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Editorial

This issue marks the beginning of *e-flux journal*'s second year. The open-ended editorial model seems to be working—contributors have frequently chosen to borrow, extend, or elaborate upon concerns opened up by previous texts. So far, discussions on self-design have spoken to an interest in self-building practices, the factory as a museum became the museum as a factory, while a speculative model for granting legitimacy to artistic acts in the absence of exhibition infrastructures sidestepped both spaces. An essay on the dormant potential in the art academy stimulated a discussion about art education, while questions of how art pedagogy can contribute to a broader understanding of literacy overlapped with an exploration of the borders between legibility and illegibility.

In this issue, **Anselm Franke** surveys modernity's borderland between the rational and the irrational. As the perception of modernity as a fundamentally rational enterprise was often exploited by imperial interests to provide a cover for not only irrational, but even heinous, acts abroad, the "rationalist veil" marks an important distinction between modernity's self-image and its actual practice—a site of potential reversal and collapse. Artists have been interested in moving back and forth across this territory for some time, and if conceptual artists are indeed mystics, as Sol LeWitt remarked, then the rationalist veil is what thinly conceals a rich place of artistic work: "a privileged site of a particular modern practice aimed at creating continuity, blending systemic knowledge, belief, and the power of imagery."

Bilal Khbeiz considers modernism's sensitive side, or, rather, its underside. How was an ethical imperative to protect the weak, conserve the ephemeral, and nurture the future translated into a representational mode mandating the weakness and frailty of subjects, returning them to the wreckage of the pre-modern, and enlarging the figure of the artist as compassionate god? As modernism's ethical plane twists around itself, the careful deployment of sympathy mobilized by artworks and images constitutes a form of violence all its own.

Following this twisting plane around a corner, **Sven Lütticken** discovers certain crevasses and eddies in the exceptional ethical space opened up by the unofficial circulation of viewing-copy DVDs of artworks. If an alternative art-world economy based on availability rather than scarcity could be inferred from the format and circulatory patterns of these bootlegged editions, then surely it would be one poised to engage a "complex, aggregate temporal economy" that has more to do with the act of viewing than with display.

Barbad Golshiri reflects upon how a set of empty geographical and cultural signifiers has been deployed in the service of many highly visible exhibitions and lucrative artistic practices peddling the "aestheticization of stereotypes." Careers have been built by reinforcing terms such as "Middle East" and "Arab" with meanings

previously granted to them by political imperatives. When artists relinquish their last ounce of sovereignty by marketing cultural peculiarities with which they themselves are unfamiliar, surely we need to start thinking about what is to be done with the void that opens up in this space.

Another significant gap is the one that exists between work and life. **Marion von Osten** remembers Helke Sander's 1978 film *Redupers*, which deals with the plight of a young woman in West Berlin struggling to reconcile work with life at a moment when the two were just beginning to become less distinguishable. Overworked and underpaid, self-determined yet enslaved, the anxiousness and precariousness that often accompanies flexible working patterns should not distract from "being able to consider the "material, social, and symbolic conditions necessary for life as interconnected entities that can overcome the traditional dichotomies of public/private and production/reproduction to set new standards for living life in its entirety."

—Julieta Aranda, Brian Kuan Wood, Anton Vidokle

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Anselm Franke

Across the Rationalist Veil

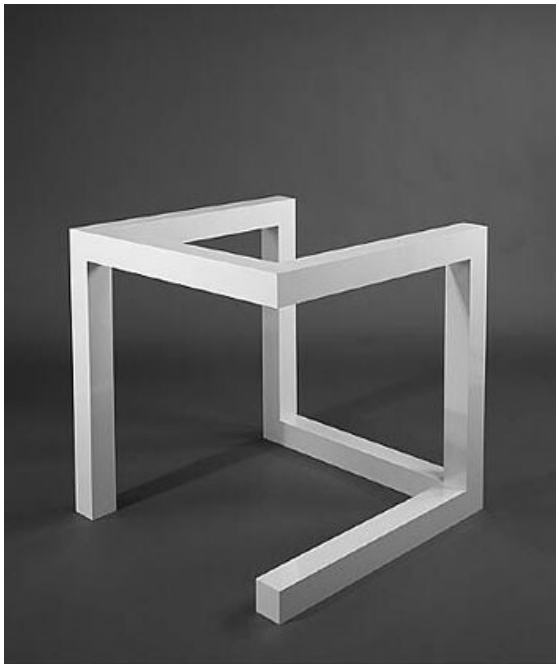
Many recent works of art hold undoubtedly close ties to anthropology, resembling reverse ethnography or neo-ethnography, taking the form of research that embraces anthropology's sociological methods, adopting documentary techniques or borrowing from such genres as the travelogue. Anthropology, on the other hand, is currently engaged in renewed debates over the discipline's roots as reflected in its contemporary "politics." These controversies, involving politics, ethics (both disciplinary and individual), and image strategies, were sparked by the death of "human terrain" researchers in Afghanistan—anthropologists embedded with the U.S. military to help tacticians in the field navigate local customs and codes.[1] Claiming not to militarize anthropology but to anthropologize forms of violence, these practitioners have eroded a border that, given the colonial roots of the discipline, was before only notionally in place.

This is the first in a series of articles concerned with a specific site of convergence between contemporary anthropology and contemporary artistic practice, namely, their concern for boundaries, whether territorial, epistemological or conceptual; and of which the question of collaboration and entanglement of forms of knowledge production (and operation) is only one aspect. Certainly, many works of art that appropriate elements of anthropology are doing so in awareness of the history of the discipline, but many also assume its problems. Anthropologists, on the other hand, as Hal Foster observed some time ago, often look with a certain envy at artists, and the capacity of aesthetic strategies to relate to, and particularly to transgress, boundaries.[2] But Foster's critique remains within the representational logic of the self/other dichotomy, and consequently he is concerned with the problematic of identification and the question of either "too much" or "too little" distance. Much of the discussion since has remained within these parameters, leaving aside the historical nature of aesthetic transgression, that is, the way modern boundaries are established as well as crossed through the use of images and their placement within artistic strategies.

Which borders, however? And how does transgression affect them? These questions are of some urgency, particularly with regard to art that we perceive to be "politically engaged." The transgression of political boundaries has largely been perceived as a form of negation, one that could effectively be used to build up an oppositional position. This approach to transgression could be termed "dialectic," since it mobilizes that which is excluded in a regime of inclusion and exclusion. But this mobilization must have as its prime target those representations that are employed to legitimize such exclusions.

There are two familiar problems with the "dialectic" approach. One is that, when taken to be an exception, the critique often retains, or even confirms, the paradigms on which the original law or boundary is modeled. The other

problem is that the strategy applies only to borders modeled on dichotomies (such as linguistic binaries) that are at least theoretically symmetrical, constituted by a *de jure* symmetry that can therefore be politically claimed where a *de facto* asymmetry rules. This applies to the borders of the modern disciplinary regime, such as the nation state and its institutions, or to gender division, to name but a few. The "modulated" boundaries in the "society of control," however, pose a different challenge, for not only do they incorporate plurality effectively, they are scattered, evasive, and themselves transgressive, mobilizing the power of images by shifting the static logic of representation to the dynamic and the performative.[3]



Sol LeWitt, Incomplete Open Cube, 1974, baked enamel on aluminum.

A Sleight of Hand

An understanding of the operational modes of both types of borders—borders modeled on theoretically symmetrical dichotomies, and "modulated" boundaries—depends on a grasp of their historical genealogy. Across several fields, an overwhelming amount of the critical engagement with modernity and modernism in the past decades has questioned the conceptual separations on which modernity is modeled, separations which constitute modernity's sources of authority. If we are, as Bruno Latour claims, no longer able to be modern and yet not able to be anything else (which also characterizes much of the situation in the arts), this is certainly connected to the erosion of the power of the first type of borders, those modeled on more or less static conceptual dichotomies.[4] With regard to the technologies of power they have enabled, however, the "rationality" of these dichotomies so crucial for the self-understanding of modernity has always had a mythical side to it, in which the first type of border division is always already connected to the second. This concerns the original separation on which any rational dichotomy must be built, based on a paradoxical inclusion of that which it excludes, thus performing a dialectical twist or proper reversal, which the work of rationalization must later mask in a magical sleight of hand.

This is the prevailing question in the context of the political debates on the "exception as rule."[5] However, it is less the question of sovereignty than the "sleight of hand" that interests me here, as this is what potentially has the furthest-reaching consequences for the role aesthetics holds in both transgressing and constituting the modern border-space. This sleight of hand is what I wish to discuss here under the guise of the "rationalist veil." Any sleight of hand, as is well known, relies on the complicity of its audience; the "rationalist veil," as the belief in the "rationality" of modern power as modern myth, is what constitutes this complicity. It places rationality always already on the side of the moderns, rendering its power a self-fulfilling prophecy—a necessity exempt from any qualification beyond just what is rational and what is not. If we are no longer modern, but still unable to be anything else, it is perhaps because the residual "rationalist veil" constitutes a form of continuity that binds the present to the modern past.

In what follows, I turn to the work of anthropologists Michael Taussig, Johannes Fabian, and later, Bruno Latour, to sound out this proposition. These authors prove especially helpful because of the particular ways they relate to modernity against the backdrop of struggles within their own field(s), of imperialism and colonial heritage, and of their concern for how conceptual dichotomies have become actual boundaries. Their work touches upon aesthetic questions in different ways, directly and indirectly, but even where the place of aesthetics is left almost entirely unacknowledged, as in the work of Bruno Latour, there is much ground offered for a historically grounded discussion of aesthetic strategies in the modern border topography, particularly with regard to its paradoxical reversals.

What I wish to suggest with the term "rationalist veil," however, is not merely another gesture in the great machine of critique, an unmasking of the rational as really irrational, for example, or an embrace of the irrational that positions it against modern rationality. The point is to sound out historical layers within the modern rationale—the emancipatory promise entailed in the triumph of reason over superstition and the "irrationality" of religious violence—in an examination of both its rationalizing of what it rendered irrational in the first place, and its production of that which is exempt from rational scrutiny *without* being a danger to the rational order, on which the order in fact relies. The point is to locate the smooth shifts and displacements between such seemingly distinct, even irreconcilable categories. The "rationalist veil" is a privileged site of a particular modern practice

aimed at creating continuity, blending systemic knowledge, belief, and the power of imagery.

exhibition-making and critique, one often encounters Sol LeWitt's statement that "conceptual artists are mystics rather than rationalists." Suggesting a possible

Jimmie Durham, Xitle and Spirit , 2007. Volcanic stone on automobile, 200 x 350 x 160 cm.

Insofar as art has developed a political consciousness vis-à-vis these problematics, it has struggled with its place and participation in the logic of boundaries. Modern art, for instance, variously problematizes the line of distinction between the rational and irrational; through negation, affirmation, and dialectic exposures, it participates in the common conceptions of what constitutes the rational and the irrational. Alongside the apparent advocacy of the rational in art (e.g., the iconoclasm of modern architecture), there was equally a mobilization of irrationality in movements as diverse as Romanticism, Expressionism, Dada, Surrealism, Primitivism, and Art Brut. Appearances notwithstanding, those strands of modern art that embraced rationality for their own distinct purposes also, upon closer investigation, reveal an essentially "irrational" core. Rosalind Krauss' book *The Optical Unconscious*, to give just one example, makes such a case for High Modernism.[6] In recent

reconciliation between the rational and irrational, the notion seems to appeal to contemporary artists, in particular to those contributing to a renewed interest in the obscure and the occult, for whom this reconciliation is a formal loophole through which one can remain formally agreeable without resorting to subjective mythology.

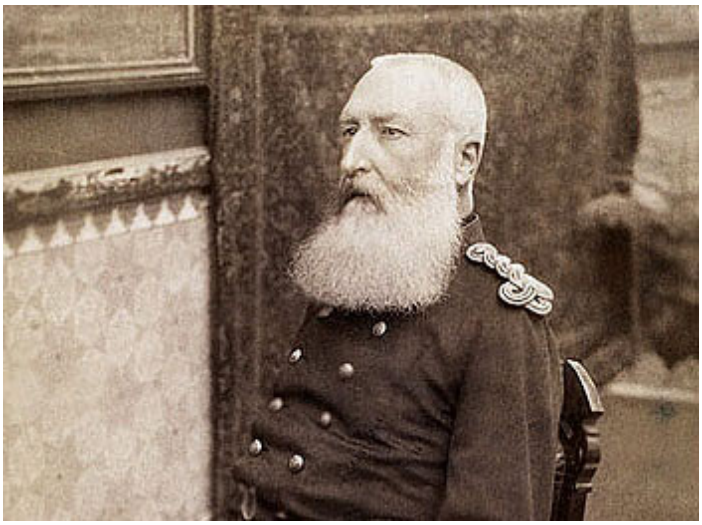
Primitivism

A paradigmatic case is the “Primitivism” debate that had such a profound impact on the course of recent art history following the critique of the “‘Primitivism’ in 20th Century Art” exhibition at MoMA in 1984. It is worth recalling how influential that exhibition became through the criticism it sparked. It informed the *Magiciens de la Terre* exhibition at the Centre Pompidou in 1989, where the criticism was

renewed and sharpened, and without which neither documenta X nor documenta 11 would have been possible in their scope. The debate evolving around the MoMA exhibition exposed the very category of the "primitive" as a Western fantasy and master narrative projected onto its colonial others firmly situated in a spatial and temporal outside. The exhibition took place at a time when this category could no longer pass uncontested. In the preceding decade, art had increasingly taken its cue from theoretical attacks on modernity's system of imaginary oppositions. The notorious dualisms had already been under attack. Feminism, queer studies, and postcolonial theory, among others, drew attention to just how these (often linguistically rooted) dualisms resulted in confining border regimes. Whether it be children, the insane, "primitives," the colonial other, women or gays, the differences monitored by the border regime and its respective institutions in each case fundamentally relied on inscribing and subsequently rationalizing the "irrational." In a similar pattern of "inclusive exclusion," the "primitive" was exposed as subjected to a dialectics that simultaneously split and locked the subject rendered "other" within a confined place.

