as Kelley had it, "designed to be a 'fuck you' to the prevailing popular

culture."[11] In the early to mid-seventies, popular culture and its adherents slumbered to the somnambulant strains of James Taylor and the back-to-nature California dreaming of Neil Young's *Harvest*. The failure of the countercultural rock 'n' roll project, from Hendrix to the MC5 and its subsequent corporate take-over, left (in America at least) a void waiting to be filled.

Kelley was keenly influenced by the psychedelic compositions and communal band arrangements of Sun Ra, as well as the Brechtian theater of Iggy Pop's stage persona—two figures who, Kelley states, taught him all he needed to know about art and performance. He also cites the satiric politics of Frank Zappa and the horror drag of Alice Cooper as influences. His early experiences in Detroit—The Stooges, Sun Ra, the Free Jazz movement, and the street politics of John Sinclair's White Panthers—go some way towards suggesting his formidable DNA.[12] It is a lineage that screams pop, so much that it nearly obscures the key influence of avant-garde figures and their thinking, from Russolo to Cage, from performance artists Bob Flanagan and Mike Smith to obscure cult singers and performers like Yma Sumac and Rod, Teri, and the MSR Singers. Kelley's interests are wide-ranging and necessarily eclectic; they are, as the title of his 1993 Whitney Museum publication has it, catholic in taste.

Rehearsing in Kelley and Shaw's basement at the Gods Oasis Drive In Church, a hippy commune of sorts where nothing but music was shared. The group recorded many of their sessions on cheap recording equipment; the result was co-released many years later on Thurston Moore's Ecstatic Peace label and Byron Coley's Father Yod label. Kelley is one of those rare artists, like his peer John Miller, who wrote extensively about his own work, a practice that owes much to an earlier proto-conceptual generation of artists such as Lawrence Weiner, Dan Graham, Donald Judd, and Robert Smithson. He took it upon himself to counter critical misreadings and to reveal in essay form those minor histories that are otherwise left untold.

Destroy All Monsters was no exception. His decision to pen the facts and frame lost music "to set them up to age" left a map for others to follow. In "To the Throne of Chaos Where The Thin Flutes Pipe Mindlessly," which accompanies the triple CD release *Destroy All Monsters: 1974/77*, Kelley gets to the facts of popular music: that with age, those once "potent fuck beats of your prime become limply infantile." His examples are Cab Calloway who would become the soundtrack of Betty Boop cartoons and Hendrix's songs transplanted to car commercials: no longer speaking the rhythm of their times, they are caught outside of ritual. What was once relevant is now the Muzak of the ancients. As Kelley states, these are the sad observations of the old, for popular music marches in time with flushed youth: one is *in it*, part of pops ritual, not observing from a distance. Here we find Kelley in a reflective mood, considering DAM, the band that never was!:

> Cary and Niagara would take turns on the various songs. Cary had the better voice: a Jim Morrisonesque low tone, but Niagara was the center of attention. Niagara's anti-stage presence was captivating. Her emotionless monotone made Nico sound like a screamer, and generally she sang so softly you could barely hear her over the din. Oftentimes she would sing seated, facing away from the audience, and in one memorable show, she lay on the floor in a fetal position with her head on the pillow inside of the bass drum, letting out a pitiful cry every time the bass was struck, yet unwilling, or unable, to get up.[13]

In DAM's 2009 triple album reissue Niagara—a sickly anti-blonde Marilyn Monroe with riveting anti-stage presence all cheap peroxide hair and ashen skin—begins her *Vampire* chant, a declaration of self as folkloric bloodsucker. The lyrics are delivered in faltering style; crawling from the cave of the mouth festering on the tongue this is Karen Carpenter as the living dead hopped up on Valium and Nyquil. The voice is not feminine sweet or controlled, it stands as one of the punk precursors for a generation to come (Ari Up, Siouxsie Sioux). Of these early recordings it is clear that Niagara is the presiding and authored voice, revealed as person as personality: the "I" of the song. To this extent pop rules are exemplified, the "special" and authored voice is adhered to, as listeners we search for the life in someone's voice that beyond lyrics the material—the tenor of the voice—reveals the person and the body inherent. As the writer Simon Frith has it "the first general point to make about the pop voice, then, is that we hear singers as *personally* expressive, in a way that a classical singer is not." The voice in classical music is on par with the instrument it sits within the score and assumes the role of bass, baritone, tenor or soprano. The pop voice fends its way scoreless, feeling, and in this instance crawling it's way amongst discordant and broken sound. A cover of *Mack the Knife* is delivered in quavering falsetto the lyrics jumbled, semi-audible and full of laughter accompanied by the ring of a triangle and plodding guitar chords. In the background the band can be heard, laughing, audibly present willing her on, a reminder of the ritual of the band the coming together of people. In *Boots* Niagara takes on *These Boots are Made for Walking*. Her vocal delivery floats lazily across a bed of noise, turning this otherwise upbeat song into a choppy psych-rock S&M ballad. *Take Me With You*, Niagara's ode to a dead lover buried in a coffin takes a more standard, vocal and guitar approach. To the extent that such songs—few in number—revert to the rock-and-roll call and response of voice and electric guitar, words, their meaning and delivery disrupt happy relations. In *You Can't Kill Kill,* deadpan word repetition takes death obsession to new and gloriously melancholic and satiric heights. "No,

Niagara performing at a DAM concert.

you can't kill kill. Because it doesn't happen twice."

Kelley's early work with DAM, its small audiences and generally hostile and room-clearing reception, could be described as *of* the people rather than *for* the people. The people in question were Loren, Niagara, Shaw, and Kelley. If popular music form—i.e., the untold rehearsal hours of the garage band—was a process ultimately attuned to its eventual public consumption, then Kelley's music in rehearsal-as-performance is one that satisfies the moment, the coming-together in discord of like-minded artists: improvisers in the sense of Cornelius Cardew and Free Jazz, more living sonic sculpture than rock 'n' roll act. Kelley states, "I am not often that interested in controlling the sounds I make. It is more like play, done for the pure pleasure of experimentation."[14]

DAM was an "art school band"—in his writing, Kelley is clear to make the distinction between art school band and the "art rock" of, say Talking Heads, which formed at the Rhode Island School of Design around the same time as DAM and whose format and instrumentation mimicked the standard rock group. DAM's key instruments were a prepared guitar (courtesy of John Cage) and a drum machine, which the band started using after hearing one on a record by the British band Arthur Brown's Kingdom Come (for example, on "Time Captives," the opening track to the album *Journey*). Alongside drum machine and guitar, Kelley employed various noise-making items, showing the influence he absorbed from the Art Ensemble of Chicago, which employed everything from birdcall whistles to musical toys.

Caught between times, DAM was in the musical no-mans land of the early seventies. Chris Cutler euphemistically describes this period—1969 to 1975—as "the time of the Tiny Flame." Progressive music was kept alive in this period by the likes of Henry Cow in the UK and Frank Zappa in the US. Kelley and the other members of DAM were too young to be hippies and too old, when it finally arrived, to be punk. It wasn't until much later that the connections between DAM and bands of similar spirit and intent could be made, and there were many: from New York's Suicide, to Ohio's Pere Ubu, to San Francisco's The

Screamers.

In order to consider Kelley's music, it is first instructive to identify how much his work dealt with and deployed popular form. He embraced the popular, not as skin or simple surface, but as something that speaks meaningfully of the times. In his essay "The Poet As Janitor," John Miller suggests the a priori motivation and makeup of Kelley the artist as one engaged in class pronouncement. Kelley is seen on the front cover of the catalogue for *Catholic Tastes,* his Whitney Museum retrospective, literally mopping his way into the gallery. Detroit, where Kelley grew up, was a jewel in the Midwest that over time has seen the highs and lows of the American Dream, from Ford's Motor City and General Motor's to riot town, white flight, and righteous race rebellion. This is a history and a city that has provided it's own soundtrack, from Motown to Detroit Techno—a history that Destroy All Monsters has been retrospectively added to, Kelley and DAM's voices finally being heard.

2. The Poetics

> I consider the work to be an exercise in the construction of a history, and specifically a minor history. Minor histories are ones that have yet found no need to be written. Thus they must find their way into history via forms that already exist, forms that are considered worthy of consideration. Thus minor histories are at first construed to be parasitic.
>
> —Mike Kelley[15]

In the 1998 book *Poetics Project*, Kelley and fellow artist Tony Oursler reflect upon the ambitions, germination, and ultimate failure of their joint art-band The Poetics. Kelley's to-the-point essay title "Introduction to an Essay, Which is in the Form of Liner Notes for a CD Reissue Box Set" reveals a history of a band caught between nightclub comedy act, noise music, and British punk's landing on American shores. It was a time of border confusion, when for a moment one could move between disciplines, reminiscent of earlier periods when jazz, folk, and psychedelic music were unashamedly linked to the art world and art production.

The Poetics consists of two main releases: *Remixes of Recordings 1977–1983*, a box set of remixed past material, and *Critical Inquiry in Green*, an investigation of lost music. The Poetics were also the subject of shows at the Watari Museum of Contemporary Art in Tokyo and at Metro Pictures and Lehman Maupin galleries in New York. As Kelley describes it: "The music [of The Poetics] is revealed as not being 'popular,' that is, designed to produce instant gratification, since it gratifies fifteen years too late. Instead, it is art, it is façade."[16] At the root of such a statement sits failure, the sense that the music failed in its resolve to reach people. And yet Kelley defines pop music in the basest of terms—as a form that seeks to "produce instant gratification." It invites the question: Can pop music be both popular and critical?

