Editorial

All things have borders that make them what they are. Some borders are spatial, like the edge of a painting, and some are chronological, like the end of a play. In this issue, Vivian Ziherl and Maria Iñigo Clavo both attempt to translate modernity from a historical, chronological teleology into a spatial geography. Ziherl does this by drawing our attention to the persistence, within contemporary space, of that supposedly historical borderline, the frontier, while Clavo provides a taxonomy of the various prefixes, like post-, pre-, and anti-, that have been appended to the "modern" in order to conceal its violent distribution in space within a false sequence of time.

Often, the role of a vanguard is to deploy one kind of limit against the other. Performance took its significance by insisting on chronological borders within a visual art context. By simply ending, the thinking went, and not repeating, performance resisted incorporation, and with it, the accumulation of value, which not only drew attention to the ubiquity of that motivation more generally, but was anyway required to establish the alternative credibility necessary for certain commitments, projects, and ideas to fall into relief.

In the opposite direction, vanguard performers often self-consciously subordinated the chronological to the topological, creating visual environments that threatened, like a landscape, to endure past all inherited understanding of an event's ending. More mundanely, institutions organized around events or objects frequently find it necessary to treat the one like the other. Despite the fact that a Pollock persists in time, one typically has to buy a ticket to the museum that owns it—a ticket which is only good for this or that hour of this or that day. The painting may not be an event, but our encounter with it usually is. David Claerbout writes about the closure of a certain technological era when photography enabled such encounters outside the walls of the museum, and the implications for authorial subjectivity in light of what he calls "the silence of the lens."

Event-producing institutions have likewise evolved to leave a corresponding trail of props, documents, or souvenirs: objects sufficiently implicated in what has transpired to become totems capable of sustaining its otherwise vanishing legacy. The problem with a vanguard then is that it relies on the very institutional practice it would subvert to provide the rationale for its own behavior. It cannot succeed, because to do so would erase the stated reasons for its own existence. This is why the oldest and most established institutions—like museums, temples, or academies—often house the most impressively dissident tribes. To be recognized for what they are, self-conscious interventions in a social-historical process require a community securely implicated in the reproduction of that same process. "The avant-garde," Claire Fontaine writes, "provided no credible counterpoint, for it had not adequately resolved its relationship to

politics as the governing of men, as administration, and as repressive apparatus."

This is why Franco "Bifo" Beradi and Marco Magagnoli look at the recent destruction, by the street artist Blu, of his own murals to argue that the project of abolishing the distance between art and everyday life that characterized the twentieth century should be retired. Meanwhile Rebekah Sheldon looks at the recent work of vanguard queer theorists to show how this refusal might be more difficult in practice than it is in theory.

Finally, Giorgio Agamben concludes his monumental *Homo Sacer* project by arguing for an ontology of style that would raise matters of taste to the highest existential reality, reuniting the subject divided by power into bare life, *bios*, on the one hand, and social belonging, *zoe*, on the other.

X

Giorgio Agamben
Toward an Ontology of Style

1.

Form-of-life is not something like a subject, which preexists living and gives it substance and reality. On the contrary, it is generated in living; it is "produced by the very one for which it is form" and for that reason does not have any priority, either substantial or transcendental, with respect to living. It is only a manner of being and living, which does not in any way determine the living thing, just as it is in no way determined by it and is nonetheless inseparable from it.[1]

Medieval philosophers were familiar with a term, *maneries*, which they traced back to the verb *manere*, while modern philologists, identifying it with the modern "manner," have it derive from *manus*. A passage of the *Book of Muhammad's Ladder* instead suggests a different etymology. The author of this visionary work, which must have been familiar to Dante, at a certain point witnesses an apparition of a pen, from which "ink issued" (*manabat encaustum*). "And all these things," he writes, "were done in such a manner that they seemed to have been created in that very instant" (*et haec omnia tali manerie facta erant, quod simul videbantur creata fuisse*).[2] The etymological juxtaposition *manare*/ *maneries* shows that *maneries* here means "mode of welling up": all these things emanate from the pen in such a way that they seem to have been created in that very instant.

In this sense, form-of-life is a "manner of rising forth," not a being that has this or that property or quality but a being that is its mode of being, which is its welling up and is continually generated by its "manner" of being. (It is in this sense that one is to read the Stoic definition of *ethos* as *pegè biou*, "rising-forth of life.")

2.

It is in this way that we must understand the relationship between *bios* and *zoè* in form-of-life. At the end of *Homo Sacer I*, form of life was briefly evoked as a *bios* that is only its *zoè*. But what can "living (or be-ing) one's own *zoè*" mean? What can a mode of life be that has for its object only life, which our political tradition has always already separated into bare life? Certainly it will mean living it as something absolutely inseparable, causing *bios* and *zoè* to coincide at every point. But above all, what are we to understand by *zoè* if it cannot be a question of bare life? Our corporeal life, the physiological life that we tend to always already separate and isolate? Here one sees the limit and, at the same time, the abyss that Nietzsche had to have glimpsed when he speaks of "great poli-tics" as physiology. Here the risk is the same one that the biopolitics of modernity has fallen into: to make bare life as such the preeminent object of politics.