In her book on cinema as modern magic, Rachel Moore makes the distinction between three kinds of primitivisms, with each corresponding to a different level in the modern border topography.[7] The first sees primitivism as a neutral term denoting a lack of sophistication, an "artlessness" which, in the hands of modern artists, also becomes an effect. The second refers to primitivism as the use of artifacts or the appropriation of forms from non-Western "native" people. In the third sense primitivism refers to the "repressed" of modernity. This is where irrationality develops a rationality of its own; nonetheless, it must stay symptomatic, as it is always a compensatory expression, a "displacement." The third primitivism, however, exceeds the aesthetic by far and instead refers to a persistent modern boundary in which the question of binary rationales is always already turned on its head. This is the Western mythology of savagery as a self-fulfilling prophecy, a "savage imagination" of repressed contents projected onto the "other" that not only legitimizes, but necessitates terror in building order on disorder. This primitivism played itself out on the colonial frontier. The colonial frontier is a site where the original separation of building order on disorder takes place. On the frontier, rationality thus acts through irrationality, in a paradoxical intertwinement of systematic arbitrariness, where power is the power to induce separation, physically and socially. The frontier exchanges means for ends, things for people, terror for law, but these exchanges happen in the name of people and the law.

While the three primitivisms listed above have been the subject of much work and debate, it has historically been difficult to get beyond the problem of "projection" in the case of the third. This is the limit established by the "dialectic" approach, except that here a simple dialectics gazes only into mirror images, into self-fulfilling mythologies, or into the "irrational." Thus much work has dealt with the problem of "otherness." However, it is precisely the frontier as the original separation and, thus, as boundary paradigm of modernity, that needs to be grasped aesthetically, if it is no longer the rationalist boundaries that are at stake, but their irrational underside. Not unlike the evasive boundaries of global capitalism today, the colonial frontier cannot be represented by taking one's distance from it. It seems to draw any representation, any image, into its logic, thus reproducing itself. But if images hold such a privileged place in the "original separation," what accounts for this history? Is there any history of the frontier in the arsenal of modern imagery? It is to be found in the modern understanding and positioning of images themselves, I suggest—but in order to dwell on this point, the frontier needs further attention.



King Leopold's Rationalist Veil

The first mass human-rights movement in the first years of the twentieth century makes for an interesting case. It was what today can be considered global in scale, and it involved not merely reports, but photographic evidence of crimes reproduced in widely circulating newspapers in both the industrialized world and in the colonies; thus was initiated a form of activism in which both the evidence and the effects of empathy produced by pictures of atrocities for the first time occupied a central place, thus mobilizing public opinion in novel ways, instituting the mediascape of modern democracies. I am referring to the protest movement against King Leopold's regime in his private colonial possession, the Congo Free State, where he had set up a forced-labor system for the extraction of the natural resources of the Congo, in particular rubber, necessary for, among other things, automobile and bicycle tires. The death toll associated with the rule of the Belgian King, "enthroned" at the infamous 1884 Berlin conference, is today estimated to have been between five and thirty

million people.

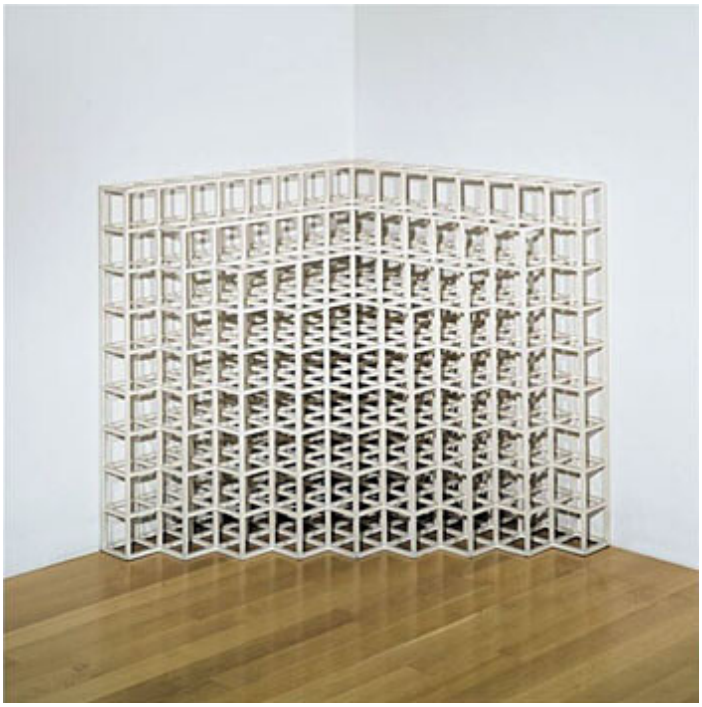
The protest movement had its origin in the port of Antwerp, where a British then-clerk named Edward Morel confirmed the practice of slavery in the Congo based on trade records. The campaign against slavery led by Morel proved successful largely thanks to the eyewitness accounts of British diplomat Roger Casement, who had been sent to the Congo to assess the human rights situation, not least because the British government objected to Leopold's de facto trade monopoly. The Casement Report was delivered in 1904 and sparked a public outcry as well as petitions to Parliament that became instrumental in turning the Congo into a "normal" colony four years later, which was then the limit of the imaginable.

In clarifying the wicked dialectics established by the "rationalist veil," Leopold and the activism of the Congo Reform Association are of particular interest for three reasons. The first concerns the veil of deception set up by Leopold himself, which, until Casement's report, had systematically spoiled attempts to reveal the truth of his corporate terror regime. Under the guise of the International African Association, ostensibly a scientific and philanthropic association, Leopold represented his Congo activity as a civilizing mission all the way up to the end. He was a gifted public relations manager. In the book that in 1998 ended the "Great Forgetting" concerning the Congo atrocities since it had become a "normal" colony, Adam Hochschild reports that there is no evidence of a single journalist, diplomat or even outright opponent ever leaving a personal audience with the King without becoming complicit in his veil of deceptions and lies.[8] That veil, however, was operative only because its rationale conformed with the practice and beliefs of the day; its real scandal was that it was private terror and profit, not the state, which then as today was the impersonal guarantor of reason and rationality.

The second lesson to be drawn from Leopold's case concerns aesthetic consequences and responses to "the veil," and their historical resonance. In his groundbreaking 1987 study *Shamanism, Colonialism and the Wild Man: A Study in Terror and Healing*, anthropologist Michael Taussig examines the economy of terror and the colonial "space of death" in the Putumayo region in Colombia, where Casement was sent in 1906 after his engagement with the Congo, once again to report on atrocities connected to the rubber economy.[9] The civilizing order brought about by the original settlement of British rubber barons in the Putuyamo is described by Taussig as

> a society shrouded in an order so orderly that its chaos was far more intense than anything that had preceded it—a death space in the land of the living where torture's certain uncertainty fed the great machinery of the arbitrariness of power, power on the rampage—that great steaming morass of chaos that lies on the underside of order and without which order could not exist.[10]

Taussig calls on us to understand the quickly achieved hegemony of a small number of white Christians over the "*irracionales*" by thinking-through-terror, that is, through the "space of death where the Indian, African and white gave birth to a New World."[11] Taussig invokes a different aspect of what James Clifford famously has termed "ethnographic surrealism," namely, the long history and rich culture of the social imagination of the "space of death," in its Western genealogy the space of negativity, branded as underworld and evil, and the space of transformation and metamorphosis, too, the latter becoming the starting point for Taussig's examination of healing as that which mobilizes the dialectical imagery in the space of death.[12]



Sol LeWitt, Corner Piece No. 2 (from Cube structures based on nine modules), 1976. Painted wood, 43.3 x 43.3 x 43.3 in.

The Business of Mimesis

Previously in the Congo, Casement had met Joseph Conrad, who had embarked on that infamous steamboat journey on the Congo river, on which *Heart of Darkness* was modeled. This "trip" into the reality of the "colonial unconscious"—"The horror! The horror!"—is used by Taussig to confront the problem of aesthetics, of perspective, of complicity in the rationale representing the brutality and irrationality of colonial reality that evades explanation. Casement, according to Taussig, in writing

his reports, was torn between his own Anti-Imperialist views (based on his Irish Nationalism, for which he would later be hanged), and the obligation to comply with the common sense of political economy that ruled in British Parliament, the rationality of business, which was the way to make sense of reality there, if there was any sense to be made of it at all. Just as in the famous case recalled by Jacques Rancière, also in this instance the politics of aesthetics found the patricians simply unable to understand what the plebeians in their uprising were exclaiming, until the latter had begun to imitate the former, in a mimetic appropriation that is also telling with regard to the limited resources in positions from which one can speak at all.[13]

> To claim the rationality of business for this is unwittingly to claim *and sustain* an illusory rationality, obscuring our understanding of the way business can transform terror from a means into an end in itself. This sort of rationality is hallucinatory like the veil that Conrad and Casement faced earlier in the Congo, where . . . Conrad abandoned the realism practiced by Casement for a technique that worked through the veil while retaining its hallucinatory quality.[14]

In order to be understood at all, Casement clothes his report in the rationale of business, for the reality of what he was reporting would otherwise not have been comprehensible. Through the language of business, a political stage is created, and the colonial subjects acquire a "voice" and enter the "picture"—at the price, however, of affirming the rationality that rendered them mute in the first place. The veil produces necessity in forging an impossible choice: the other option, for Casement, would have been merely to speak the language of that which was already rendered irrational, and British Parliament surely would have declared him mad.

Conrad, instead, embraces the veil, and exposes it from within. Taussig sees here "a twofold movement of interpretation in a combined action of reduction and revelation—the hermeneutics of suspicion and of revelation in an act of mythic subversion inspired by the mythology of imperialism itself."[15]

Heart of Darkness, a cornerstone of modernist literature, to be sure, does not rationalize the border away, but leaves it in place. It accounts for the economy of projection and mimicry by which the colonists enact the very savagery that they impute to the natives. But is such a "twofold strategy," which brackets the twisted dialectics of framing *and* becoming what has first been established as "other" and properly "negative," capable of moving beyond the closed circuit of "projection," the modernist self-reflection of modernity? Is it capable of conceiving of a different political stage? Taussig, while endorsing Conrad's aesthetics and its ambiguities, maintains that it was Casement's reports, not Conrad's semi-documentary fiction, which had forced political responses.

Rational Imperialism

Another influential anthropologist who wrote about the problem of writing across the veil, also attempting to cope with its mythological dialectics of rationality, was Johannes Fabian. In *Out of Our Minds* Fabian examines the travelogues of Western explorers, as well as the anthropological practice of fieldwork premised on them, engaged in a re-reading of how the question of rationality, of rational detachment as opposed to sensual experience in particular, is posed therein.[16] The mythical image of the explorer is of a heroic figure "guided by self-denying missionary zeal and philanthropic compassion, as well as a taste for travel and adventure, often combined with scientific curiosity."[17] This was the image, too, that most explorers, often equipped with remarkable skills in self-marketing, were careful to present of themselves. Faith and reason, as well as political and economic imperatives, supposedly determined their encounters. However, as long as this determination is accepted, writes Fabian, the conclusions drawn from their accounts remain entirely predictable and inescapable.