The birth of The Poetics stemmed in part from the lack of an audience for DAM and the increasing staidness of Ann Arbor. In 1978, Kelley moved to Los Angeles to attend CalArts. The only founding member of DAM that remained was Niagara; with the addition of The Stooges guitarist Ron Asheton, they became what they had initially set out to attack: business-as-usual hard rock. Within a year of moving to LA, Kelley forms The Poetics with Tony Oursler and Don Krieger, both fellow CalArts students. Later they would be joined by artist John Miller.

The name "The Poetics" calls to mind the Aristotle text of the same name, as well as Aristotle's battle with his tutor of twenty years, Plato, a philosopher who had little time for poetry. Aristotle's key quote was crucial for the band: "*Poetry* is finer and more philosophical than *history*; for *poetry* expresses the universal, and *history* only the particular." It echoes Kelley's constant battle with history and his place within it. Kelley describes how he encountered the work of Oursler in a crit class screening of *Joe, Joe's Transsexual Brother and Joe's Woman* (1977). Struck by Oursler's haunting voice and the perverse narratives of his vignettes, Kelley invited him to join the group. Kelley recalls, "I was so impressed with Oursler's morbid vocal quality and his narrative abilities that I immediately asked him to be the vocalist in the band."

> You come home from work
> You turn on the record player
> You hear your favorite music, maybe lay down
> Close your eyes
> You can faaaaaalll into the music
> You can feeeeeelll yourself relaxing
> Into the music
> Parts of your mind you've never used before
> The power that lies there
> Can give you anything
>
> —"Listen Carefully," The Poetics

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Released in 1996 on Kelley's label Compound Annexe, *Remixes of Recordings 1977–1983* presents ninety-one songs over three CDs. No published original exists, putting the fixations of time and place, the "I was there," in doubt. Are these recordings for real? Who are they made for? They exist outside the ritual ecology of time and place, cargo cult from another time beached upon future shores.

The Poetics

"Listen Carefully" establishes the bands relationship to pop music as hypnotic domestic form, evidenced by the scene Oursler describes above. Oursler's low-voiced "The Loner" treats the plight of the lonely individual as that of the B movie monster, never wanted but occasionally loved by the other strange kid in the class. "Nobody out there likes the loner, but somebody out there looooves a loner. The loner is sooo ... alone."

In "Searing Gum," Jim Morrison meets Iggy Pop in Oursler's aggro-delivery of a song written by conceptual artist and CalArts faculty member David Askevold. Many of the lyrics in the collection take the form of short stories, such as "The New Girl," in which the archetypal college girl desperate to fit in hosts a party, and things take a turn for the worse, Boone's Farm wine and all. Bleak shaggy dog stories and abstract jokes meet vocal remonstration, such as in "Rocket #9," where an indecipherable voice freaks out, making way for high pitched wails accompanied by wood-chimes and trumpet.

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In "The Carnal Plane," snoring is accompanied by a far-from-heavenly choir of human wolf sounds, animal grunts, and flatulence. Peppered throughout the collection is a series of interviews conducted by Oursler, some of which are set to music; in "Old Hoger," a young woman describes a séance for a man many had little time for in the flesh, while in "The Little Horn," Oursler interviews a UFO conspiracy theorist.

"Dream Lover," recorded for the program Close Radio on KPFK (hosted by artists Paul McCarthy and John Duncan), features Oursler's loopy demented voice, like something from Walt Disney. "Wait a minute, stop it!" comes a woman's (Kelley's) screeched response.

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"Science Fiction" mixes primal language, scat vocals, and reversed vocals. In a similar vein, "An Unusual Bone" features Oursler's sped up voice, creating a Disney-like character obsessed with an unusual bone constructed from flesh yet unsupported by bone: a reference to the penis, a Throbbing Gristle of another kind. In "Mr.

Orgatron," Oursler converses with an organ: "Hey Mr. Orgatron, how are you doing today? I have a question for you. How come you keep making me play sick things instead of nice peaceful things?" There ensues a call and response between Kelley the organ player, and Oursler the soon to be slaughtered "daughter" of the organ.

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In "Behind the Curtains" the radio detunes between stations while a female voice stuck in in endless loop whispers the title, hinting at something dangerous lurking behind curtained windows. The history of drone music and La Monte Young is taken up in "Tibetan Security Guard," with its droning vocal croak.

In "Copy Cats" (initially developed as a night-club act) Kelley and Oursler follow the instructions on an educational recording to make farm animal noises, from duck to cow, again in search of the primal. "Wilde Child" finds Oursler in a regressive mode, howling like a child raised by wolves.

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Critical Inquiry in Green (1997) begins with "The Poetics (Initial Inquiry)," an audio questionnaire of sorts: "Have you ever heard any music by The Poetics? Ever seen them perform? What was your general impression of their music? How did it relate to the musical scene of the period? Tell me any experience that concerns a wonderful musical experience?" Voiced by Hollywood actor and Kelley's neighbor William Wintersole, the questionnaire probes the listener about his or her interest in the band.[17] The return of The Poetics, after fourteen years of silence, was for Kelley a critical approach to the repackaging of the history of subcultural musical forms—in short, the historicization of UK and US punk.

Critical Inquiry In Green takes an anthropological approach to the demotic popular voice: the probing questionnaire makes way for the knowledge-imparting lecture-cum-esoteric-sermon, which in turn makes way for the B movie horror voice-over. We are subjected to the voice, to its demand for answers and certainties, yet throughout we are reminded of artifice. By the numbers, "popular" suggests choice and ranking among a limited number of commodities. Production, distribution, and marketing set against "economic-realities," set against—for want of a better word—profiteering. To this extent, Kelley's art-bands sit outside the market, within the off-shore currents and experimental sounds that decades later would become pop and "noise." Kelley bumps against the tautology and apparent binary of avant-experimental vs. folk music—the former a process and struggle for affective aesthetic expression (breaking sonic ground), and the latter predicated on shared histories and a communing with like-minded individuals. He is clear in his definition—seemingly hair-splitting yet crucial—of DAM and The Poetics as "art school bands," as opposed to the "art rock bands" like Talking Heads and, later, Sonic Youth.

Notably, before becoming a band The Poetics looked to the blend of prop comedy and the high forms of Bauhaus and the Judson Dance Theater; a video playing at Documenta X reconstructed The Poetics' "Pole Dance," with two dancers moving around the space, extended poles jutting from their rectum and crotch. Kelley's crunch of high and low forms informed much of what would come in his *EAPR Series* and his masterwork *Day is Done*.

3. Day Is Done

> Popular culture's really invisible, people are oblivious to it, but that's the culture I live in and that's the culture people speak. My interest in popular forms wasn't to glorify them, because I really dislike them in most of the cases. All you can really do now is work with the dominant culture, flay it, rip it apart, reconfigure it![18]
>
> —Mike Kelley

Inspired by hundreds of photographs from American high school yearbooks and the holiday pageants, band performances, pep rallies, and Halloween scare parties that they capture, Kelley's large-scale video installation *Day is Done* (2005) comprised a series of elaborate vignettes showcasing what Kelley calls "common American performance types." Each vignette was titled *Extracurricular Activity Projective Reconstruction*, listed from 1 to the proposed 365 videotapes and installations that would make up the completed final work. First experienced as a fifty-screen video installation at the Gagosian Gallery in New York, *Day is Done (Extracurricular Activity Projective Reconstructions #2–#32)* was released as a DVD by the film distributor Microcinema International and as an original motion picture soundtrack on Compound Annexe. It's perhaps one of the first works of art to successfully take on the serial nature of the television drama and the Broadway musical. An anthropological study of American folk culture set largely in an art college—CalArts— *Day is Done* embodies and spins many popular vocal forms, from Broadway show tunes, choral chants, hip-hop, and metal to R&B and soul. *Day is Done* signals Kelley's new approach to popular and subcultural form. No longer something to be celebrated, pop culture is something to be ripped open and satirized. It is also the first time that Kelley has written all of the lyrics.

Drive the train in the tunnel

And around the bend
Put the train in reverse
And drive it in again
Chugga chugga chugga woowoo
Chugga chugga chugga here we go
Engine's overheated and it's going to blow!

—*EAPR#2 (Party Train)*, Mike Kelley[19]

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In *EAPR#2 (Party Train)*, three dancers sing and move through the corridors of CalArts: a samba line of black leotards and white face paint, the musical score kept in time by the "chugga chugga" chant of the dancers. In the next sequence, called *Candle-Lighting Ceremony*, a plump Catholic girl in pigtails calls to the assembled crowd: "I was picked from all my peers to light this light, to allay your fears, to banish darkness, to give it flight." The congregation responds, "Darkness flees it cannot hide, it leaves this room, it goes outside."

In another part of the college, a stand-up comedian-cum-devil tells a lewd joke about a bride and groom. The college is populated with the ghosts, ghouls, and student characters from the year book. It is also populated with the various voices and characters of Kelley's musical history: the stand-up comedian, the vampire, and the ghoul. This time, something has shifted: the improvised music of DAM and The Poetics has become the score, the premeditated act. Popular forms themselves are reheated, brought to life in order to tell a different story. The reductive emotional shorthand of the musical libretto is skewered, made base. What is presented on-screen is always undercut by the lyrics and by the voice.

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The clearest example of vocal parody-cum-pop mash-up is *EAPR#9 (Farm Girl)*. A young girl in dungarees and gingham stands on stage. Behind her is a scaled-down suburban ranch house. The soundtrack begins with dueling banjos and moves into R&B territory with an ecstatic Mary J. Blige-style undulating vocal, which finishes with the rapidly changing pitch of a yodel: suburban pop meets down-South yodeling hick. The lyrics are comprised of potential titles for Kelley's work: "Tijuana hayride. Animal sacrifice. Liberal conspiracy. Pick a mascot. Come strong cutie pie. Peaking through the biomorphic wig. At natures mattress. Organic fuck pit. At Rays Burgers. Two balls burgers. For a young buck. Empty surface facility. Used to mask the hurt inside."

Sex and sexuality, as defined by popular music, looms large. In *EAPR#19 (Black Eyed Susan*), the somber lilt of English court song delivered by a black-eyed female has become one of barely suppressed sexual yearning: "Lurid purple, velvet turtle. Deep inside my purple cave! Like the muffled cry of a kitten drowning in a well!" The world of hip-hop collides with two far right thugs, hair-slicked back sporting leather jackets and swastikas, who in response to the plump Catholic girl begin to rap: "'Hidden under a blanket of lard. Two for one that's what you are! I ride my hog, I don't mean a bike. A big fat chick is what I like."

In *Phat Goth*, a tubby teen-goth stomps to industrial-electronica as she details the ways and means of her occult power. In *Hag Mary*, the virgin voice is tainted, becoming more like Alice Cooper. Kelley also makes several appearances. In *Arbor Day*, he appears as the voice of two bushes, a comic book Southern drawl telling the tale of America. In *Ol' Filthy*, he is cast in the role of the old man prone to subverting the purity of youth, as he has no other purpose than telling dirty stories. In *Morose Ghoul*, he haunts the underpass of the Colorado Bridge in Pasadena, searching for "perky flowers," only to find used condoms.

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Day is Done creates a dialogue with New York and its musical traditions, from Broadway and hip-hop to minimal avant-composition. It is an invocation of the popular that is far from romanticized. Words are valued for their material and physical possibilities as they are turned over and explored in the mouth, passed through the filter of pop traditions. The popular voice is a form of material, something to be stripped down to its component parts and re-articulated, and put to other use.

As with the Goliards, Kelley has taken the popular form of the day, digested it, and rewritten the libretto. Pop has eaten itself, digested its own organs, and in the waste it excretes, Kelley pinpoints its death.

Mike Kelley, performance of Tijuana Hayride, from the show Extracurricular Activity Projective Reconstruction #s 2 through 32 (Day is Done), 2004-2005. Copyright: Mike Kelley.

X

The extended version of this text is to appear in a forthcoming publication on *The Voice in Performance*. The research and subsequent publication is a result of the practice-led Fine Art Ph.D program at Reading University, UK.

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1
Let All Mortal Flesh Keep Silence , Divine Li-tur-gy of St. James, 4th Cen-tu-ry A.D.

2
Mike Kelley, *Foul Perfection: Essays and Criticism* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2002), 101.

3
"Speculum musicae," in *Music, Words and Voice: A Reader* , ed. Martin Clayton Coussemaker (Manchester, UK: Manchester Univ. Press Music, 2008).

4
13th Century papal decree, Pope John XXII.

5
Not for Sale: Noise Panel , 2009. Artists Space, organized by Mark Beasley, Performa 09, NYC.

6
Mike Kelley in conversation with Lee Ranaldo and Mark Beasley, *Performa 09: Back to Futurism* , (Performa publications: 2010).

7
"Carly Mike Kelley: An Interview," Carly Berwick, *Art in America,* (Nov. 2009)

8
"To the Throne of Chaos Where The Thin Flutes Pipe Mindlessly." See http://www.myspace.com/destroyallmonstersdetroit .

9
Nicole Rudick et al., *Return of the Repressed:D estroy All Monsters 1973 –1977* (New York: PictureBox, 2011).

10
"To the Throne of Chaos Where The Thin Flutes Pipe Mindlessly."

11
Nicole Rudick et al., *Return of the Repressed : Destroy All Monsters 1973-1977* , (New York: PictureBox, 2011).

12
Mike Kelley, *Catholic Tastes*, Whitney Abrams, 1993.

13
"To the Throne of Chaos Where The Thin Flutes Pipe Mindlessly."

14
Carly Berwick, "Mike Kelley: An Interview by Carly Berwick," *Art in America* (Nov. 2009) 170–175.

15
Mike Kelley, Tony Oursler, *Poetics Project* , (Watari-UM, 1997).

16
Mike Kelley, Tony Oursler, *Poetics Project* , (Watari-UM, 1997) See https://web.archive.org/web/20120205034510/http://www.mikekelley.com/poeticintro.html .

17
Wintersole also appears in the performance work *Confusion* (1982), and a component slide presentation titled *An Actor Portrays Boredom and Exhibits His Knick Knack Collection* , which shows a sequence of images of the actor with his frog collection assembled on a table.

18
Memory , Art 21 interview with Mike Kelley, Youtube, PBS, 2005.

19
EAPR#2 (Party Train), Day is Done: A Film by Mike Kelley, Microcinema, 2009.

Michael Baers

Michael Asher (1943–2012): Parting Words and Unfinished Work

1.

Early in the afternoon of Wednesday, October 17, I got a call from a friend and fellow alumnus of CalArts with the news that Michael Asher had passed away. I set down the phone and quickly scanned the obituaries in the *Los Angeles Times* and the *New York Times*. And then that sinking feeling set in. I had not been in contact with Michael for some years, but in the nature of a death both expected and untimely (I was aware he was in poor health), I was not prepared for how the news hit me. I was overcome by a wave of remorse: remorse born of a guilty conscience, of kindnesses not paid and obligations unmet; a remorse too late now for any remedy.

I imagined the calls passing back and forth among Michael's colleagues, and especially among his former students, exchanging the various stories and anecdotes that, as if through sympathetic magic, could summon him back. I imagined with equal clarity the many texts—now that his oeuvre is a closed book—that could proceed unhindered by the living artist's stubborn irascibility. How would these texts now position him and to what end? As a practitioner of "situational aesthetics," that procedural version of site-specificity? What, then, of his absolute refusal to conflate the commodity form and the art object? And what of his attitude towards history, or labor, or his longstanding fascination with the intricacies of infrastructure?

These questions are further complicated by an approach to artistic practice that left few physical traces. Michael's work was site-specific, but he took the procedure of approaching a site and using "just elements which already existed without a great modification to the space" through all its possible permutations, this disarmingly simple premise eventually encompassing the synchronic and diachronic dimensions of site—phenomenological time and perceptual space, contingency and determination, ideology and history.[1] And yet, despite the scarcity of physical traces left by his artistic practice and his absence from the many indices by which the art world calculates influence and canonical significance (auction prices, gallery shows, presence in museum and private collections), despite his stubborn and unfashionable solidarity with the working class, and a concomitant abhorrence of the sort of lionization that might endanger his fealty to the category of remunerated labor, I would describe him as the most influential artist of his generation—an ironic superlative considering how neatly he evaded most of the criteria customarily employed in according artistic influence. [2]

Michael Asher (center) with Michael Baers (right) at the author's graduation.

2.

I didn't know who Michael Asher was when in the fall of 2000 I entered graduate school. I recall speaking by phone to a second year grad student who mentioned Michael Asher as one of the art department's most interesting figures, leader of a marathon critique course that met every Friday.

"Michael who?" I asked.

"He's not so well-known," she answered. "He's more of an *artist's* artist." She described a work involving heating pipes that I can now identify as his 1992 installation at Kunsthalle Bern, where he relocated the Kunsthalle's steam radiators to the building's foyer, connecting them to their respective sockets with a network of steel pipes. Thus informed, on registration day, when CalArts' faculty members assembled in the main gallery, sitting behind folding tables to sign students up for courses, I approached Michael Asher, asking if he thought it advisable for an incoming student to take his course. "Why not?," he said, and smiled what I came to know as a characteristic smile, as if he were amused by some private joke.

For those unfamiliar with the Southern California art scene, it is difficult to fully appreciate Michael's influence. It stemmed not only from his pedagogic reputation and the unimpeachable quality of his work, but also from a certain Asher mythos (or, more accurately, ethos). While attending CalArts, I heard all the rumors then in circulation: that his apartment was more of a studio; that he slept on a mattress on the floor; that his closet contained nothing but identical button-down shirts, and his kitchen cabinets, books instead of food; how incessant work and a monochromatic diet taken at a Greek restaurant near his house led to his first physical collapse; how after his mother, Betty Asher, died, he systematically gave away her art collection without regard for personal gain. The germ of a fascination most other artists would envy but to which Asher himself seemed utterly indifferent was contained in the near literary conceit of an art collector's son who developed a practice in which no tangible or sellable object was produced, who not only eschewed artistic commodification but chose to lead a life of such austerity that his refusal of parental largesse appeared like a badge of honor. At least in Southern California, the source of the fascination surrounding Asher the person and Asher the artist lay in this symmetry between his work's absolute refusal of commodification and his personal renunciation

of material acquisitiveness. No other artist I am familiar with was as consistent in carrying over the ideas he espoused in his artwork into the terrain of lived experience.[3]

Since 1977, Michael had earned a large portion of his income teaching at CalArts. In a school that prided itself on experimentation, his post-studio critique class became arguably its most famous innovation.[4] The term "post-studio" was originally coined by John Baldessari, who employed it as an alternative to "conceptual" (and who, coincidentally, first brought Michael to CalArts), but it is Asher who is indelibly associated with it. In my mind, post-studio is scarcely associated with conceptual art, but involves, rather, applying a set of non-formalist criteria to the evaluation of artworks. Beginning Fridays at 10:00 a.m., two students presented their work consecutively, with discussion continuing until mutual consensus deemed it time to stop. Ignoring all scheduling and durational considerations, the class sometimes lasted long into the night—an exhaustive and exhausting approach to critique. (His *Los Angeles Times* obituary quotes Asher from a 2006 interview: "I throw away the clock. There is never enough time to get everything said."[5]. It demands time, the thing, but it demands a delimited time, neither an instant nor an infinite time, but a time determined by a term, in other words, a rhythm, a cadence. The thing is not *in* time; it is or it has time, or rather it demands to have, to give, or to take time—and time as rhythm, that does not befall a homogenous time but that structures it originarily." (Thanks to Christine Würmell for pointing out this passage.) Jacques Derrida, *Given Time: I. Counterfeit Money*, trans. Peggy Kamuf (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1992), 41.]) The end result of these sessions was invariably the establishment of, to quote Michael, "the disparity between what a person says their work is about and what is actually being observed": where a work's internal logic broke down; where it relegated to a representational schema what the artist wished to produce as a function; where the often vaguely framed or incoherent intentions of the artist were in themselves contradictory.[6] If, as Lacan said, the unconscious is structured like a language, it is also a tongue that marshals speech, without our cognizance or agency, to its own inscrutable ends. The process of submitting to critique, of observing it or participating in it, felt not only revelatory of how ideology becomes physically embodied in reification, but also discomfiting, for it demonstrated without fail the inevitability with which one's neurotic mentations penetrated the structural and conceptual schemes of one's art practice.