In seeking a writing mode that contests the myth—capable of speaking of the conditions of anarchic irrationality, of ecstasy and outright delirium for which he finds much evidence beneath that mythological veil—without falling into Western rationality's self-fulfilling prophecy, he writes:

> One strategy adopted in recent years to counteract that self-fulfilling prophecy is to accumulate evidence for resistance to conquest and to write about that. This is a necessary task, and much more needs to be done to carry it out. But what will such efforts show? That imperialism was weaker than the image it liked to project, or less organized, or less rational? . . . Even if we can point to deception, misrepresentation, and perhaps blindness in these encounters of exploration, conquest and exploitation, that is not likely to shake in any fundamental way the belief in the basic rationality, and hence necessity, of Western expansion.[18]

In the context I wish to invoke here, I take this to be not merely a historical question on the retroactive legitimization or deconstruction of imperialism. It is indisputable that historical interpretations—the articulation of a rationale—have far-reaching consequences for the present, depending on the context in which they are made intelligible. The invocation here is primarily targeted at the border technologies that we have inherited from modernity and imperialism, and which, by

Caspar David Friedrich, Mann und Frau den Mond betrachtend, c. 1830-1835. Oil on canvas, 34 × 44 cm.

way of their simultaneously evasive and imperative nature, constitute a continuity in hegemony, and concern the establishing of indisputable background conditions and thus of the "political stage." It concerns particularly the mechanisms by which the "original separation" that marks this stage embraces what it formerly established as its "outside." The "accumulation of evidence" was surely a successful strategy in contesting the separations that have structured the stage set up by Western modernity internally; however, if the background conditions, the border of the political as such, is at stake, different strategies are necessary, strategies in correspondence with the twisted economy of the frontier. And it is because of its dialectically twisted structure that "critique," itself a modern practice, has entered into the often lamented crisis we currently face, foregrounding its complicities in upholding the power of the critiqued, corresponding to the specific ways in which transgression confirms, rather than undoes, the law of boundaries. However, rather than conclude, from the realization that the "outside" of modern critique was nothing but a pretense and phantasm, that there is "no more outside"—and thus only "insider" positions, varying by degrees of consent—it is the *production* of an outside through the economy of the frontier (ranging in scope from conceptual divisions via political separations to the act of killing) that provides the historical backdrop to the contemporary challenge. This requires a different optics than those of modern critique. It requires that one *think-through-terror*—as Taussig demands in his study—the world that is already-upside-down.

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In a following text, I will attempt to trace some

conjunctions between the economy of the frontier and the logic of the imaginary.

Anselm Franke is a curator and writer based in Brussels and Berlin. He is the Artistic Director of Extra City Center for Contemporary Art in Antwerp, and he was a co-curator of Manifesta 7 in Trentino-Alto Adige, Italy, in 2008 (Trento). Previously, Franke acted as curator of KW Institute for Contemporary Art in Berlin until 2006, where he organized exhibitions such as *Territories. Islands, Camps and Other States of Utopia* (2003); *Image Archives* (2001/2002); *The Imaginary Number* (2005, together with Hila Peleg), and *B-Zone – Becoming Europe and Beyond* (2006) and he co-developed the project *No Matter How Bright the Light, the Crossing Occurs At Night* (2006). He has edited and published various publications and is a contributor to magazines such as Metropolis M, Piktogram, and Cabinet.

1
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8
Adam Hochschild, *King Leopold's Ghost: A Story of Greed, Terror, and Heroism in Colonial Africa* (New York: Houghton Mifflin, 1998).

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Michael Taussig, *Shamanism, Colonialism, and the Wild Man: A Study in Terror and Healing* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987).

10
Taussig, 4.

11
Taussig, 5.

12
See James Clifford, *The Predicament of Culture: Twentieth Century Ethnography, Literature, and Art* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1988).

13
Jacques Rancière, *Disagreement: Politics and Philosophy* , trans. Julie Rose (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1999), 25.

14
Taussig, 53, 54.

15
Taussig, 10.

16
Johannes Fabian, *Out of Our Minds: Reason and Madness in the Exploration of Central Africa* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000).

17
Fabian, 4.

18
Fabian, 4.

Barbad Golshiri

For They Know What They Do Know

Positions June 2009

Making art, as I've always put it, is a habit—a poor one in my case. Making art is not initially creation but constant repetition, salvaged by making puny differences in certain orders on the plane of the feasible. Art is, semiotically speaking, purely negative; it cannot be defined positively. And of course doing it entails not doing something else*. . Like some of my Iranian colleagues, I'm not doing it these days. We have all seen frames that we can freeze, stick to, and damn. Barring whatever may cross the thresholds of our studios and whatever may enframe and transcend what has been going on in the streets of Iran, perhaps the same thing crossed each of our minds: we have no future.*

Certainly we are also established abroad and we can have our own futures beyond these walls, but I'm speaking of those like me who have refused to leave the country and who have decided not to become one more seated in Matisse's easy chair, chanting "I will rebuild you my country with these tears," or one more dissolved in the out-of-context souks of the UAE. We have chosen to breathe hatred, tear and pepper gas, instead of hanging onto nostalgia and the myths of exile and of "the innocent artist." So it's true to say that in the eclipse of relative political freedom and under the oligarchy and inquisitions of the Ministry of Culture and Islamic Guidance, we—like millions of Iranian citizens—have planned our to-be by abandoning "labor" and "work" in favor of "action."

With these words, I would also like to dedicate this paper to all my compatriots and—for the reasons discussed in this paper (and not to be auctioned in October at Christie's), and because in a situation where even e-flux is sending a petition to the UNO and the EU, Magic of Persia is still financially thinking pink—I declare that as one of the seven finalists for the Magic of Persia Art Prize (MopCap) I strongly denounce their criteria and withdraw my works, for as they would have it:

> The contemporary Iranian art scene is not to be underestimated. Recent auction results stand as testament to the global acknowledgement of the vitality of Iranian art, with artists such as Shirazeh Houshiary, Shirin Neshat, Parviz Tanavoli and Farhad Moshiri commanding record prices at sales around the world.[1]

***

Parviz Tanavoli, The Wall (Oh, Persepolis), 1975. Bronze, 181 x 102 x 23 cm.

The E Word

I assume that today we are all familiar with the terms "exotic" and "exoticism." We usually take them to be successors to nineteenth-century Orientalism, but exoticism today is much more complex than Ingres' or Renoir's *Odalisques*. There are those in my circle who have condemned many artists by labeling them "exotic." And my colleagues and I have been swearing at each other using the E word. I do not agree that being exotic proceeds from some sort of defect, for you may use local motifs in your work, and that may appear exotic to tourists or those curators who come mining. Hence exoticism has little to do with being exotic; it is rather a trend that operates within an ideological apparatus.

Saatchi Gallery's gift shop during the "Unveiled" Exhibition. Courtesy the author.

I have participated in several events and contributed to publications devoted to so-called contemporary Iranian art, the Tehran contemporary art scene, or new art from the Middle East. Today every schoolchild knows that the recent increase in interest in the region stems from the catastrophic geopolitical state of affairs in my country and in those of its neighbors, and also from the brand new art market in the United Arab Emirates. Bonhams Dubai, for instance, reportedly broke thirty-three world records at their $13 million Inaugural Middle East Auction. That was almost three times the expected result, with a phenomenal 94% of lots sold.[2] I'm not saying Orientalism is no longer a force; on the contrary, today the market is much more hungry for exotic commodities and, at least in Iran, one of the leading trends in art is decorative calligraphy and a modernist approach to patriarchal heritage. Parviz Tanavoli's *Oh Persepolis*, which sold at Christie's Dubai for $2,841,000,[3] is an example of this trend. His works, like what was being sold at Saatchi's gift shop during its recent "Unveiled" Exhibition (such as "mouse rugs"), are exotic rather than exoticist.

Maliha Al Tabari, the managing director of ArtSpace

Farhad Moshiri, Oil and acrylic on canvas. 132.7 x 98.6 cm. "Come now, stop your hypocrisy, all your lies and games. You have hurt me. I will forgive. But this time, come like a lover" (recto), "When I rest my head on your shoulder, crying, you whisper, I don't love you anymore" (verso)

Middle East Gallery, admits that "typically, the people who buy from us are the kind that can definitely afford it . . . mostly they are people in the banking industry." She continues, "I've been in Dubai for six years and I came when there was almost no art . . . We were trying hard to sell pieces by Farhad Moshiri for about $2,000 (Dh7,500) or $3,000 (Dh11,000)—now his work is worth $200,000 (Dh740,000) or $300,000 (Dh1.1 million).[4]"

Today Farhad Moshiri is the most in-demand Iranian artist on the market. His *Eshgh (love)* was auctioned by Bonhams and sold for over $1 million.

Middle East: The Floating Signifier

The use of the term "Middle East" does not date back to prehistory, and it has little to do with the Achaemenid Persian Empire, Babylon, or the Herat School of Painting.

Like "Eastern European Countries," the Middle East does not exist geographically. "West" and "East" too are not merely geographical terms; the Orient, for instance, has odd connotations—"oriental martial arts" never refers to Turkish or Iranian traditional martial arts, for example, and the case is the same for "oriental massage." And in pornography "Asian teens" are neither Lebanese, nor Iranian, nor indeed Afghan.

The region was constructed in the nineteenth century, the term coined in the British India Office, the department responsible for administering the Indian subcontinent during the British Reign (Raj, 1757–1947), and later

Farhad Moshiri, Eshgh (Love), 2007. crystals and glitter on canvas with acrylic laid on mdf, 176 x 155 x 8 cm.

popularized by Captain Alfred Thayer Mahan. Mahan chose this geographical term for the areas surrounding the Persian Gulf—what Gamal Abdel Nasser later called the Arabian Gulf: both sides are still vying for control of the name. Mahan believed that, after the Suez Canal, the Gulf was the most strategic route for any British attempt to stop the Russians from advancing towards India.

The Middle East does not exist geographically not just because it's constructed and still seen from a Eurocentric viewpoint—for a Chinese person it is located to the west, for a Russian to the south—but also because we cannot define its borders and areas, that is to say, we cannot designate a unified object. UN analysts often use relatively more descriptive terms such as "Near East." They also refer to it using the term "Western Asia," but on the UN's official website Iran is not a part of Western Asia but rather Southern Asia. This is not what Mahan desired: "Western Asia" now includes Armenia and Azerbaijan, both once Russian. The United States government first used the term "Middle East" when in their eyes an opposing force was growing in the region, namely, Communism (or "Atheism," as Eisenhower put it). As the region is the site of a large percentage of the world's oil production, the Eisenhower Administration saw the growth of Communism in the region as a serious threat towards the U.S. and its spiritual or anti-communist allies' "economic life and political prospects." Let us cite his "Special Message to the Congress on the Situation in the Middle East":

> It would be intolerable if the holy places of the Middle East should be subjected to a rule that glorifies atheistic materialism.[5]

In his speech Eisenhower is really concerned with three major, interconnected matters: oil, independence, and spirituality. These three matters and "non-matters" meet again in Ahmadinejad and in Iranian spiritual and official artists.

What is this restless attempt to maintain consistency for the Middle East, since—to borrow Lévi-Strauss' term—it is but a "floating signifier"?[6] In 2004 the Bush Administration coined the terms "Greater Middle East," "New Middle East," and "Broader Middle East." According to U.S. administration preparatory work for the thirtieth G8 summit, this wider region includes "the Arab states, Israel, Turkey, Iran, Pakistan and Afghanistan. Some pundits go further and include all of Central Asia or the Caucasus."[7] Perhaps one day museums and galleries will start vying for exhibitions devoted to what the Bush Administration sought to encompass.

Why do we need to keep the Name, even though its referent has been changing geographically ever since the day of its baptism; even though it does not signify a cluster of descriptive features and subsequently does not refer to an object in reality or at minimum a geographically, politically, socioculturally, and economically circumscribed region—in brief, a "sense" that does not possess an extension of descriptive "references"? The name has not designated the same object and the word has been transmitted from subject to subject while the object has been changing. Over time the signifier has been preserved. If we try to fill the void today with positive cultural or geographical realities, we are—again—designating an empty signifier in a "retroactive" manner, that is to say, we constitute the name after we're in it—after politics has already shaped the name.

Most of the exhibitions, panels, and conferences that we find more radical than the import/export art scene of Dubai, its related auctions and numerous art fairs, are those whose curators and organizers have begun by opposing the "mainstream," so-called "Western media representation." All these programmes speak of cutting-edge works of art produced "in the region." The common achievement of all these discourses—those that try to constitute political, cultural or geographical "identity" for the baptized object beyond its ever-changing descriptions—is: there really is a Middle East; that the Middle East is for real. They all try to designate what—in their eyes—has always been there. This is the omnipresent characteristic of all those efforts that operate retroactively.

"Arab" as the One

So what is keeping this borderless region or, should I say, this void, full or consistent, if full or consistent is what it is? For this we should examine the common experience of its given reality which, like any other historic reality, achieves its identity and unity through the mediation of a signifier that can symbolize our experience of its meaning. When, from time to time, institutions, museums, galleries and their curators, while trying to fill this void, to locate and determine "the region," make grave mistakes, they are actually symbolizing diverse geopolitical and sociocultural experiences. Saatchi's newsletter for the "Unveiled" exhibition is a good example:

> On 30 January the Saatchi Gallery's second show, **Unveiled: New Art from the Middle East**, will open, presenting the work of over 20 of the region's most exciting artists. Dedicated to the flourishing contemporary Arabic art scene, the exhibition will offer a cutting edge survey of recent painting, sculpture and installation.[8]

And in the exhibition's picture by picture guide, concerning Rokni Haerizadeh's *Dagger Dance*, it is written:

> Dancing with swords is a traditional custom throughout the Arab world, usually performed by women as part of a wedding ceremony. Haerizadeh delivers this scene with the vivid exoticism of Matisse or Gauguin, his bold colours, heavy outlines, and opulent patterning re-appropriating the tradition of "orientalism."[9]

Why is the catalogue also in Arabic? Where does "the flourishing contemporary *Arabic* art scene" come from when eleven of the twenty-one artists are Iranians? Perhaps one has to be a Panofskian iconologist to tell the differences between Yemeni, Turkmen, and Qajar courtier dagger dancers, but Haerizadeh has in any event had recourse to a very illustrious hypotext, known to anyone who has skimmed through a concise history of Persian painting (see below). It's true to say that these are neither blunders nor a matter of opinion; they derive, rather, from certain varieties of doxa. "Arab" is there to cut the chain of signifiers, and thus serve as the ultimate point of reference. It operates effectively when we say—like Tom Cruise when he spoke about the policy of Scientology—"this is it, this is exactly it."