Post-studio critique was mythic, and the almost ritualistic set of conventions that lent it this status (place, duration, discursive scene) were the perhaps necessary outward traces setting it apart as event, as occasion. Some of this had to do with CalArts' unique architectural qualities. Built into a sloping hill, the institution's main building is abundantly supplied with classrooms devoid of natural light, and Michael's course took place in such a room, giving what occurred there the sense of existing apart from the rhythms of everyday temporality. I once asked him why he chose this particular classroom, which possessed the added disadvantage of heightening postprandial somnolence. He answered—and something of this exchange has the Asheresque quality of a levity masking more consequential matters—that he chose a classroom without windows so we would be more aware of the sun.

While I recall few particulars of the discussions that took place in post-studio critique classes, I do remember discussions having a hermetic quality, an unduplicatable gestalt. The circling and at times frustrating recursivity of a discussion thread would warp back on itself like a Möbius strip, before eventually leading us to the kernel at the center of a work's failure. What transpired was often contextual, resistant to description. Roland Barthes used the term "grain" to describe the uniquely embodied quality of vocal music. One might equally apply the term to the characteristics of thought—the *grain* of thought—as being the unique and irreducible surplus of a sequence of logical or analytic statements. A turn of phrase, a characteristic intonation, a way of placing stress on a concept are also inseparable qualities of thought, and it is typical of the influence of Michael's thought that this idea is at once cerebral and inseparable from notions of embodiment. The alchemical process that transformed our criteria into something like insight remains difficult to identify. I suppose this is just a complicated way of saying that what constitutes a gifted teacher is not so much an ability to transmit knowledge as the talent for creating an environment where knowledge is receivable.

I once asked Michael how he got the idea for his post-studio course. He answered: "Plato."

3.

In the summer of 2002 I graduated from CalArts, and that fall I began working for Michael as a researcher on a project that remains unrealized—an analysis of the adaptive re-use of factory space by contemporary art institutions in the European Union. In fact, the essay you are now reading may be the first public discussion of this project.

As I understood it, Michael was researching adaptive re-use for a prospective show at the Generali Foundation in Vienna, an institution itself housed in a converted hat factory. One permutation of Michael's eschewal of adding anything to a site had previously resulted in a diachronic approach to site-specificity. His 1992 work for BOZAR in Brussels, for instance, demonstrated how extrapolating from a site's prior function (in that case, a newspaper archive) could offer insight into how any specific site "is

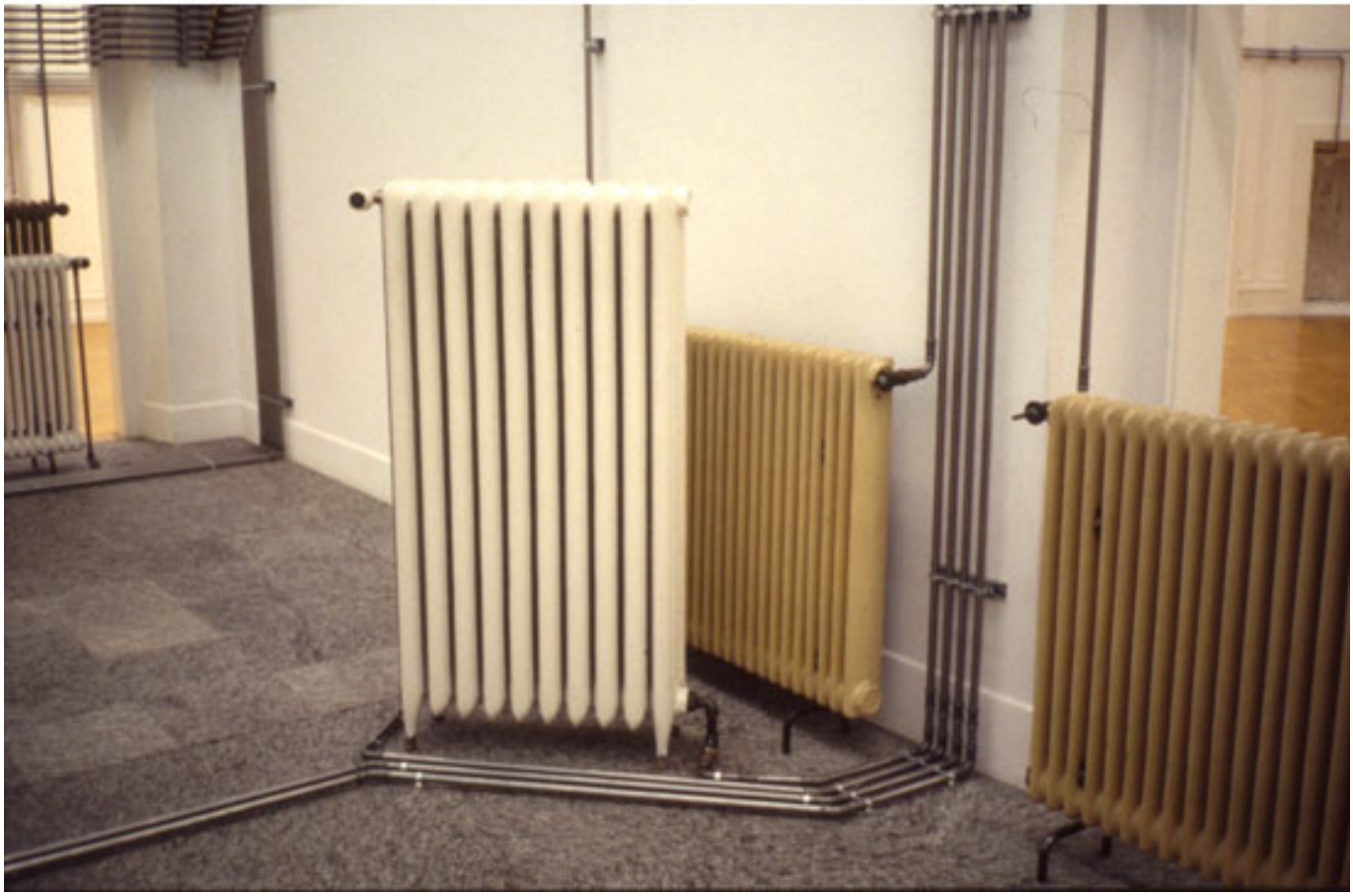
Michael Asher, Untitled, 1991. Permanent installation at UC San Diego.

covered over by realities, representations, decors, and settings … a serried network of semblances" extending far beyond a particular locale.[7]His proposal for the Generali Foundation repeated this approach on a grand scale, encompassing not only the particulars of the Generali's architectural history, but the broader social, political, and economic transformations in which it was enmeshed.

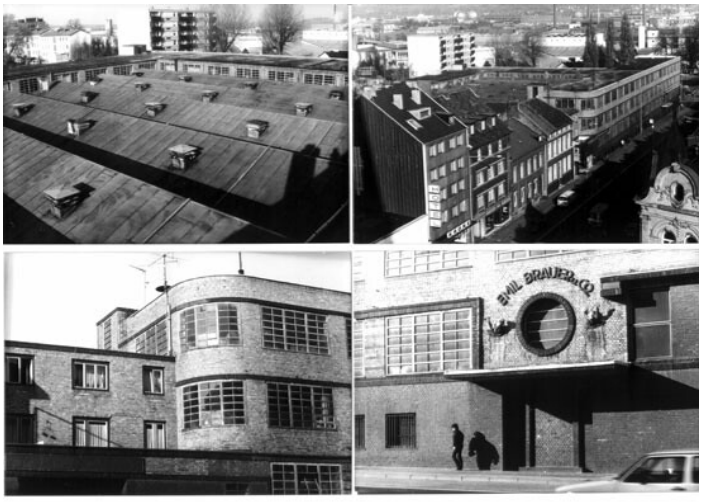
To begin work, Michael asked me to come by his apartment in an anonymous section of West Los Angeles, near where the 405 and Santa Monica Freeway intersect, to familiarize myself with the extant research. He met me at the door, ushering me into a modest one-bedroom apartment, a kind of reduction of your typical postwar ranch-style house. The living room was dominated by rows of black file cabinets; in a corner opposite the front door, a piece of plywood covered with butcher paper and mounted on trestles served as Michael's desk. Next to a small adjacent kitchen stood a grey metal bookshelf. Each shelf was secured with a bungee cord against the threat of earthquakes. The only other pieces of furniture consisted of two chromium-plated tubular steel chairs, whose upholstering consisted of little more than those pieces of desiccated foam padding still adhering to their backing, and a replica of a Gerrit Rietveld armchair given to him, Michael said, by a former student.

Michael positioned one of the steel chairs in front of a narrow gap between two file cabinets overlaid with a piece of plywood, creating for me an improvised desk, and explained the research. He detailed how he and the other researchers working on the project had set about identifying institutions similar to the Generali—institutions housed in converted factories, showing contemporary art, and possessing international collections. Then, handing me an extra key to push through the front door mail slot when I finished, he got up to leave for a doctor's appointment. On his way out, he glanced around the apartment, and in his laconic way said, "Yeah, there's a lot to see here." Then he left.

A few days later I began my work in earnest. Assigned to locate relevant institutions in Austria, Germany, Scandinavia, and the former Eastern Bloc, I started the search by combing through a extensive list of museums, eventually investigating in greater detail an Austrian institution, a former salt warehouse in the Tirol. Michael gave me a list of thirteen questions that concerned the material history of the *Salzlager*, covering all changes of function and ownership, architectural modifications, and the prior use and ownership of the land before the *Salzlager* was constructed. The work was slow and exacting, and my correspondence with Austrians knowledgeable about the salt industry frequently delayed by their vacations and travel plans. It was also complicated by Michael's admonition that I avoid using his name in correspondence. This directive piqued people's curiosity rather than limit their interest in my employer's identity. I



Michael Asher, Kunsthalle Bern, 1992, 1992. Copyright: Kunsthalle Bern.



Photographs of prior uses of the building now housing Ludwigsforum, Aachen.

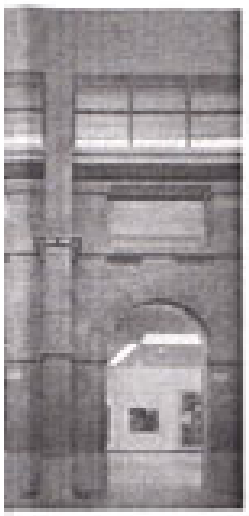
eventually submitted an extensive report encompassing not only the built history of the hall, but the history of the Austrian salt industry itself. My conclusion, however, was anticlimactic: the *Salzlager* could not be included in the project as it had no permanent collection. Since the local municipality had withdrawn funding, it was no longer even used for exhibitions, but was now rented out for parties, weddings, and festivals.

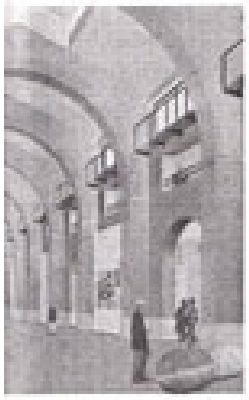
By the time I completed this report, I had relocated to Berlin with my then-partner, Christine Würmell, with whom I collaborated on much of the research. Having eliminated all the sites in Austria, we focused our attention on German institutions, eventually identifying four museums that fit Michael's criteria. It was immediately apparent that our research was not going to be straightforward. It was not only the effects of the two World Wars and their disruption to German society that caused our difficulties: even relatively simple cases presented unforeseen complications. The Ludwigsforum in Aachen, for instance, is housed in a former Emil Brauer & Co. umbrella factory, but when we contacted the city archive to ask how many different umbrella models the factory produced, we learned that, besides normal umbrellas, the factory also made custom-built ceremonial umbrellas for royalty—a tantalizing fact, but in the context of our research, an exasperating wrinkle.[8]]. The factory thus sold the building to the city of Aachen."]

Ceremonial umbrellas were nothing compared to the complexities we encountered elsewhere. Take the Neues Museum Weserburg. It is located on a narrow spit of land—the " *Teerhof*"—at the northern end of a peninsula separating the Weser and the Little Weser Rivers, an area already well developed in the thirteenth century. The *Teerhof* premises later to become a museum went through a dizzying number of changes in architecture and use before they were utterly destroyed in bombing raids during WWII. After the war, its main tenant, the Schilling Coffee Company, set up their roastery in the building's cellar before rebuilding the premises, which became a museum in 1991. In the age of the internet, perhaps this welter of information does not seem too great a challenge, but in the years before Google, locating information about the history of the successive businesses occupying the premises was difficult, to say nothing of the various renovations and additions, a fact compounded by Michael's request that we avoid contacting the museum directly.[9]

The apotheosis of our research difficulties, however, was the ZKM Museum of Contemporary Art in Karlsruhe, an institution housed in a section of what was once the largest munitions factory in Europe. Construction of the *Industriewerke Karlsruhe* plant, a building consisting of a row of ten atria, was completed just as WWI came to an end. Just as it came on line, the Versailles Treaty stipulated the factory shift to non-military manufacture. In the interwar period, it produced a dizzying array of products ranging from bicycles to kitchenware. Considering the confusion of the immediate postwar economic situation and in the absence of a local industrial archive, finding out which goods had been produced in the specific atria housing the art museum appeared a task of insurmountable difficulty.

Christine and I worked on Michael's research until I moved to New York to attend the Whitney Independent Study Program (ISP), and from there I rotated between the ISP and the main branch of the New York Public Library. In August I returned to Berlin in a state of profound emotional distress, but with an abundance of research. Despite my disequilibrium, or perhaps to combat it, I began drafting updated reports and researching a final institution, the International Artists' Museum in Łódź, Poland. In 1795, Poland was partitioned by Germany, Russia, and the Hapsburg Empire (the third and last partition in a twenty-three-year period) and carved into separate administrative zones. Then in the 1830s, following the Polish economy's "liberalization," investors and managers from Germany and England flocked to the German zone, which encompassed Łódź, to set up textile mills; the International Artists' Museum was housed in such a mill. It presented its own unique difficulties for the researcher. Finding out the exact size and address of the museum was no easy task, and attempts to locate via telephone archival material in Łódź's various historical museums was also frustrated by employees who were averse to communicating in anything but their native tongue.[10]Then I made contact with a British entrepreneur and specialist in industrial preservation who was involved with local efforts to preserve Łódź's derelict but mainly intact nineteenth-century industrial landscape. As coincidence would have it, he was organizing a conference in Łódź and urged me to attend. One after-effect of the Communist era, he explained, was the reluctance of museum and archive employees (in which Łódź's industrial past had been carefully documented) to





1989: Because of its location and historic value, the old slaughterhouse was chosen by the city of Toulouse to become the site of the contemporary art museum.
1990: The buildings are registered to the "Inventaire Supplementaire des Monuments Historiques" (historic monuments).
1995: The architects Antoine Stinco and Remi Papillault win the competition to transform the building.
The city associated a local/traditional architect, Remi Papillault, who had experience renovating Urbain Vitry buildings, with an architect with a more radical and contemporary background, Antoine Stinco from Paris.
The new plans brought back Vitry's design. First, the additions to the 1827 Bagiani plan were distroyed. The 2 pavillions parallel and South of the main hall were rebuilt. To maintain Vitry's design yet add more space, the architects designed 2 underground levels under the old slaughter hall.
1996: The building permit is obtained.
1997: Construction work began.
The nave was where the permanent collection and temporary exhibitions were displayed. The new underground spaces extended the exhibition space, and was also designed for storage of the collection, conservation workshops, as well as an auditorium.
The pavillions on the North side of the central building was used for museum administration. The pavillions on the South became the documentation center, library and multimedia room.
The semi-circular building by the river was adapted for children workshop and cafeteria.
2000: The museum was inaugurated.

MICHAEL ASHER

FOR M. BARS

8/28/05

Annotated document by Michael Asher, undated.

share information via phone or e-mail. All the information I was looking for was carefully preserved in the archives, said the British entrepreneur, but I would have to go there in person.

I called Michael and communicated the entrepreneur's advice. He was unwilling to fund the trip. I was not especially surprised, as he had previously resisted all suggestions that we visit sites. I knew Michael was funding this research mainly out-of-pocket, and I knew his generosity as a pedagogue did not extend to financial matters. Nonetheless, I could not see how to proceed with his research. I completed my pending reports, packed up the research materials I had collected at the New York Public Library over the summer, and sent them off, considering the matter closed. Although there were occasions when working on a project by the artist I admired more than almost any other was immensely satisfying, there were more times when my employment was a matter of frustration to us both. I saw him once more during a visit to Los Angeles the following January. Then we lost contact.

4.

In late October, before leaving on a trip to Vienna, I located what remained of my adaptive re-use research material in a box of old clothes and computer equipment. Amongst the miscellaneous papers and remnants of my research, I found an unopened manila envelope Michael had posted in August 2005. It contained a timeline prepared by a fellow researcher of Les Abattoirs, a contemporary art museum in Toulouse. A note in Michael's characteristically shaky hand read: "Dear Michael, It makes me truly uncomfortable to send out material like the enclosed. But if it is something that will help you to focus, perhaps it is necessary. If you have any doubt about your ability to protect it please return it. Michael Asher."

While I am surprised I did not open it, I also see a certain Lacanian irony in the contents of this letter that was delivered but did not reach its recipient. It also made me very, very sad. There is no further reason now to protect the document enclosed. Today, in fact, the obverse is the case.

The matter of Michael Asher's final, unrealized project is of more than peripheral importance, and I have described my experience at length to ensure that the project's conceptual parameters are marked with his imprimatur. I view it as the culmination of his work on the intersection between site, class, ideology, and history—his interest in understanding the real as a negotiation between the historical and structural basis of reality, arrived at through "epistemological procedures of which the archive is the cipher and research the mode."[11] More specifically, by focusing on the architectonic conflation of sites of industrial production with sites of cultural production, Asher created a neat one-to-one relationship between the normally separate spheres of economy and culture—articulated not as an exterior fact but as the basis of every exhibition staged on the Generali Foundation's premises.

But why was it never realized?