When the holders of such discourses—those who designate the region as the "Middle East" by abandoning dissimilar qualities, homogenizing and producing a unified

Rokni Haerizadeh, Dagger Dance, 2008. Acrylic on canvas, 200 x 200 cm.

entity such as "Arabic"—hand on to us certain signifiers as "the Signified," they in fact nourish certain systems of belief and ideological maxims. The main achievement of all these unavoidable gaffes, unbeknownst to their agents, is that it is the imaginary other that calls for "thereness" and seeks objectivity, be it paradoxical, undemocratic, or simply bullshit. It's the same with our politicians: the leaders have been speaking of "the Enemy" ever since the revolution, and the slogan has been "neither East, nor West, the Islamic Republic [only]." But every day when we were at school we had to trample something underfoot, even if it was just an Israeli or American flag painted on schoolyard pavement.

The ideological apparatus does not welcome Turkish artists so often. Although Turks are geographically represented as inhabitants of the region, they are not *that* Arab or *that* Muslim or *that* fanatic anymore (needless to say, today "Arab" and "Muslim," the "Arab world" and the "Muslim world"—thanks to common sense—refer to one another and can be used interchangeably), even though the Ottoman Empire was supposed to be the center of the so-called Islamic World. We do not see very many Turkish artists in the exhibitions devoted to "the region," for, since Atatürk, there are serious social and even military forces perceived as absolute defenders of secularism.[10] Remember that Turkey is potentially an EU member and a NATO partner.

It's not just unscholarly curatorial texts (such as Saatchi's) that permit such homogenizations; some political analysts, in discussing "The Greater Middle East," refer to the Arab states alone, and for the American government, in its

Attributed to Shirin Negar, Khotan Khatoun or The Dagger Dance, 1840. The Museum of Fine Arts, Saadabad Palace, Tehran.

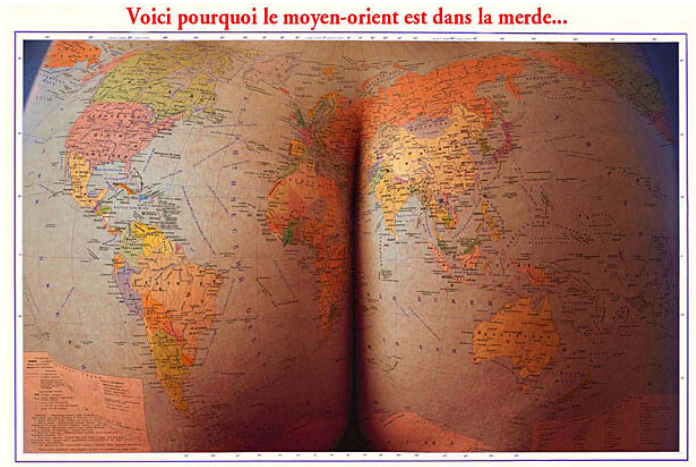
proposal presented to that G8 summit, "Arabs'" problems are the region's problems.[11]

To construct this "real" other, there is surely a need for an "us and them," an old discourse to which I do not wish to reduce my theory; that is the very discourse of otherness in which others are simply those excluded. This discourse assumes that cultural units, social organizations, ethnicities, and races are privileged and maintained through different processes of exclusion and opposition based on a straightforward dualism.[12]

"Middle East" has so often been filled with another void, with an empty signifier which operates as the last signified: Arab. In an international biennial, an artist who could only read and write in French was insistent that he was just an Arab; seen wearing only his undershirt, belching throughout the biennale, his answer to each and every complaint was: Quoi? Je suis arabe!

Being an Arab has little to do with one's genes, the degree of pigmentation, location or language; and, of course, it is not about diverse Arabic dialects and descendants; it is neither about secular Nasserism nor about Islam. The experiences of *Arabité* as historical meaning can only take place on an ideological plane. "Arab" does not designate a real object and has no rigid point of reference; it is itself the Referent, i.e., a knot that, when multiple signifiers are floating in discursive fields, intervenes and stops their slide. Since the "Middle East" does not exist in a geographical space but only on an ideological plane, and is more concrete than the heap of its referents, eventually it is unified and identified through the agency of a master-signifier: "Arab" is there to unify dissimilar historical realities through symbolization. The name "Arab" has been extravagantly saturated not because it is the richest word, but because it is empty. For the Name is prerequisite: we need it to accumulate our heap retroactively, a paradoxical heap of others. And, in brief, we need it to unify a mass. This does not only suggest that a social bond is there, allowing one to refer to this full-empty entity by uttering the Name, but beyond this, it reveals the reign of the commonsensical.

"Arab" appears to connote a cluster of quasi-descriptive features: Muslim, anti-Semite, stinky, outlandish, undemocratic, vigorous, rambunctious, camel-riding, bearded or veiled, a man with a long circumcised penis: in brief, the new Jew. It is certain politics, migrations, terrorist activities, and the "democracy-imposing" invasions that permit such connotations. And the reign of common sense can be perceived in a simple tautological assertion: we say they are as such because they are Arabs.[13] *Arabité* is a vacuum that gulps down certain connotations.



Here the Middle East is the world's most stinky part, or the pain in the world's arse, or, to borrow Mohamed Sid-Ahmed's words, "a mainstay of world terrorism." [14]The dark side of the globe, like the anus, has its fabulous obscurities and is full of mysticism, for there should be more in it than a hole.

Today, Iran is the most strategically important country in this region; it is the alma mater of all the evils around it; it spreads cockroaches (remember how the Rwandan radio station RTLM referred to Tutsis) and embraces curators willingly.

Today it's hard to recognize Arabs, not just because they are everywhere, but also because they're like "us"—they no longer "go to school every day by camel."

How does art support the quasi-tautological assertion that says "there is a Middle East because there are Arabs living there and they are Arabs because they live in the Middle East"? Saatchi's newsletter was a simple example, but we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EDITORIALS

47 million reasons

...aber of uninsured ...h high, momentum

...ple to get some health care. It's just that many don't get preventive care. Because they cannot pay, they delay

TURKMENISTAN
TURKEY
SYRIA
IRAQ
IRAN
AFGHANISTAN
PAKISTAN
SAUDI ARABIA

Michael Ramirez, Columbus Dispatch, September 4, 2007.

should not overlook the fact that there are artists supporting such claims. I have distinguished a few dominant orientations in Tehran's Art scene of today (let us not call it contemporary). Among these, the art market has chosen a certain trend: aestheticization of stereotypes. Many have said that this exoticism functions as abjection. In contrast with Catherine David, I insist that we should not call it self-abjection or self-exoticism, for although the subject of abjection, the exoticist, is an inhabitant of the altered territory, and although unanimity and hegemony have constructed a vague, abstract, and paradoxical whole (a "we"), the artist usually extracts himself/herself from this mass to *enframe* it from afar. This gives way to a "beautiful mind" and lets the artist be both insider and outsider. For we should not overlook the ambivalent nature of abjection—abjection is letting go of something we still keep. We recognize semen, excrement, or dismembered organs as once being parts of ourselves—they are dismembered bits of us.

All these mechanisms have something in common; they all create or—unbeknownst to their agents—support the constructed mass by attributing to it an ethnic, geographic, cultural, or political reality to homogenize diversity and difference. For instance, take Shirin Neshat's answer to why she has hung onto "Chador art":

> In Iran, the chador is reality. That's just the way people dress. Or at least some people.[15]

Or a curator's note on Shirin Aliabadi's *Miss Hybrid* series:

> Shirin Aliabadi's photographs capture the desire of today's Iranian women to reshape their image—transforming themselves as acts of cultural rebellion.[16]

As I have said before, the altered territory is an unreal mass, it's a façade. The aforementioned trend represents this façade. Among Iranian-born artists, the pioneer, we know, is Neshat, but today she's important precisely because her works have aestheticized this façade to such an extreme degree. When I told her this, she claimed that there's nothing wrong with this, for she's an admirer of beauty and chadors make beautiful shapes. Here we deal with art's oldest platitude, its ancient auxiliary and appurtenance: beauty. In her recent photographs—like her most famous series, "Women of Allah"—Neshat has used Persian writing.

In this piece, language has lost its function and carries the charm of the unfamiliar, and so becomes mere exotic ornament. What is there for anyone who can read Persian? Neshat has employed such an excess of superfluous and incorrect diacritics that no one is able to pronounce her words. These are no longer words but ornaments, knick-knacks, and an answer to the market's demand for the "arabesque" and Arabic letters without knowing what they are.[17] Especially in Dubai, there is a constant call for calligraphy, no matter what the text reads.[18]

The success of Ghazel, another Iranian artist based in Paris, lies in nourishing common sense and adopting various strands of doxa. In her videos the chador, the most inspiring cliché, embraces all dilemmas: for Iranian women, feminist activities are unlikely, because the chador will not let them climb up a standard truck step, and Iranian activists perceive feminism as lumpen illiterate people do, as tantamount to manhood. But it is Ghazel's video which resides in an ideological field, from where she perceives feminist activism as exerting "manly qualities." Let us remember that the feminist movement in Iran has been one of the most active movements demanding changes to discriminatory laws. According to the Barbican Cinema, she's "reflecting on social and gender issues in Iran,"[19] but the way she ridicules feminism is the same way official agents of ideology mock these demands in Iran.

Of course it's much more difficult to analyze serious egalitarian movements in Iran than to add to common beliefs, and for Neshat too it would have been an onerous task to analyze Forough Farrokhzad's intertextuality and search for the roots of her poetry in *The Wasteland*. I'm not saying that she has intentionally chosen to portray the poet as a fragile, mesmerized woman, for in *The Last Word* (2003) it is not just Neshat, Barbara Gladstone, or Shoja Azari "speaking"; it is the common wisdom; it is platitude that calls for delicacy and the myth of Beauty. And of course to satisfy this need for beauty one need not search in vain; samples are already there: a *hammam* with naked women (remember Ingres), and then we insert an anorexic naked girl taken from the "No Anorexia" poster to oppose Orientalist imagery! And it's for the sake of beautification that, for the film *Munis*, she bought her cloud scene from Getty Images. It is "Everyone" that would say, "that is beautiful indeed."

Shirin Neshat, Faezeh, 2008. Ink on gelatin silver print, 36 x 25 cm, Edition of 15.

Unanimity

The exoticist product is an ideological *parole*—this is the definition of façade. An ideology maintains its consistency when it stops meaning from sliding about. Such *paroles* impose signifieds to pin the supposedly open-ended meaning down. Unanimity or absolute concord entails a belief in the naturalness of this signification. Surprisingly exoticists are famous for being subversive artists, but as mentioned earlier, their products are *paroles* of the same *langue*, the language of an ideological regime. The way Neshat treats the chador is the way the culture factory of the Islamic Republic beautifies its restrictions; they too aestheticize the veil in their murals, posters, and slogans. For them, a woman in a veil is like a pearl in its shell. The apparatus too is similar (compare Ghazel's videos with posters and slogans of the regime: "The veil is serenity" is as ideological as "the veil is THE problem").

Ghadirian's *Like Everyday Series* (2001–2) is an accumulation of ideological *paroles* and is an exemplar of exoticism as a trend. The *Like Everyday Series* shows women in chador with their faces veiled by domestic appliances: one should not forget that Muslim or Iranian women are just identical housewives. And it's important to repeat this in different photos because ideological utterances resemble moral judgments and religious prayers, for they restlessly seek unanimous approval. Her *Qajar* series embraces "our anachronistic life" as common wisdom does: Westoxication.[20] Westoxication is not a harmless theory, today, in the Stalinist show trials of the Iranian regime, reformists have to defend themselves against westoxication as a charge.

The veil has become the easiest way for an artist to promote his/her work. Another Iranian artist has produced a film to promote her art. After she shows an archive of her different projects and works, she shows herself in high heels wearing a headscarf standing by a closet. She enters the chamber and frees her hair from the scarf and the door closes dramatically. This symbolic act has nothing to offer Iranian society, as she never performed it within the society. This was just marketing.

Shadi Ghadirian, Farhad Moshiri, Ghazel, and Shirin Ali-Abadi perpetuate the dominant image in a very direct way; no pentimenti or "curvatures" are there to be seen. They take advantage of doxa and hegemony and submit to it in the name of subversion.