While in Vienna, I spoke with a staff member at the Generali Foundation. I learned discussions between Michael and the Foundation dated back to the mid-90s, and the adaptive re-use project was only one of several concepts considered. While it was taken seriously enough for the Generali to launch its own adaptive re-use investigation, ultimately Michael and former director Sabine Breitwieser elected to pursue a retrospective exhibition—a concept that had also been under discussion. Suffice it to say that in 2006 Michael returned his first payment for the sale of *No Title* (1965-67) (Forced Air Column) to the Foundation and with that the matter was concluded. Exhibition planning is rarely a straightforward affair, especially when it involves an artist as meticulous as Michael Asher: this account should be considered nothing more than a preliminary sketch. In any event, it is not the time to delve further into the matter.

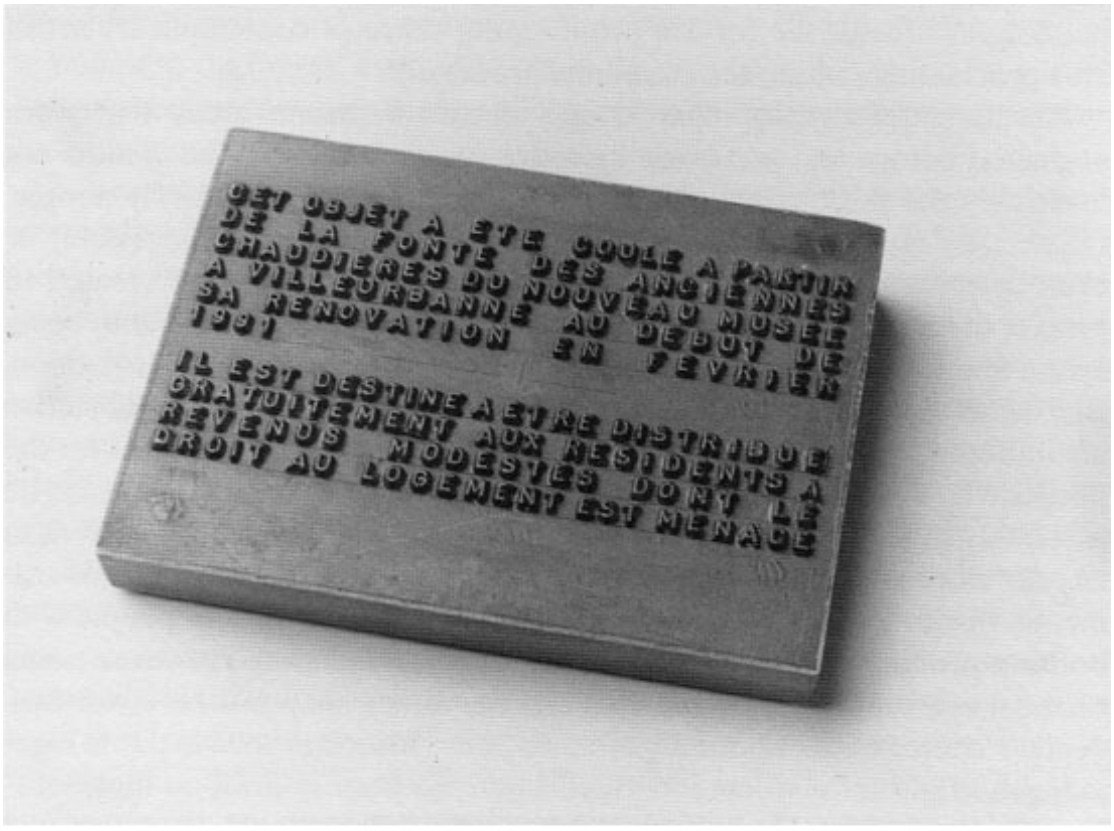
5.

I once heard Mary Kelly say that most male conceptual artists used the language of scientific objectivity without considering the question of their own desire in the matter. While I do not exactly include Michael Asher in the category of "male conceptual artist," the nature of his desire is of some consequence. What Michael intended his adaptive re-use project to look like remains unknown, although fellow researchers say he continued working on the project after the Generali Foundation exhibit's cancellation. He took it seriously enough for it to point to the questions I raised at the beginning of this text: How will his artistic legacy be framed? How will the paucity of artifacts relating to his practice effect this process? In refusing the art object as such (including foreclosing the possible fetish-status detritus of his installations might acquire by contractually obligating host institutions to destroy any remainders), Michael insisted on the absolute temporal and spatial specificity of his artwork. With the exception of three permanent installations, Michael's legacy exists solely in catalogues, books, and publications, and in the documentation collected in his personal archive or in the archives of the institutions he worked with—a triumph of the indexical over the material object.[12] on the Campus [*sic*]] of the University of California, San Diego, where he placed a fully functional granite replica of a commercial indoor drinking fountain on a grassy island between a flagpole and a rock with a plaque commemorating the Marine Corps training ground that once occupied the site. The third was a project for the

Michael Asher, Installation Münster (Caravan), 2007. Skulptur Project Münster.

international exposition Daejeon Expo '93, in South Korea, for which he placed a rock on an island in a man-made lake. On the rock, a text is engraved in Korean: 'ASSUMING THAT THE ARRAY OF STRUCTURES WHICH CONSTITUTE THE IMMEDIATE SURROUNDINGS WERE DESIGNED FOR US SPECTATORS, IT ENABLES US TO ASK: WHO BENEFITS FROM OUR NAVIGATING BETWEEN DISPLAYS OF CORPORATE LEGITIMATION AND REPRESENTATIONS OF POWER?'"] But his work also resides, it can be said, in the minds of those who have encountered his oeuvre, since even in its paper form, Asher's work retains a remarkable plasticity (although there the very clarity of his concepts carries with it the danger of obviating the spatial and experiential—i.e., sculptural—aspect of his work).

This type of mediation gives rise to a danger that is now quite clear: without the actual work itself (and with the idea of reconstituting nearly every work in his ouevre amounting to a perversion), it is up to his professional interlocutors to enact a secondary enframement, describing for us what the various interventions Michael created meant and who they were meant for. In other words, his legacy risks becoming a plaything bequeathed to critics and art historians. Already one sees some inkling of this process in his several published obituaries, with Jori Finkel of the *Los Angeles Times* writing that "unlike the work of some other artists grouped under [the institutional critique] umbrella, Asher's was not fueled by political dogma as much as intelligence and curiosity." In a similar vein, the *New York Times'* Randy Kennedy wrote that Michael "sought to use art to awaken people's perceptions to the complex, subtle, often unexpectedly beautiful nature of their everyday visual landscape." While daily newspapers are perhaps unlikely venues for an appreciation of the politics in Michael Asher's work, that both writers assiduously sideline a concern so consequential to his production portends an ominous



Michael Asher, Rénovation = Expulsion, 1991. Edition of 700 paperweights made from old cast iron boilers from Le Nouveau Musée, Lyon, recovered by the artist during its renovation and made available to housing associations. Paperweights cannot be sold. Photo: André Morin.

trend.

Michael Asher, Untitled, 1991. Installation at Le Consortium, Dijon.

Something has been left out of these obituaries. This omission involves not only the ways in which art institutions buttress the presuppositions foundational to bourgeois subjectivity, but also how, as institutions, they frequently operate in ways contrary to the interests of working class populations—on the semiotic level of affirmative culture and in those concrete instances where art museums act as agents of gentrification. For a project Michael executed at Le Nouveau Musée in Lyon, the obsolete cast iron boiler of the museum was smelted down and transformed into 700 paperweights, impressed on one side with contact information for two local housing rights associations, and on the other with the following statement: "This object comes from the old furnace of Le Nouveau Musée at the beginning of its renovation in February 1991. It is to be distributed for free to people of low income who have housing problems."[13] In his introduction for the exhibition catalogue, Michael wrote,

> As the neighborhood of the 3rd, 4th, and 7th arrondissement of Lyon were either in jeopardy of redevelopment or were already greatly transformed as communities which no longer could be affordable to meet the needs of those families whose ancestors established their homes and businesses [there], it was not difficult to understand how a sign of renovation was one of the important keys for speculators' equations for the justification of future development.[14]

The more or less recondite arguments found in essays explicating Asher's work often gloss over this central aspect of his art—that he perceived his practice as both operating in contradistinction to the omnipresent, corrosive logic of the art market, *and* as a type of art in the service of a particular class: the worker. For Asher, the artist did not abide on some mythic plane of unalienated expression. S/he was constituted, through intellectual or physical work, as one category of alienated laborer.

I don't think Michael observed developments in the world situation or the world of art with equanimity—especially in the last two decades, when art has come to be spoken of increasingly as one asset among many in a diversified investment portfolio. The high standards Michael adhered to in his personal practice, and in his precise, incessant drive to root out the processes of reification he found in his students, was not without its corrosive effect. I know of at least one student who gave up art after encountering the absoluteness inherent in Asher's project of critical negation and his refusal to accommodate the market in ways even the most political among us accede to—as a matter of course and a perfect expression of life under late capitalism. His example constituted the terminus of a sort of critical engagement that even in the early 2000s risked appearing quaint when compared with the behavior of his contemporaries. It remained up to us—his students—to rework his procedures for our contemporary ends. Most of us failed, and this failure was also the refusal of an obligation to which Michael never made us explicitly submit but was there as a subtext in the logic of his practice and his life. Perhaps, as recently published reminiscences have emphasized, he was capable of frequent and abundant laughter. What this laughter signified is a different matter.

X

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1
Unpublished note of Michael Asher quoted in Benjamin H.D. Buchloh, "Michael Asher and the Conclusion of Modernist Sculpture," in *Neo-Avantgarde and Culture Industry: Essays on European and American Art from 1955 to 1975* (Cambridge and London: The MIT Press, 2000), 20.

2
See Eric Golo Stone, "A Document of Regulation Reflexive Process: Michael Asher's Contractual Agreement Commissioning Works of Art (1975)," posted August 12, 2011 to *Art and Education* http://web.archive.org/web/20110917140617/http://www.artandeducation.net/paper/a-document-of-regulation-and-reflexive-process-michael-asher%E2%80%99s-contractual-agreement-commissioning-works-of-art-1975/ .

3
Two related anecdotes spring to mind. In 2003, when the Los Angeles real estate market was approaching its peak, I asked Michael if the reason he rented an apartment had to do with his refusal of private property. He answered in the affirmative. Similarly, I recall the glee with which he recounted his one realized private commission, where he moved a wall on the southern edge of the house of a Beverly Hills collector eleven inches to the north: in effect, the collector paid for an excision to his private property.

4
One might speak of a culture of critique particular to Los Angeles-area art schools originating from Michael's class. Mike Kelley and Jeremy Gilbert-Rolfe both initiated versions at Pasadena Art Center, while Mary Kelly is also known as a proponent of a specific critique style in which students begin by speaking only about a work's concrete appearance for a given period of time, before proceeding to interpretation. Thus, each academy was invested in advocating for the rigor of its critical apparatus. Although Asher's class was by far the most storied, by the time I attended art school, Asher's course, as well as the CalArts visiting artist lecture series, were both far tamer events. As I have written elsewhere, the storied days of the 1990s were passed down to those of us who came later as a time when grad students had forsaken object-making altogether in favor of discourse and nurturing antagonisms that were often vented in Michael's class. With some regret, I fail to recall an occasion when the level of rancor I experienced exceeded what might occur on your average high school debate team.

5
In an oft-repeated quote, Barbara Kruger is said to have advised CalArts students to take Michael's class because no one in the art world would ever devote four or five hours to talking about their work. In essence, then, what Michael Asher offered in his class was the gift of time (just as the temporal specificity of his work offered another sort of gift of non-exchangeable, unequivocal time). There is reason for further reflection here, for while Michael established a contract for his work based on wage labor, it occurs to me now that the relationship between his salary from CalArts and the amount of time he devoted to teaching his class was also organized to emphasize its relation to the gift. There is a passage in *Given Time: I. Counterfeit Money* where Jacques Derrida elaborates on the gift's temporality: "The gift is not a gift, the gift only gives to the extent it *gives time*. The difference between a gift and every other operation of pure and simple exchange is that the gift gives time. *There where there is gift, there is time.* What it gives, the gift, is time, but this gift of time is also a demand of time. The thing must not be restituted *immediately and right away* . There must be time, it must last, there must be waiting—without forgetting [*l'attente—sans obubli*

6
I recall one critique concerning a meter-high, all-white, knitted wall hanging that spelled out the word "colonialism." At one end, a strand of yarn attached to an electric motor slowly unwound the knitting, undoing the substantial labor that had gone into making the piece. We gathered on folding chairs in a semicircle around the work, and slowly the logic of the piece was undone by the critique as surely as by the electric motor—a dehiscence in which it emerged that the artist's wish for an end to colonialism was more fundamental to understanding the work than anything specific about what colonialism is and how it remains active in our ostensibly postcolonial epoch.

7
Birgit Pelzer, "Byways of History," in the catalogue for *Michael Asher: Palais des Beaux-Arts de Bruxelles* (Brussels: La Société des Expositions du Palais des Beaux-Arts Bruxelles, 1995), 36.

8
An example of the type of quotidian detail that contributed to remaking the European cultural landscape is found in our answer to question number twelve on Michael's form: "Q: What caused the transfer in ownership from one owner to another? A: Production stopped in Germany, they only imported umbrellas, and the containers didn't fit through the entrance [3.8m high and above workers' apartments

9
Christine had translated portions of a book on the *Teerhof*, and while recently discussing the research we conducted, she mentioned that her participation in an exhibition at the Weserburg in 2011 cleared up a great deal of the difficulty in understanding the history of the museum's premises that we had encountered while reading this text.

10
As I learned recently from reading the Wikipedia entry on the museum's founder, Ryszard Wasko, at the time of my research, the museum's premises had already been sold by the Łódź municipality to a private bank, and this bank had then proceeded to destroy the site-specific works comprising the museum's collection. I was thus involved, I now realize, in a complicated shell game where the museum's supporters were trying to conceal this salient fact—which, in retrospect, explains the lengthy gap in the museum's published exhibition record.

11
Frederick Leen, "Archive and Index," in the catalogue for *Michael Asher: Palais des Beaux-Arts de Bruxelles* (Brussels: La Société des Expositions du Palais des Beaux-Arts Bruxelles, 1995) 52–53.

12
In footnote 4 of her essay "Procedural Matters: Andrea Fraser on the Art of Michael Asher," published in the summer 2008 issue of *Artforum*, Fraser supplies the following helpful information: "Asher has made only three permanent works. The first is a project for private collectors in Los Angeles that he completed in 1978. The second is a 1991 project for the Stuart collection [*sic*

13
In the Autumn/Winter 2000 issue of *Afterall*, Allan Sekula wrote: "The preoccupation with the flows of waste, with plumbing and heating—with what, in American parlance, are termed 'utilities'—is central to Michael Asher's work. The realm of culture is always shadowed by the realm of utility, in an often very funny enactment of the old-fashioned Marxist hierarchy of base and superstructure, grafted onto an appreciation of the specific Duchampian origins of the readymade."

14
Quoted from Michael Asher, "Introduction," in *Renovation = Expulsion* (Lyon: Le Nouveau Musée, centre d'art, 1991), 6. The following is from an interview published in *Merge Magazine* about Michael's contribution to the 1999 exhibition "Museum as Muse" at MOMA: Michael Asher: Another indirect aspect of my work deals with the relationship between the working classes and acquisitions and de-acquisitions of works of art by museums. I wondered why these classes oppose de-accession — of course, they are not the only ones. Its one of the things I find very complicated and really interesting. I think one of the reasons is, consciously or unconsciously, they are aware that or they identify with the fact that their labor made possible the purchase of these works of art. Stephen Pascher: How do you mean? Michael Asher: I mean that their labor was responsible for generating enough profits for company owners to purchase gifts. Gifts to museums are often the result of these purchases. Once these works of art become public, that is, part of a museum collection, they become part of the culture of that community, and when institutions de-accession a work or sell it off, they are taking it away from that community — removing it from the consciousness of the community to which the works have become valued possessions. And that's a speculation, but I really think it's true that people have a close bond and relationship with these works of art, not only due to their own labor, but due to the fact that they

live in these communities. And the works become a part of the communities, and that's why it's very hard to unglue them, and where there is opposition. (Michael Asher and Stephen Pascher, "Cave Notes," *Merge Magazine* #5 (Summer 1999): 26.)

Cédric Vincent

Friction in Benin

On November 6, 2012, e-flux circulated an announcement with misleading information about a biennial or two in Benin. Cédric Vincent wrote this important essay on how that announcement gave form to the way information spins a dispersed and globalized art world in many directions simultaneously, for better or for worse. We didn't know to publish this essay in the November 2012 issue of e-flux journal because Cédric hadn't written it yet, but we can now include it in that issue as a message to the past.

—Julieta Aranda, Brian Kuan Wood, Anton Vidokle
(December 30, 2013)

Everything was looking good for the second edition of the Benin biennial. On November 6, 2012, an announcement for the biennial appeared. There was, however, a strange problem with the announcement.[1] While the event announced had the exact same theme as the exhibition going up right before my eyes ("Inventing the World: The Artist as Citizen"), as well as the same artistic director and identical dates, there were a few incongruities: the list of sponsors had changed, as had the show locations and, most importantly, the lineup of artists had been totally revised. Moreover, the event as a whole had undergone a slight but significant name change. Whereas before it had been called "Biennale Bénin 2012," now it was titled "Biennale Regard Benin 2012." Unless some serious last-minute changes had occurred, there was only one possible conclusion: one event had become two. Indeed, such was the case. The strange announcement was not for the event I was witnessing go up, but for a completely different, if similar-sounding, event. From November 8, 2012 to January 13, 2013, two contemporary art biennials centered on the exact same theme took place simultaneously in Benin.

However, for visitors who weren't aware of the double-dutching going on, Biennale Bénin 2012 was the only biennial occurring in Benin during those months. It took place in a disused department store called Centre Kora, and the artistic director was Moroccan curator Abdellah Karroum.[2] Karroum's plans for the show were quite ambitious. His goal was to go beyond the habitual, to cast his gaze beyond Africa and its diasporas—a laudable intention and a most effective way of positioning Biennale Bénin vis-à-vis Dak'Art and SUD (Douala), both of which have a resolutely Pan-African focus.

The first edition of the Benin biennial, held two years earlier, in 2010, had been a fairly modest affair. It was not a major group show, but rather a mobilization of Cotonou's principal arts institutions, including a series of open

studios. Though unspectacular, the event allowed visitors to discover diverse arts spaces and cultural organizations scattered around the city. Coinciding with the fifty-year celebration of Benin's independence, the biennial benefitted from the accompanying media attention.

The second edition of the Benin biennial, officially titled "Biennale Bénin 2012," employed a fairly conventional approach: a group show presented as an international undertaking, bringing together some forty artists around the theme "Inventing the World: The Artist as Citizen." Its statement of intent, published in the first issue of the *Biennale Journal*, offered little in the way of explanation: "The artist as citizen," wrote Karroum, "takes upon himself the task of transmission that gives meaning to his work, in an extension of research in/on the domain of art, toward societal action." A few key themes emerged: a sharing of forms of knowledge; a determination to transcend borders; a focus on art as linked to, or in the service of, the social.