Now we understand that a narrow view is not only due to naıveté; it is also what an ideological system has to offer. But the common result of this trend is not only the simplification of dilemmas, which makes people more docile and mediocre, or the aestheticization of façades, reinforcing the idea that there is a homogenous region and that the mass is for real; beyond these, the praxis of art is disturbed because refiguration is no longer a vital issue. This is again how an ideological utterance castrates

Shadi Ghadirian, Untitled, (Qajar Series), 1998. Photograph, Gelatin-silver bromide print, Image: 23.97 x 16.19 cm; 25.24 x 20.32 cm

thinking when pinning down meaning. When foreseeable, the "doxical" and its audience give each other standing ovations, for they understand each other; for " *they* know what *they* mean." In certain species of doxa, ideological values, historical phenomena—which have come to function as realities—recognize themselves.

Shirin Aliabadi, Miss Hybrid Series, 2006. inkjet print, 150 x 114 cm.

Michael Irving Jensen has chosen one of Aliabadi's *Miss Hybrid* pieces for the website **www.middleeastawareness.dk**. The answer to the question "Why Shirin Ali-Abadi?" is the answer Dubai Tourism has given to "Why Dubai?": "captivating contrasts."

The media today typically uses such contrasts in representing Iran. In March 2006, Susan Loehr's reportage on ARTE television's "Metropolis" programme begins by showing such captivating contrasts as veiled "chicks" wearing extravagant makeup with dyed hair, standing before murals of martyrs' portraits, or a mullah

Moral propaganda: Veil is a shell for its pearl.

Shahram Entekhabi, Islamic Vogue, 2005. Acrylics and permanent marker on fashion magazine, 46.5 x 33.5 cm

speaking on his mobile phone. Then the narrator tells us that we're used to such representations, but today they are going to show us something different.[21] Shirin Ali-Abadi not only perpetuates the pictorial representation served up by CNN or VOA[22], but also follows the Islamic Republic's discourse of "cultural invasion of the West": that young Iranian people are having an identity crisis; that they are no longer identical with themselves; that they cannot be themselves. Since this series by Ali-Abadi—as an ideological and propagandistic commodity—is produced in order to be consumed immediately, she is not about to content herself with the mediocre pictorial representation of this ideology, and so entitles the series "Miss Hybrid." The same can be said with regard to Shahram Entekhabi's *Islamic Vogue*.

The Abyss

Among Ayatollah Khomeini's catchwords and slogans was "unity of words" or unanimity. With this he drew a boundary between "us" and "them," reined in diversity, and nipped pluralism in the bud in the very beginning of the Islamic Revolution.[23] Unanimity is absolute concord and harmony. When unanimous, everybody is believed to be of the same mind and acting together as an undiversified whole, as an "army of 20 million," as Khomeini had put it.

Instead of piercing holes in the overlooked, unsymbolized (or at least less symbolized) realities relating to subcategories of those ideological maxims and the commonsensical, these artists acted unanimously and transmitted their messages at the behest of a closed society, a privileged and established clan. The agents of ethnic marketing won out over dissident narratives and became part of the hegemonic discourse, not because their narratives were better able to match the "facts," but because they were better able to fulfill the desire for predictability and were indeed much better able to answer the demands of a huge number of potential customers. And that's what exoticism is: the representation and production of ideological commodities and symbolizing parts of a culture for consumption by those consumers who wish to reinforce their identical positive identities by way of stigmatizing others.

All of these artists are still inhaling doxa and are becoming more and more hegemonic, but in contrast with official or governmental artists, they are praised in the name of subversion. They *should* fight with monsters, yet it's true that "whoever fights with monsters should see to it that he does not become one himself. And when you stare a long time into an abyss, the abyss stares back into you."[24]

Shadi Ghadirian, Scratchy, 2005. Photograph, 100 x 70 cm.

Farhad Moshiri, Battlegrounds of the Cultural Invasion, 2004. Actual censored magazine images.

X

The outlines of this paper were first discussed at the 2007 Festival d'Automne à Paris roundtable "Pratiques esthétiques contemporaines : productions, enjeux et publics," with Catherine David, Lina Saneh, Joana Hadjithomas, Khalil Joreige, and Abdellah Karroum. In May 2009, at the invitation of Dr. Sarah Wilson, it was presented at the Courtauld Institute of Art as "Barbad Golshiri in Conversation with Layal Ftouni. 'Unveiled: Dismantling or Reproducing the Orientalist Canon?"

Barbad Golshiri works as an artist and political and cultural critic in Teheran. His media range from video, installation, photography, and documented performance to the graphic novel and *Aplastic* production. He is translator and editor of Samuel Beckett into Persian. Most of his works are language-based and contend with art and literature's plane of the feasible.
www.barbadgolshiri.com

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7
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8
Since I was a participant myself, I received the announcement much before the opening via email. Here ‘the flourishing contemporary art scene’ is quoted: http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/in_pictures/7855596.stm

9
‘Unveiled: New Art from the Middle East’ Picture by Picture Guide . (no further information was indicated)

10
Kemal Atatürk did not want to mix politics with militarism.

11
The London-based Arabic daily *Al-Hayat* obtained a copy of the proposal and published the document in its entirety on February 13, 2004; the English translation was later published by *Al-Hayat* on its Web site, and is available at Middle East Intelligence Bulletin, “G-8 Greater Middle East Partnership Working Paper,” http://www.meib.org/documentfile/040213.htm#_ftnref1 .

12
In this discourse we could have said that the excluded are befriended only by and through Orientalism.

13
Zižek believes such appearance of tautology is false because “Arab” (“Jew” in his text) in “because they are Jews” “does not connote a series of effective properties, it refers again to that unattainable X.” Slavoj Zižek, “Che Vuoi?,” in *The Sublime Object of Ideology* (London: Verso, 1999) 96–7.

14
Mohamed Sid-Ahmed, “On the Greater Middle East,” *Al-Ahram Weekly* 679, February 26–March 3, 2004).

15
Rachel Aspden, “Living with the Monster,” *New Statesman*, December 4, 2008.

16
“Made in Iran” exhibition flyer, 24th June – 11th July 2009, curated by Arianne Levene and Eglantine de Ganay, Asia House, London.

17
In 2002, when I showed *What Has Befallen Us, Barbad?* in New York, it was written here and there that the locks of hair in the piece resemble arabesque calligraphy.

18
Agents and consultants of an auction visited an Iranian abstract painter. They told him “your paintings are really beautiful but we can sell them only if you use a bit of calligraphy.”

19
See http://www.barbican.org.uk/theatre/event-detail.asp?ID=8162 .

20
Like any other narrative absorbed into common sense, “westoxication” or “Occidentosis” was once a theory. For example, see Jalal Al-e Ahmad, *Occidentosis: A Plague from the West* (*Gharbzadegi*), trans. R. Campbell (Berkeley, CA: Mizan Press, 1983).

21
See https://web.archive.org/web/20090910020358/http://www.arte.tv/de/navigation/1164114.html .

22
I should say that after our recent riots and protests this imagery has changed.

23
This led to the execution of thousands in one summer and offered up an archetypal embodiment of Heterotopia: Khavaran cemetery.

24
Friedrich Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil* , ed. Rolf-Peter Horstmann and Judith Norman, trans. Judith Norman (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002) 69.

Bilal Khbeiz

Modernity's Obsession with Systems of Preservation

The Products of Fragility

Modernity, the mother of many democracies, has given a great deal of attention to developing means of preservation and conservation. It has taught us to care for all that is frail and delicate. Charles Baudelaire, speaking about one of his contemporaries, the photographer Miron, said: "He photographed Paris because it is ephemeral."[1] Perhaps then it should come as no surprise that such an image, itself made up of only smooth paper and some ink, outlasts the cathedrals of Paris. This is not something we should attribute simply to a photograph's status as an art object—the lasting quality of an image is not a matter of poetry, but of irrefutable reality.

In other words, as modernity has taken the utmost care in ensuring optimal conditions for preservation, conservation, and safekeeping, it has bound itself to a system that will only continue to grow until our entire universe consists of fragile monuments that cannot survive without daily care. The most noteworthy aspect of this system is how the instruments of preservation are transformed before us into insatiable monsters, forever in search of nourishment, devouring books, paintings, and old manuscripts before moving onto bodies, buildings, and ecosystems. These instruments have developed to such an extent that it is difficult to predict either their future paths or requirements.

What we do know is that the size of the Google archive today is unprecedented, with no apparent limits to the amount of data it can contain, making the books we keep on our shelves seem more and more like artworks according to Michel Hermes' definition—beautiful, useless objects.[2] Why would we bother to book a plane to Berlin in order to study some old manuscripts held in its museums, when those same documents can be downloaded from numerous sites on the Internet, unless of course we wanted to examine the curves and bends of the calligrapher's script at close range in order to speculate on the author's mood.

Manufacturing Care

In *L'amour en plus*, Elisabeth Badinter advances the notion that parental care, whether maternal or paternal, is not a given factor of human society.[3] In the pre-Enlightenment era, the French aristocracy left the care of their children to wet nurses who, even without this added burden, lived a life of hardship and destitution, attaining only the lowest standards of physical and mental health. Infant mortality rates in France during this era reached disturbing levels, leading philosophers like Jean-Jacques Rousseau to express concern for the future of a French nation that allows its infants to die of hunger and neglect. It was rare for parents who used the services of these women to ask about the health of the children in

their care. After many years, when they returned to claim their offspring from the nurse, they could not recognize them nor tell them apart from others. Consequently, many chose the healthiest among them without verifying their lineage.

The aristocrat who handed an infant over to be reared in such circumstances was effectively freed from the burden of childcare, having placed it firmly on the shoulders of those of lower rank. Indeed, a typical day in the life of an aristocratic lady of this epoch usually involved a leisurely breakfast in bed, followed by hours of grooming, dressing, and other preparations. Only then, at the end of this long beauty regime, would the servant then be asked to bring forth the lady's daughter, who lived in the cellar and the kitchen with the hired help. Taking extreme care not to disturb the meticulous arrangement of hair and make-up, and holding her nose closed so as not to smell the acrid odor emitted by her daughter's body, the noble lady would place a kiss on the little girl's forehead. Soon after the stolen kiss, the girl would be whisked back to the cellar or the kitchen to remain with the servants.

What concerned a thinker like Rousseau was precisely this life of hardship that children faced regardless of their lineage. Rousseau's appeal for the care of children was directed at France itself, as drastically rising infant mortality rates threatened the future of France. The picture of the pre-Enlightenment aristocracy drawn by Badinter would certainly have called for an urgent condemnation from the likes of Rousseau, and a demand that the nobility rear their offspring in line with what their economic and social circumstances permitted. It is as if what was needed was a call for parents to spend more of the time that they would normally spend getting dressed, grooming themselves, attending balls, and in frivolous conversations with their peers, looking after their offspring. Nonetheless, the ethical measures espoused by Rousseau would change nothing in the lives of merchants, craftsmen, and the poor in the France of that era.

Indeed, the improvement in living standards for *all* French children was not a demand that could be made at that time; or, to be more accurate, a reading of Badinter's account today reveals a notable urgency with regard to the improvement in the circumstances of children of noble birth whose parents had the means to raise them differently from the offspring of the general populace. It was upon the distinguished upbringing, education, and care of this minority that Jean-Jacques Rousseau placed his hopes for the future of France. If the French nation could invest in this specimen for the sake of its future, would not an improvement in the lives of *all* French children be an investment with greater returns than one in a small sample of them? Today the answer to such a proposition is beyond dispute from the perspective of our philosophical, political, and social ethics, so it is hardly surprising that France would eventually become committed to the care of all children regardless of their social class. In addition, this view would come to be championed in the European ethical philosophy that followed, from Karl Marx to Alexis de Tocqueville, to Nietzsche.

Manufacturing Hope

It is not particularly difficult to make the connection between hope, an attribute and instrument of the future, and childcare. Hope itself requires care and education, and the future, if it is to avoid the pitfalls of the past and the present, requires the same attention. It is not as though the generations that preceded documented history lived without hope, yet theirs was of a divine nature and mere mortals were helpless to influence outcomes. The Greek mythological hero Hercules was created by the gods, and the pre-ordained destiny of this immortal figure, his life and death, lay solely in the hands of Zeus. The mortals among whom he lived were unable to influence his path in any way, but they were also helpless to impede his influence over their lives and futures. Under these circumstances, the manufacture of hope was merely the human anticipation of the desires of the deities.

By the same token, when God sent down his prophets, their remarkable deeds inevitably became an inescapable destiny, so much so that no human effort could have possibly stopped the crucifixion of Christ, even had a thousand Pontius Pilates washed their hands of his righteous blood. Similarly, no power, however fierce, could have prevented the Prophet Mohammad from delivering his message. Hope, as it existed in these prophetic ages, was of a different kind to the one we know today; it was more akin to surrender, an acknowledgment of human feebleness in the face of natural, social or political factors that governed lives and livelihoods. Whatever may come, divine action, whether in the form of a deluge that sweeps away life as we know it, a prophetic message of compassion such as the one delivered by Jesus Christ, or the establishment of a system to organize the lives of mortals such as those conveyed by the Prophet Mohammad and by the Prophet Moses, cannot be reversed. The only consolation for these generations in the face of calamity was patience and the anticipation of the arrival of the Savior.

When life is confined to mere anticipation of the Savior, people are compassionate towards one another, counseling patience and helping one another as they pass the time waiting. Under these circumstances, a mother may pity her suckling infant and a husband may care for his pregnant wife and his elderly parents, but this does not mean that the level of parental care is not in line with that apparently obtaining in pre-Enlightenment France. Bertrand Russell argues that human instinct compels parents to care for their young because human infants are the weakest among all creatures and display the least degree of self-sufficiency, making the care of offspring necessary in order to preserve the species.[4] However, the state of affairs described in Badinter's *L'amour en plus*

could not have been possible had society not reached a complex juncture in its social hierarchy that gave birth to *surplus value*.

The Enslavement of Expectation

Though today there are few who would question the notion that the care and education of children is a worthwhile investment in the future of any society, it seems that exorbitant demands for profitable returns from this venture have lead to the subjugation of children in modern societies. A sociological study of child education in any modern society today might return results similar to those in Badinter's study: children are left in the charge of stern educators, burdened with more responsibility than they can bear; from a young age they toil and struggle for long hours, far longer than what is permissible for an average adult worker; they are not asked their opinion nor are their desires considered with regard to what we want them to learn.

Nonetheless, the desperate situation of children today does not invalidate Rousseau's observations on the subject, because in essence his conviction is not bound to encumbering children with more than what it is just, fair, or reasonable to expect of them, but rather, with parental neglect. It is enough to spend time and effort on youth education in order to reassure ourselves that we have expertly invested in the future, that of the family, or of the nation. We fulfill our obligations by not leaving our children defenseless against the twists of fate and in return we charge them with creating our future. With the grueling endeavors that we force upon our children, we guarantee the realization of a mechanism devoted to progress, development, and change. And this mechanism effectively functions as a historical substitution for the unending anticipation of the Savior, since the saviors of contemporary times are those members of society who are the most fragile and the most prone to injury. It is upon this fragility and frailty that we place our hope in the future, since we have exchanged the gods of the immemorial past with our children. The conspicuous distinction between the two is a result of our catastrophic choice of the deities that are the most prone to damage and the least able to resist.

The Artist's Disdain for his Subject Matter

The rapid progress of everything, from the body to architecture, industry, and commerce, along the path towards complete fragility, and the consequent urgency of preservation, necessitate some scrutiny. This is even more crucial when one considers the state of contemporary art and the concerns of its audience. While nothing in the world of art intrinsically negates hope, there is nonetheless a discrepancy between the pretensions of form and the philosophical reflection it embodies.

For an artist to photograph an impoverished district of Los Angeles and assume that in publishing these images he demonstrates solidarity with its inhabitants, implies that the artist no longer lives there. However intensely and passionately he may have lived through the transitions of this neighborhood in the past, he now merely *remembers* those for whom luck and hard work were insufficient, those who have not escaped. In the reproduction of these photographs, an intimacy is revealed with an image of the place rather than with its materiality. Given art's propensity for deception, the image of the destitute quarter could resemble the décor of one of Emir Kusturica's films in the same way that a vagabond might resemble Michelangelo's statue of the Prophet Moses. Yet in these photographs, the vagabond loses his identity without becoming a prophet.

The tendency of artistically-minded audiences to concern themselves with these works suggests that they assume that an image can show solidarity with a group of people, but that it cannot harm or kill them. This is because the solidarity of the audience is with the survivors of the inexplicable and unacceptable poverty of this district. The survivors are those who have escaped to the pure space of art, furnished with all the implements of preservation, from the scented soap that expunges bad odors to refrigerators that conserve food to photographic implements that capture loved ones before old age and death. Given these circumstances, it is altogether unlikely that an artist stands in solidarity with those who live without residency papers and work permits, those who are subjected to police brutality, those who are without legal rights which would permit them, at least in theory, to leave the dump where they live for the opulent air of the city. There is no doubt that an audience concerned with this type of art implicitly calls for the integration and legalization of these communities and urges the political and legal authorities to take necessary measures to improve their circumstances.

We know, however, that art itself cannot save these communities. Rather, art's predicament resembles that of the solitary refugee who is characterized by his singularity far more than the capacity of the law to feign equality. The inhabitants of these impoverished places are destined to suffer the same fate as the rest of the community in awaiting comprehensive solutions from the political and legal authorities. The art domain has always accommodated individuals who arise from these communities and encouraged them to exhibit their causes, insofar as their acceptance has been as refugees or exiles from societies in which life is impossible.

Jamming Axiomatics

While the mention of Los Angeles transfers us directly to its sunny shores, international fare, and vibrant nightlife, the mention of Baghdad, Kabul or Gaza cannot but evoke fear, hunger, disease, and gushing blood. Nonetheless, the

productivity of artistic representation, whether in cinema or in contemporary art, is not obscured by what such representation blurs in the enduring images of these places. Just as an artist can film a mixed dance party in Tehran, another can film violent riots in New York or Los Angeles. As the artist in both instances is transformed into a survivor, he also succeeds in jamming the image of the city promulgated by its authorities. It is for this reason that Taliban authorities sought photographs and accounts of the executions of women on football fields in order to turn Kabul into an image, much like New York or Los Angeles.[5]

However, jamming the official image of the city has never been effective. It is more likely to confront us with two prickly issues. The first is that unlawful activity in Los Angeles, to a large extent, resembles the lawful society of Tehran or Kabul, given that a dance party in Kabul lies outside the realm of legal activity and is subject to prosecution. As an art audience, we sympathize with the dancers of Kabul, whom we take to represent an example of a courageous society desiring freedom from oppression. To an extent, we want to liberate the image of unlawful activity in Los Angeles from any resemblance to Tehran as much as we want to liberate Kabul and Tehran. We assume that all people envision a life like that sought by the dancers in Tehran.

This brings us directly to the second issue, namely, the impossibility of lasting solutions, given that once any artist born and raised outside of a network of politically stable places like New York accepts the welcome of the art world, he or she becomes an escapee fleeing the inferno of unjust rule in Tehran and Gaza. Art becomes part of a breathtaking plan that resembles those of Mao Zedong, entailing the singular acceptance of police authority and the acquiescence to the jurisdiction of law. In the process, we exchange a living society for an image of a living society. We desire the persistence and endurance of the image while hoping that the society itself will wither and fade away. Nobody wants the rundown suburbs of Los Angeles to remain as they are, and, it seems, no one wants Gaza to stay as it is today. It is not this that is objectionable. Rather, what is unacceptable and intolerable is the acceptance of images of these communities as indisputable works of art.

Fading Cities

The pilots who took charge of the four planes on September 11, 2001 were acquainted with contemporaneity, yet they chose life in Kabul under the Taliban. In making this choice, they were able to destroy firmly established symbols of modernity. Works of art have also alluded to such events as consequences of modernity. In a lecture given at Julia Meltzer and David Thorne's studios in Los Angeles, Daniel Flaming showed an image of Wilshire Boulevard in Los Angeles taken from Google Earth. The tall buildings of the street were surrounded on both sides by neighborhoods inhabited by

An image from the Magnum Photos exhibition Bitter Fruit: Pictures from Afghanistan. Its caption reads: "Christopher Anderson AFGHANISTAN. Kunduz. 2001. Taliban fighter seen through the windshield of a Toyota HiLux that has been smeared with mud as camouflage from American bombers surrenders to Northern Alliance troops outside of Kunduz. Copyright Christopher Anderson/Magnum Photos."

illegal immigrants. Rather than the tall buildings of Wilshire Boulevard exercising authority over their surroundings, it was the surrounding areas that appeared to threaten the affluent street. Modern cities expend immense energy to remain within the parameters of what is comprehensible and acceptable. The neighborhoods that encircle Wilshire could, were they not subject to constant surveillance, destroy the functions of the tall buildings and contribute to their depreciation. The image would remain, but the street itself would be reduced in an instant to a pile of rubble.

In other places, far from Los Angeles, there is a pervasive awareness of the difficulty of reconciling such neighborhoods with the operative laws of modernity. In Beirut, Damascus, Tehran, and pre-occupation Baghdad, authorities place their confidence in imposing images of leaders that occupy the streets. These images spawn countless victims when armed disputes erupt between opposing factions. Yet in that part of the world, it is well known that images endure longer than cities, and that even if Gaza and south Beirut are obliterated in the blink of an eye or reduced to a dust heap, their images remain—as do the images of their leaders.

Responsibility for this discrepancy between the image of the place and the place itself does not lie with the artist, but with modernity. Despite modernity's obsession with fragility and its aspiration to produce instruments of preservation, it is unable to preserve bodies—so it resorts to preserving images. Ava Gardner remains an enduring image, even as Ava Gardner the person grows old. Since modernity cannot bring those societies drowning in violence and tragedy under its control, it confines them to

an image that, from the instance of capture, assigns itself to the past. And the artistic merit of such images derives from their claim to be authentic documents of pre-modernity, whatever their temporality.

The instant the picture catches the eye of the art world, the temporal disparity between audience and image is palpable. Artists are always photographing old cars and domestic appliances that belong to the past of modernity. They are very capable of utilizing the temporal disparity of such images. In a sense, what they photograph is the absence of the Apple computer on the shelf, increasing the authority of the historical discrepancy between the audience and the run-down districts of Los Angeles or the neighborhoods of Gaza. It is like an anthropologist uncovering the gullibility of a society yet to attain the comforts of modernity. Insofar as they have become artifacts, these images belong to the past of the audience. Given the implausibility of retaining these neighborhoods as they are, art resorts to the preservation of what it is possible to preserve.

Since Mario Ybarra Jr. exhibited his images of the districts of Los Angeles that are home to those without residency papers and work permits, it became clear to me that this city was fading and that nothing would remain of it, save perhaps its museums, or its images of celebrities hanging out at traffic intersections. This type of art extols impermanence. In all likelihood, modernity privileges this aspect and even compels it, since modernity never stops declaring: preserve images insofar as they are more delicate and accessible than bodies, buildings, and trees, and enjoin cities to die.

X

Translated from the Arabic by Nour Dados.

Bilal Khbeiz (1963, Kfarchouba) is a poet, essayist, and journalist. He regularly contributes to the newspapers *Beirut Al Masa'*, *Al Nahar*, and to *Future Television Beirut*, among other publications and networks. Published poetry and books on cultural theory include *Fi Annal jassad Khatia' Wa Khalas* (That the Body is Sin and Deliverance), *Globalisation and the Manufacture of Transient Events*, *The Enduring Image and the Vanishing World*, and *Tragedy in the Moment of Vision*.

1
Charles Baudelaire, *Le peintre de la vie moderne* (The Painter of Modern Life), 1863.

2
Nicole Avril, *Le Roman du visage* (Paris: Plon, 2000).

3
L'Amour en plus : histoire de l'amour maternel (XVIIe-XXe siècle) (Paris: Flammarion, 1980).

4
Bertrand Russell, *Religion and Science* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997).

5
This image was published in *Malaly* newspaper, Kabul, fall 1999. No one was certain at the time whether the Taliban sought to propagate these types of images or not. But after a short time, during the war in Iraq, Abu Musab al-Zarqawi was proud to be responsible for them. For him, these images became a means of making an example of his victims as a warning to his enemies.

Sven Lütticken

Viewing Copies: On the Mobility of Moving Images

X

This text will be the point of departure for a presentation at the James Gallery in the CUNY Graduate Center, New York, as the final part of a three-part exhibition to be curated by the author during the first half of 2010.

Sven Lütticken teaches art history at VU University Amsterdam. Sternberg Press recently published his book *Idols of the Market: Modern Iconoclasm and the Fundamentalist Spectacle*.
http://svenlutticken.blogspot.com

Marion von Osten

Irene ist Viele! Or What We Call "Productive" Forces

Irene ist Viele![1]

An extensive 2004 study undertaken by the Swiss Federal Office of Statistics (BFS) found that, in one of the world's wealthiest countries, of nearly fifteen billion annual work hours, eight billion went unpaid. Two-thirds of that free labor was performed by women, while women in the wage-labor sector were paid on average 18 percent less than men.[1] The study shows that the "invisible hand of the market," with its celebrated promise of economic equality, fails when it comes to social, cultural, and life-sustaining activities; furthermore, it appears that the "free market" has something against women. If, on top of this, the current form of capitalism is characterized by its extension of the logic of commodity production into the social realm (although, according to its classical self-conception, the capitalist economy actually claims to exclude the interpersonal realm), this means that not only wages and social services are reduced and cut, but above all that the reproductive reserves are plundered.[2] According to many contemporary theorists, what was considered in the Fordist system to be external to the concerns of the economy—communication, personalized services, social relationships, lifestyle, subjectivity—today establishes the conditions for the generation of wealth. Social and cultural competences and processes—the most varied forms of knowledge production and dissemination—are central to what Antonella Corsani calls "cognitive" capitalism.[3]

Thus the current debate surrounding precarity in Europe, as a neoliberal condition and a comprehensive mode of subjectivity, doesn't stop where wage labor or social-state welfare ends, but rather seeks out perspectives that help us to think beyond the reductive logic of the current conception of work, and beyond the nation-state as well. This also means being able to consider the material, social, and symbolic conditions necessary for life as interconnected entities that can overcome the traditional dichotomies of public/private and production/reproduction to set new standards for living life with all its facets and contingencies.[4]

But how does a life look when it doesn't define itself in relation to the status of wage labor, but rather through the desire to freely decide one's own conditions for living and working, effectively comprising a demand for a flexible labor market? What does it mean for our work and life when the social, the cultural, and the economic cease to be clearly distinguishable categories and instead condition and permeate each other? Beyond this, what does it mean when people come to terms with these new forms of work as isolated individuals? What can forms of collectivity look like? And what does it mean when there is not only no consideration of the redistribution of wealth in the precarity debate, but also no consideration of a good life for all? How do we expect to work politically to develop overall social conditions when the theoretical premises of their transformation remain to a large degree unexplained?