In light of these first two iterations of the Benin biennial, the challenge for Biennale Regard Benin 2012—lest its organizers lose face—was to propose a quality program on the same theme as Biennale Bénin, but with a far smaller budget. For a sense of how serious the challenge was for Regard Benin, it's useful to review some budgetary numbers: while Biennale Bénin had serious money—260 million CFA (around USD 518,000)—Regard Benin had only 50 million CFA (a little under USD 100,000).[3]

The organizers of Regard Benin chose to follow the model used in the 2010 Benin biennial. By partnering with a range of local institutions and businesses, which lent their spaces for exhibiting works, Regard Benin mounted a decentralized event. While the Biennale Bénin installation was more convincing from a curatorial point of view, Regard Benin's use of independent structures and the deployment of site-specific installations were effective civic gestures. This was so not only because spaces to show art are few and far between in Benin, but also because the theme chosen by Regard Benin—"Inventing the World: The Artist as Citizen"—lent itself well to a performative treatment.

The decision by Regard Benin to use the exact same theme as Biennale Bénin was so crude that it suggested a desire on the part of Regard Benin for visitors to mistake the two events as a single, unified biennial. Only those in the know could tell where one event ended and the other began. At the end of the day, Regard Benin could position itself as the action-based complement to Biennale Bénin.

To clear things up, an official decree was published in late September 2012, signed by none other than the Minister of Culture, Jean-Michel Abimbola. The decree stated unequivocally that Dominique Zinkpè was the executive director of Biennale Bénin 2012. A key figure in the local arts scene, Zinkpè was one of the initiators of the first Benin biennial in 2010. That's why it would be a mistake to say that Abdellah Karroum was the sole organizer of Biennale Bénin 2012. The whole thing was, in fact, coordinated by the Consortium, an entity run by Zinkpè. This decree could have discouraged the organizers of Regard Benin, but it did precisely the opposite: embittered, they took to working even harder.

On Wednesday, November 7, 2012, the day after the Regard Benin announcement was released, a press conference was held at Centre Artisttik Africa. Ousmane Alèdji, the Centre's director and a staunch supporter of Regard Benin, offered some rather misleading remarks. He expressed relief at the fact that the 2012 edition of the Benin biennial was being held under the name "Regard Benin." After hearing him speak, one was left with the impression that the name was what mattered most. (The 2010 biennial, as well as the organization that resulted from it, had borne the name "Regard Benin.")

In his press conference, Alèdji resorted to the hackneyed rhetoric of cultural dispossession in order to defend *his* biennial:

> For the sake of our country, we wanted this international market to be grandiose. Yet—nothing here you don't know—it has suffered due to attempts at recuperation, or worse, appropriation. We have always sought, and we will continue to seek, to explain to our partners, even the most important, that the market of which I speak is Béninois and that it is legitimate that Benin and its people should remain in control of it. To say this is not to pick a fight, but to express a conviction. This market is ours and we will continue to claim it as long as others seek to take it over.

As Alèdji's comments suggest, the aim was less to offer an alternative event or a counter-biennial than to ensure the survival of the Regard Benin label, lest it disappear behind the other event's name. If this was the goal, then the gambit proved successful. Go to your browser and enter the words "Biennale Bénin": you'll be directed to the Regard Benin site. No hacking involved; it's just that the Biennale Bénin site is down. It must have been exceedingly difficult for media outlets to figure out what was what.[4]

Bearing in mind the foregoing, let us return to the November 6 announcement about Regard Benin, so as to understand its implications. In the communication chain, it was a vital link: a means of giving the event visibility not only on a local scale, but internationally as well. The announcement also constituted a challenge to the Biennale Bénin project. Biennale Bénin had released its own announcement on October 6, one month earlier to

Meschac Gaba, Musée de l'art de la vie active, bibliothèque roulante [Museum of the Art of Active Life, Travelling Library], 2012. Performance, Cotonou, Benin.

the day.[5] The November announcement by Regard Benin was meant to restore balance vis-à-vis Biennale Bénin—to ensure that in the eyes of international onlookers, the latter would lose its status as the "official" event. The Regard Benin announcement read as follows:

> "Inventing the World" is the modest theme of the first official edition of the Biennale Regard Benin, which had formerly premiered in June 2010 on the 50th Anniversary of Independence of the Republic of Benin. The Biennial Regard Benin breaks with the conventions of curatorial branding by renouncing the vertical structure of inviting a general commissioner with a top-down curated exhibition. Purposely risking the label of dilettantism, the event will be unfolded by a local team of operators who will have occasional exchange with distant, yet close advisers … Based on the successful, innovative nature of [the] pilot event, participating members of a federation of a dozen independent art spaces and their activities founded the nonprofit association Biennale Regard Benin in March 2011, which organizes this edition with a balanced network of partners. Therefore the name of this event remains unchanged as Biennale Regard Benin, as decreed by the Minister of culture of Benin in May 2012.

First observation: the text proves useless for readers hoping to learn something about the theme of the event. The focus, rather, is on pragmatic considerations. The ad first provides historical background, meant to reestablish the order of things; the opening sentence presents Regard Benin 2012 as the "first official" biennial, with the 2010 event as a trial run. This version of history allows Regard Benin to position itself as a guarantor of continuity. The

The Berlin-based artists Andreas Siekmann and Alice Creischer gave a Claymation workshop on the theme of land grabbing as their contribution to the Biennale Regard Benin, 2012. Thirty-five participants produced three films for the project.

closing sentence references none other than the Benin government to prove Regard Benin's bona fides as the sole, legitimate biennial.

Second observation: the text insists on pointing out the absence of a vertical structure in which one artistic director controls the whole of the event's programming. This is presented as a significant departure from the norm. The reader's gaze is directed at a team of local "operators" working in tandem with international "advisors": a pluralistic arrangement which, the authors claim, is highly original. The end result is striking to say the least. Abdellah Karroum and Didier Houénoudé (co-curators of Biennale Bénin) are listed as artistic directors alongside Stephan Köhler, a cultural "operator" who has lived in Benin for several years. Dominique Zinkpè and Ousmane Alèdji are listed as executive directors—all within the framework of a single overarching project.

One might read all of this as a strategy meant to misinform and destabilize. That, however, would be too simplistic. For it must be recognized that the strategy does something else as well: it projects a certain vision of what a biennial in Benin could or should be. In this sense, a third way is opened up: an arrangement in which a reunified team comes together to revive the original, federated nature of the 2010 event. Seen in this light, the biennial as it appears in the Regard Benin announcement blurs the lines of a conflict-ridden situation. Moreover, Köhler claims to have been initially approached by Biennale Bénin to handle artistic direction alongside Karroum, before being discarded.

Since the announcements for both biennials were distributed by e-flux, it is important to point out that, while subscribing to e-flux's service is free, one is expected to pay a fee in order to have one's announcement distributed. Payment, however, does not guarantee publication. The ad is presented to the e-flux team, which either accepts or rejects it. This process acts as a form of validation—a stamp of approval that is relatively minor for an event like the Istanbul Biennial, but quite important in the case of a fledgling biennial such as Benin's. In this context, the publication of the Regard Benin ad had the powerful effect of inserting Regard Benin into a vast network of contemporary art events. The impact of this may appear ephemeral, but it's not, for e-flux is more than a platform for listing events: it's also an archiving mechanism.[6] In this sense, we are not looking here at a misuse of the e-flux service, but rather at an instrumentalization of its strengths and weaknesses alike. The goal was to obscure the identity of Biennale Bénin and to bring credit to Regard Benin by relying on the fact that no other information was immediately available.

The Regard Benin ad was neither a hoax nor a fiction, for it

Workshop participants document the Bénin Biennale exhibition at the Centre Kora, 2012. Photo: Chloë Champion

referenced an event that actually did take place. What is interesting about all of this is that the ad shifted the conflict to a completely new terrain—that of the e-flux announcement service itself. Hiding behind the message in the announcement, and unbeknownst to the e-flux team, was a second, quite different message. What looked like a straightforward press release was, in fact, a statement of principle, the expression of an artistic and political stance meant as a direct rebuke to the intents and claims of Biennale Bénin.

What transpired in Benin in 2012 was anything but a trivial provincial feud. Rather, the two biennials and their announcements revealed the ways in which a scene is shaped by the conditions of a globalized art world, and how that scene is being constantly redefined by the artists, curators, and critics who take part in it.

Zon Sakai, Heavy Duty, 2012. The Japanese artist performs one of his sculptures during the opening day of the Biennale Regard Benin, November 8, 2012. Here the artist approaches the King Toffa Monument in the center of Porto Novo. Photo: S. Zounyekpe. Copyright: Biennale Regard Benin and Zon Sakai.

X

A longer version of this piece was published under the title "Mining the Biennale: A Story About Art and Globalization in Benin," in *Chimurenga Chronic*, August 2013. This text was translated from the original in French by D. Malaquais.

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1
See http://www.e-flux.com/announcements/inventing-the-world-the-artist-as-citizen/ .

2
Karroum was assisted by several co-curators: Didier Houénoudé (Benin), Olivier Marboeuf (France), Anne Szefer Karlsen (Norway), and Claire Tancons (France-USA).

3
These numbers are taken from Nicolas Michel, "Bénin: une biennale sinon rien!," *Jeune Afrique* , November 27, 2012, http://www.jeuneafrique.com/Article/JA2706p092-093.xml0/ .

4
The website universes-in-universe.org was a partner of Biennale Bénin 2012. A photo report is available on the site. See http://universes-in-universe.org/eng/bien/biennale_benin/2012

5
See http://www.e-flux.com/announcements/biennale-benin-2012-inventing-the-word-the-artist-as-citizen/ .

6
In an interview, e-flux founder Anton Vidokle once admitted to having distributed an announcement for a fictional exhibition—a Kosovo Pavilion at the 2005 Venice Biennale. On this subject and its implications, see Karl Lydén, "E-flux, Derrida and the Archive," *Site Magazine* 25 (2009):12–13.