Redupers. Die allseitig reduzierte Persönlichkeit, 1978. Directed by Helke Sander. Courtesy Deutsche Kinemathek.

In this text I will pursue these questions in relation to a 1978 film by Helke Sander titled *Redupers. Die allseitig reduzierte Persönlichkeit* (The All-Around Reduced Personality: Outtakes). At the end of the 1970s, this film already tried to consider the immanence of liberation ideals and self-determination in capitalist societies. In a way, it represents a possible historical starting point for the current debate over forces of production, precarity, and critical potential by illustrating that, even in the upheaval of changes in the capitalist as well as gender order that took place in the transition from Fordism to post-Fordism, many networked and self-organizing production conditions (what today would be considered the source of "immaterial work") were already present—and were being analyzed by feminists.

In the Magnifying Glass of Non-Work

Redupers is set in the still-divided Berlin of the 1970s. The film begins with, and is continuously interrupted by, pans of Berlin's graffiti and slogan-covered facades, reminding us of the social struggles of 1968 or the binary socialist and capitalist power blocs. Against this backdrop of the city's ever-present division and the fading memory of the 1968 revolution, the film tells of the everyday life and work of a young press photographer and single mother who works with a feminist collective in addition to her regular job. Director Helke Sander plays the main character in Redupers herself: a photographer who "produces," develops, prints, and sells images as a freelancer for a Berlin newspaper, lives in a shared apartment with her daughter and a friend, and is in a relationship with a man who is not the father of her child. She works with a feminist producers' collective on a countercultural project in the public sphere and, as part of a Berlin art collective, on an exhibition directed against the dominant capitalist image of West Berlin. The whole construction of the film doesn't only destabilize prevailing notions around the separation of public and private realms, or the classical division of labor between director, author, and actor, but can also be read as a document of a form of self-representation that destabilizes parliamentary democracies' claims that the will and interest of "the people" or the subaltern must be represented by institutions and the media in order to be valid.[5]

From the beginning, this can be understood as political positioning on the filmmaker's part. Helke Sander is also a central figure of the so-called First Women's Movement. At the 1968 conference of the Socialist German Student Union (SDS) in Berlin she delivered the speech on behalf of the Action Committee on the Liberation of Women, an event that ended with the famous tomato being thrown at her comrades. In this speech, Sander demanded that the functionalist precept rooted in political economy, according to which capitalism must determine all social conditions, be set aside. Power relations in the private sphere, which affect women above all, cannot be accommodated in this perspective, but are instead denied and dismissed as a secondary contradiction. The political project shared by leftist men and women could not, according to Sander, be successful as long as only "exceptional women" were recognized by the merit system of the leftist intelligentsia. The question of the political project lies, according to Sander, in the method by which it is practiced. What was necessary was a political practice that recognizes the private realm, the body, gender relations, and the realm of reproduction as a political sphere.

The politicization of the private is a central motif of the social movements of the 1970s and is found throughout the film. *Redupers* no longer places this critique of the normative role of the housewife at the center. Instead, the filmmaker uses the politicized perspective on the private to examine the most varied activities and constraints, drawing connections to the social, economic, and cultural fields, and the power relationships at work between them. The question of the mother's care for the daughter and their relationship plays an important role, although social conditions in the film are indicated primarily by the ever-changing demands imposed upon the overworked protagonist, whose career as a press photographer requires her to be on location at irregular times, and with little notice. Beyond the unresolved question of care, the film remains attentive to all the invisible operations that comprise work within the culture as well—those not related directly to the sale of photographs: shopping for film, working in the darkroom, developing the film and printing the photos, drying and pressing the prints as well as retouching the images; but also: negotiating assignments, remaining informed about social events, maintaining contact with the persons photographed, which also goes beyond a working relationship, as well as submitting invoices and collecting honoraria, preparing tax returns, etc. The cash-value of the compensation that

the photographer Edda receives in Sander's film for her photos, with which she defrays all expenses for both her daughter's and her own subsistence, and for all her other projects, can never make up for all of this activity. Even just with regard to the production of the photos, it doesn't even amount to a decent hourly wage. The sale of photographs as a finished product thus contains contradictions very similar to those of selling one's own labor to capital. As the photograph is only a snapshot of an instant in a live event, frozen and commodified, so also is the work performed for the production of the image not contained in the price. In a similar way, life-sustaining, social, and communicative activities are also frozen in the concept of labor, consumed by capital like a commodity.[6]

Redupers. Die allseitig reduzierte Persönlichkeit, 1978. Directed by Helke Sander. Courtesy Deutsche Kinemathek.

This understanding has a historical side: that of the discovery of work as a source of property and wealth, from John Locke and Adam Smith to Marx's *Systems of Work* and the political economy as science. In the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries thinkers of all stripes apparently agreed that "work" alone represents human beings' most productive means of shaping the world and forming values. Even when Karl Marx, in his critique of the Gotha program, strongly criticized the claim that work is the source of all wealth (he asserted that nature is also a source of wealth and that the fetish for work is an expression of bourgeois ideology), during the period of industrialization through the radical re-evaluation of the overall social status of work, there were a striking number of other activities that assumed that they could form world and value as well. The most obvious reason why the theorists of the nineteenth century weren't aware of the radical limitations of this concept of work is rooted, according to Hannah Arendt, in the fact that they only attributed work to the production of sellable goods.[7]

Throughout industrialization, the concept of work came to be understood according to its capacity for maximizing profit and producing value. But this also meant that such a concept can neither encompass "work" in the life-sustaining sense nor productivity in any non-capitalist sense. Karl Marx conceived of work in much broader terms than those of the male factory worker. He also considered "making the audience laugh" (cultural work / entertainment industry) to be work, and protested against those of the workers' movement who only understood traditional industrial labor as work. Sweat and muscle power, real manpower, and the machine hall were apparently easier to politicize than the comics, entertainers, or women—for whom the "other" industry of unpaid caretaking, childrearing, shopping, and housework were intended—on the basis of their so-called feminine characteristics. The circumstances of their exploitation were hidden, but no less brutal in their effects. In contrast to the entertainment industry, which was quite small at the time, this second industry concerned almost the entire "other half" of society. Alongside the sticky psycho-social dependency of the genders, the dichotomy formed by the woman's dependency upon the money of the man would determine the entire symbolic order of industrial capitalism.

But reducing work to production also went beyond this to lock the theoretical approaches inside the factory, so to speak. It did not take long for the critique of capitalism to consider the gendering of paid and unpaid labor alongside its role in producing capital as well.[8]

Living a life that unfolds in opposing directions, the main character in Helke Sander's film points to the imprecision of this discourse. While her "free time" is spent working with her female friends on an art project—as she says "one interesting project or another is always blowing into my house"—her days remain filled with different activities characterized by usefulness and/or idealism, both informal and normally undocumented. While her work as a press photographer secures her income and is what she describes as her actual career, the other activity—working on a cultural project—fulfills her desire for a collective, feminist practice, for change and cultural and political empowerment. At the same time, both are work, as is caring for her daughter. But in these apparently self-determined conditions, as the film shows, the unpaid care work remains not only the responsibility of women, but also invisible to the commodity forms of knowledge and cultural production. Self-organized work is also split into remunerative work offering financial support and artistic, self-actualizing, collective work that brings in cultural and social capital. And yet the care work at home is taken into account by neither occupation. While her cultural-political work is coupled with the actualization of meaningful individual and collective desires, the care work must somehow be organized around it. Her work with a group of women on a project to design a counter-image to the dominant one of a divided and cut-off Berlin is indeed more meaningful than freezing into photographs "events which are of publishable value for the newspaper." The

women's project for the Berlin art association doesn't only reflect the de-valuation of care work to that of a burdensome activity, but also points to the different levels of their own participation in the same dominant condition, as well as to their individual desires for public recognition. The sexist logic of society and the desire to change it thus come dangerously close to one another. In this way, the film's politicization of the private dissolves into new concepts of occupation and career, but while it finds its place in the self-actualization of "more meaningful" work, it no longer locates this change in the social conditions themselves.[9]

All-Around Reduced Views

Sander's film focuses on this absence in its descriptions of all the daily activities we perform in private and public space. For more than thirty years, feminist economists have examined work relationships and conditions from the perspective of non-work, calling our attention to the fact that the field of political economy (which is about two hundred and fifty years old) has until now only addressed commodity production and not the question of how to bring about sociality. On the one hand, this is because the field developed alongside mechanization and industrialization and was in a position to theorize these new production systems and capital relations, but also because a specific ruling form of subjectivity became central to the development of Western capitalist society: the *homo economicus*, the subject of this economy, with white skin and masculine gender, who follows his own interests and whose self-interest is also believed to serve the interests of all others. According to Elisabeth Stiefel, an economist from Cologne, the *homo economicus* represents not only the tasks of the public economic sphere, but also those of the head of household, while the interior of the household is *terra incognita* for economic theory. The social and the cultural thus remain fundamentally exterior to the understanding of the economical. As classical economic theory assumed care work to be self-evident—and therefore performed for free—women had to take on unpaid "extra-economical" activities for "cultural" reasons, and this gendering of paid and unpaid work, which even today finds a significant disparity in the pay of men and women, has not hurt capital in the slightest in two hundred years.

The separation of social, cultural, and economic discourses from those of production and reproduction has solidified a theoretical reductionism which has made it difficult to discern where and how to economically position the analysis and critique of post-Fordist work and life conditions, especially because it is precisely those extra-economic conditions that have become central for the production of added value. How can we begin to bring these into a discussion about the re-distribution of wealth, when above all wage labor can no longer be guaranteed? How can we demand payment for something that is not yet considered in an economic sense work? And do we even want to recognize and monetize non-work as "work" at all, thereby economizing all aspects of life?

It becomes even more complicated to address these questions when they extend, together with gender duality and its location in the (neo-)classical work imperative, into the desire economy of a "good life."

Redupers. Die allseitig reduzierte Persönlichkeit, 1978. Directed by Helke Sander. Courtesy Deutsche Kinemathek.

Sander's film also speaks to this. The figure of the photographer also plays a double role in the film: as both occupation and as a self-actualization project. The photographer historically represents an exception to the gendered division of labor, as it was one of the first occupations to witness an altered discourse of visuality brought about by new technologies, and this opened possibilities for self-sufficiency and financial independence to not just men. The female photographer thus functions as a kind of role model for women, since the possession of her own money in this "creative occupation" could be associated with liberation from the heterosexual regime. Thus it was not unusual for these self-sufficient women to live with other women and not be married to men. The techno-emancipative role model in Sander's film witnesses this historical narrative at the end of the 1970s, in a new situation between diligent self-organization and a relatively bureaucratic information and culture industry, in which the underpayment of freelance workers has become the rule. At the same time, Sander's figure of the photographer shows who has access to the representation of the world and who selects, determines, and utilizes it.

In a central scene, in which the photographer Edda calls the newspaper editors seeking payment due to her, and her just-awoken friend finds the bathroom full of developed film, a conflict emerges: the good,

non-heteronormative life together—being self-sufficient and earning money from home—and being dependent on editors. The economic reality of self-employment that was previously understood as emancipatory eats more and more into Edda's personal relationships. The emancipatory struggle that had the good life as its objective now reappears in the unsatisfied longing for change and the struggle to survive.

Against this backdrop, the film reflects the fact that the desire for feminist, occupational, and cultural-political self-sufficiency—the personal responsibility of earning money and working in the counterculture—have inverted to become their opposites. They are not only unable to resolve the social contradictions that they set out to overcome, but become mired in them instead. The protagonist's various motivations for wanting to become self-sufficient (by becoming a press photographer and an artist) connect completely in the film for the first time when the protagonist enters a new relationship with herself by going on a visit to the editorial floor of the magazine *Stern* to promote her feminist art project. In the scene, the photographer Edda puts on makeup and perfume, and, thinking as she walks down the hall to the journalist's office, "if I really wanted to represent what is right in my job as press photographer, I would have to be at home here (in the halls of *Stern*)." In this situation, it is her cultural self speaking, but not her career self, and certainly not her activist self. The interplay of her various repertoires—the fragmentation of her person—is especially clear here. This scene suggests how, by working by herself and on projects outside of her career, Edda finds options for a "better position" on the horizon. The mix of positions and activities also becomes a "portfolio": what she has done without pay and possibly with a higher degree of political investment accumulates social or cultural capital which is usable in other markets for a better position or a career in art. This points to a practice that has transformed into a dominant work-related demand today, in which unpaid internships and other indignities are part of a "normal career."

In Switzerland today, job seekers show their unpaid work in their résumés, on the one hand to signal their "willingness to work," but also to show their flexibility and versatility in the tightening job market. The feminist demand for the visibility of unpaid work seems realized here, but at the same time, the documentation of the informal serves only the efficiency logic of existing capitalist conditions by indicating a capability and readiness for wage labor.

The *Stern* editor was unresponsive to the film's protagonist. For him, she is "only" a figure of the women's movement—a feminist and a political activist. Not only is she denied the role of a cultural producer who can represent political conditions, but so is she denied any possible success as well. Here Sander illustrates what usually remains acknowledged in current theories on the emergent productivity of individual desires within

Redupers. Die allseitig reduzierte Persönlichkeit, 1978. Directed by Helke Sander. Courtesy Deutsche Kinemathek.

neoliberalism: that pay for work performed in vastly different markets does not equal the sum of the parts. Viewed from today's perspective, the film not only caricatures government-funded start-ups and the plans of the Hartz commission, but also corrects the idea that the celebrated figure of the "entrepreneurial self" is not gendered or part of a hierarchy. The reflective, connection-forming, and knowledge-producing form of work sketched out here also points to a change in society through which new claims to activity, collectivity, and property can be negotiated.

The protagonist is not only photographer, feminist activist, and theorist, that is, cultural producer, but also a product of emancipatory demands and capitalist impositions, a subject who has pulled away from wage labor and its regulatory apparatus in the factory or in the office, as the Autonomia Operaia called for. At the same time, she is a *Reduper* (an all-around REDUced PERson)—a figure who cannot be located biographically, and instead requires a new form of subjectivity to be realized in the contradictions of capitalist socialization. In this way, *Redupers* marks the post-Fordist convergence of work relationships, subjectivity, desires, and political demands that has consequently brought about a multitude of all-around reduced personalities.

Creating Probabilities

Three decades after *Redupers*, the call for self-determination and social participation is no longer only an emancipatory demand, but increasingly also a social obligation. In the new conditions of governance, subjects are pushed towards maturity, autonomy, and personal responsibility. They seem to willingly subordinate themselves to the dispositions of power—they are

"obliged to be free" (Nikolas Rose). Forms of discipline that were used in the time of mechanization and industrialization have been extended in post-Fordist societies into new forms of control. Contemporary forms of organization discipline subjects and their bodies less through "guilt and punishment," and more by aiming at internalizing productivity goals. This produces a new relationship of the subject to itself—friendliness towards customers, working with the team, increasing one's own motivation, self-organizing work routines, managing time efficiently, and being personally responsible for both the company's and one's own actions are not only demands being made on the work subject, but increasingly also on the unemployed. According to Michel Foucault, this new concept of governing "is not a way to force people to do what the governor wants; it is always a versatile equilibrium, with complementarity and conflicts between techniques which assure coercion and processes through which the self is constructed or modified by himself."[10] One's behavior in a more or less open field of possibility therefore determines the path of success. Exertion of power consists, in this sense and according to Foucault, in the "creation of probability."[11]

Accordingly, it is not a disciplinary regime that guides the subject's actions, but rather a set of governing practices that mobilize and encourage rather than "survey and punish." The new subjects of work should apparently be as contingent and flexible as the "markets." A work subject who is able to find a productive relationship between work time and life time is "supported and challenged," and within this relationship private activities are also geared toward economic use value. The entrepreneur of one's own labor[12] should also be the artist of his/her own life. The hope that these paradoxical demands could become dominant labor market politics is likely due to the fact that under such conditions, workers can always feel "liberated" from constraints, as Helke Sander's film was already able to show in 1978. It must be worked out, therefore, how the transition from liberation programs to job specifications takes place, and whether and for whom they are effective. Three decades after *Redupers*, we need to ask how the relationship between work and non-work can be politicized when their coupling has already become hegemonic in its representation.

Although the economic field, in a double sense, mobilizes and controls the social realm, the paradigms of capitalist production remain the same. They do not inform the "resources" of our social lives themselves, even (and especially) if cognitive capitalism has parasitically positioned itself at the side of reproduction. Acceleration and maximizing profit continue to be advanced as the necessary logic of the market. Life itself is subsumed under the rules of efficiency and optimization that were first encountered under the regime of automated industrial work in order to synchronize the body with machines.[13] Today, it is our cognitive capabilities that we are expected to optimize and our self-relation (to our work) that we are expected to correct in the interest of lifelong learning.[14]

Abisag Tuellmann, Flying Clipper - Traumreise Unter Weissen Segeln, 1962. Photograph used in Redupers. Die allseitig reduzierte Persönlichkeit, 1978. Directed by Helke Sander. Courtesy Deutsche Kinemathek.

Beyond this, the film *Redupers* shows that the anchoring of neoliberal ideology in the subject cannot only be considered to be a product of post-Fordist production or the information economy. Rather, the film points to arguments made by Eve Chiapello and Luc Boltanski, who in their book *The New Spirit of Capitalism* undertake a sociology of the critique of capitalism since 1968.[15] They examine the "social critique" that became engaged on the political level for the redistribution of wealth and for equal rights as well as the "artistic critique" that emerged from the artistic and intellectual avant-gardes such as the Situationists and various social movements of the postwar era. With demands for autonomy, authenticity, and creativity, but also through artistic practices beyond the classical concept of the work of art, these critiques attacked the use of the social as commodity form, discipline in the factory, bureaucratic inertia, and hierarchical power relations in the industrial societies. Boltanski and Chiapello then argue that it is precisely capitalism's adaptation to these "cultural critiques" that increasingly corroded the politicization of life and the social critique of property relations, thus paving the way for neoliberalism.

According to Yann Moulier Boutang, the classical conception of economic value and measurement changes in cognitive capitalism, since the growing use and exchange of knowledge in post-Fordist production extends far beyond its economic utilization as commodity.[16] The viral dynamics of new distribution technologies such as the internet renders information and knowledge far less accessible to supervisory bodies, as Sander's film also suggests. In the transformation of the old economy, these new possibilities also point to a new field of

struggle—such as the conflicts and arguments over *intellectual property* and the so-called *commons*.

After viewing *Redupers* against a backdrop of contemporary economic analysis, it seems insufficient to simply point out the limits in the study of political economy or to show that capitalism has incorporated certain concepts of life for its own advancement. Rather, we must also ask whether and how a critique of capitalism can make allowances for the alliance of work and life within the subject's own domain—its biopolitical preparations and desires—without getting mired in merely describing them as another advanced form of exploitation.

X

Translated from the German by Jennifer Cameron

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1
" *Irene ist Viele*" refers to Helke Sander's film *Eine Prämie für Irene* [A Bonus for Irene] (1971), in which the voiceover says "Irene ist Viele" (Irene is many). In the film, the figure of Irene stands for the many factory workers who are single mothers. *Eine Prämie für Irene* was one of the first films in Germany to suggest the interrelations between the public and the private spheres. "Irene ist Viele" was also the title of a film program I curated together with art historian Rachel Mader in the Shedhalle Zürich in 1996, in which films by feminist filmmakers from Germany and Switzerland were reviewed and reevaluated together with the filmmakers. Helke Sander was part of this important event that also tried to bridge older and younger generations.

2
According to a 2004 study by the Swiss Federal Office of Statistics (BFS), two-thirds of all unpaid work is performed by women. This corresponds to an equivalent of 172 billion Swiss Francs or 70 percent of the gross domestic product. In the future, unpaid work is to be economically evaluated on a regular basis. Although this calculation, based upon an estimation of market costs, is necessarily inexact, this sum corresponds to nearly the entire yearly wages of employed workers in Switzerland.

3
Mascha Madörin, "Der kleine Unterschied in hunderttausend Franken," *Widerspruch* 31 (1996): 127–142. See also Pauline Boudry, Brigitta Kuster, and Renate Lorenz, eds., *Reproduktionskonten fälschen! Heterosexualität, Arbeit und Zuhause* (Berlin: b_books, 1999).

4
Contemporary production models are characterized by their transformation of workers' learned skills not used in the workplace into a productive force. The post-operaistic theorists in France and Italy have shown that all immaterial and affective work gains significance in post-Fordist production. With investigations into the reorganization of the automotive and textile industries in northern Italy and the image industries in Ile de France, these theorists of "immaterial work" have also shown that communication and subjectivity are not only components of postindustrial, informalized, and informal production, but also themselves become an applied process in the industrial sector and the scene of new struggles. See also Maurizio Lazzarato, "Immaterielle Arbeit. Gesellschaftliche Tätigkeit unter den Bedingungen des Postfordismus," in *Umherschweifende Produzenten. Immaterielle Arbeit und Subversion ,* ed. Thomas Atzert (Berlin : ID-Archiv, 1998), 39–52, and Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, *Empire* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2000).

5
Affective and communicative interaction and the creation of sociality and subjectivity never become economically valuable, but are rather always valuable for life itself. The social doesn't stop when one leaves the workplace, whether this be at home or in the office, and thus it can also never fully be absorbed by capital, since affects cannot be exclusively industrially organized (even if this is attempted in the image and film industry). If immaterial work, interaction, and communication can become a resource for accumulation, or even become a commodity, then this means that a vital aspect of the work force can no longer be clearly determined through measurements such as working hours, price comparisons, or possessions. The subjectivity of the workers doesn't end in an imaginary factory, but has rather a further effect on different social processes which are not only marked by their economic value, although they can, in the reverse argument, generate it. This also means asking how we ourselves reproduce or bring about the conditions that we criticize. See the project http://www.ateliereuropa.com/ , which I developed together with Pauline Boudry, Brigitta Kuster, Isabell Lorey, Angela McRobbie, and Katja Reichard, in which we carried out a "militant investigation" with cultural producers; see also *Be Cr eative! The Creative Imperative* , which I organized with students and theorists for the Museum of Design, Zurich, http://www.k3000.ch/becreative/ .

6
The film is the expression of these demands for (self-)representation which emerged from the struggles against the exercise of control over subjectivity and are and were central to both the social and global emancipation movements.

7
It was Marx's achievement to have analyzed the abstraction process in which work is transformed in the capitalist accumulation into labor (*Arbeitskraft* , lit. work-force): into a seemingly measurable size. Capital doesn't buy all the necessary and living work, nor even the social, cultural, and spatial conditions to afford them, but rather a time-energy-money equivalence, in which life-sustaining activities are unnamed but apparently included. Labor was therefore also bought in the time of industrialization as a pre-produced commodity, in which the actual production relations which produce the commodity labor remain hidden. Thus capital in the time of industrialization had command over care work, communication, and lifestyle.

8
Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1958).

9
This missing perspective refers to the "becoming-subject" of factory work as a masculine muscular body with white skin, which would have to be analyzed in order to make a complete critique of the discipline and the making-effective of the body and its exploitation—up through existential destruction in the time of industrialization.

10
Today, this means that migrants are underpaid to perform the remaining non-prestige care work so that the men and women wrapped up in their wage work or prestige work can carry out their paid or unpaid status work. Care work, which under traditional gender regimes was coupled to the subject position of the housewife, is now bought as a service on the market, or pushed upon those who can't buy it. After finishing cleaning and care work, the servant cannot afford a servant of his/her own who would perform this work in their own home.

11
Michel Foucault, "About the Beginning of the Hermeneutics of the Self: Two Lectures at Dartmouth," in *Political Theory*, Vol. 21, No. 2 (May, 1993): 198–227, 203f. Foucault's conception of governing as "determining the conduct of individuals" focuses on how "the contact point where the individuals are driven by others is tied to the way they conduct themselves." Foucault's argument is that, by means of these so-called "technologies of the self," a much more profound integration of the individual into power takes place, without which the functional modes of modern Western society are difficult to imagine.

12
Originally "Schaffung der Wahrscheinlichkeit," in Michel Foucault, "Das Subjekt und die Macht," *Jenseits von Strukturalismus und Hermeneutik* , eds. Hubert L. Dreyfus and Paul Rabinow (Frankfurt am Main: Athenäum, 1987), 255.

13
See G. Günter Voß and Hans J. Pongratz, "Der Arbeitskraftunternehmer. Eine neue Grundform der Ware Arbeitskraft?," *Kölner Zeitschrift für Soziologie und Soz-ialpsychologie* 50, no. 1 (1998): 131–158.

14
The effects of this acceleration and its attendant standardization are especially clear in the service sector, the *care economy*, and the entire health and social systems that come under the constraints of quality management and increased efficiency as well as austere fiscal policy. The same is also true according to the Bologna negotiations for the education system of the entire European Union.

15
See a collection of texts devoted to this question, *Norm der Abweichung* , ed. Marion von Osten (Vienna: Springer, 2003).

16
Luc Boltanski and Eve Chiapello, *Der neue Geist des Kapitalismus* (Konstanz: UVK Universitätsverlag Konstanz, 2003).