Therefore it is necessary above all to neutralize the bipolar

zoè/ *bios* ap-paratus. Just as every time we nd ourselves confronted with a two-sided machine, here one needs to guard against the temptation of playing one pole off against the other as well as that of simply contracting them onto one another in a new articulation. That is to say, it is a matter of render-ing both *bios* and *zoè* inoperative, so that form-of-life can appear as the *tertium* that will become thinkable only starting from this inoperativity, from this coinciding—which is to say, falling together—of *bios* and *zoè*.

The above is one of ten India ink drawings made by illustrator Jim Leon after the book Psychopathia Sexualis (1886), a study of sexual perversions authored by Austrian psychiatrist Richard Krafft-Ebing.

3.

In ancient medicine there is a term— *diaita*—that designates the regime of life, the "diet" of an individual or a group, understood as the harmonic proportion between food (*sitos*) and physical exercise or labor (*ponos*). Thus, in the *Corpus Hippocraticum*, "the human diet" (*diaite anthropine*) is something like the mode of life, variously articulated according to seasons and individuals, best adapted to good health (*pros hygeien orthos*). That is to say, it is a question of a *bios* whose object seems to be solely *zoè*.

Curiously, this medical term also has another technical meaning, which this time refers—as also happens, after all, with our term "diet"— to the political-juridical sphere: *diaita* is that arbitration that decides a suit not according to the letter of the law but according to circumstances and equity (hence, in medieval and modern vocabulary, it has developed the meaning of "a political assembly with decision-making power"). In this sense, the term is opposed to *dike*, which indicates not so much cus-tom or mode of life but imperative rule (Aristotle, *Rhetoric,* 1374b 19: "one must recur rather to *diaita* than to *dike*,

because *diaitetes*, the will, looks to the convenient, while *dikastes*, judgment, to the law [*nomos*]").

As often happens, the gap between two meanings of the same term can give rise to instructive considerations. If politics, as we have seen, is founded on an articulation of life (living/living well; life/autarchic life), then it certainly cannot be surprising that the mode of life, the "diet" that secures the good health of human beings, can also assume a political meaning, which, however, concerns not the *nomos* but the governance and regime of life (and it is no accident that the Latin term that translates *diaita— regimen*—also preserves the same semantic duplicity: the title *de regimine* is common to both medical and political treatises). On the level of "regime," biological life and political life are indeterminate.

4.

Theologians distinguish between the life that we live (*vita quam vivimus*), namely, the sum of facts and events that constitute our biog-raphy, and the life by means of which we live (*vita qua vivimus*), that which renders life livable and gives to it a sense and a form (it is perhaps what Victorinus calls *vitalitas*). In every existence these two lives appear divided, and yet one can say that every existence is the attempt, often unsuccessful and nevertheless insistently repeated, to realize their coincidence. Indeed, only that life is happy in which the division disappears.

If one leaves to one side projects to reach this happiness on the col-lective level—from convent rules to phalansteries—the place where the study of the coincidence between the two lives has found its most sophisticated laboratory is the modern novel. Henry James's characters—but it holds for all characters—are in this sense only the experiment in which the life that we live is ceaselessly divided from the life by which we live and, at the same time, just as obstinately seeks to reunite itself with it. Thus, on the one hand, their existence is split into series of faces, perhaps accidental and in any case unassumable, object of the mundane *episteme* par excellence, gossip; on the other hand, it appears as the "beast in the jungle," something that is always waiting in ambush for them in the curves and cruxes of life and will one day inevitably pounce to show "the real truth" about them.

5.

Sexual life—which appears, for example, in the sexual biographies that Krafft-Ebing collects in his *Psychopathia sexualis* in the same years when James is writing his novels—seems to actualize a threshold that escapes the scission between the two lives. Here the beast in the jungle has always already pounced—or rather, has always

already unveiled its phantasmatic nature. These biographies, which are by all appearances miserable and have been transcribed solely to bear witness to their patho-logical and infamous character, testify to an experience in which the life *that* has been lived is identi ed without remainder with the life *by which* it has been lived. In the life that the anonymous protagonists live what is at stake in every instant is the life by which they live: the latter has been wagered and forgotten without remainder from the beginning in the former, even at the cost of losing all dignity and respectability. The short-sighted summaries of medical taxonomy conceal a sort of archive of the blessed life, whose pathographic seals had each time been broken by desire. (The narcissistic withdrawal of libido into the Ego, by which Freud de nes perversion, is only the psychological transcription of the fact that for the subject what is in question in that determined and un-controllable passion is his life, that this life has been entirely put at stake in this certain gesture or in that certain perverse behavior.)

It is striking that to nd examples and materials of a life inseparable from its form in our society, one has to rummage through pathographic registers—or, as happened to Foucault for his *Lives of Infamous Men*—in police archives. In this sense, form-of-life is something that does not yet exist in its fullness and can be attested only in places that, under present circumstances, necessarily appear unedifying. In any case, it is a matter of an application of the Benjaminian principle according to which the elements of the nal state are hidden in the present, not in the tendencies that appear progressive but in the most insigni cant and contemptible.
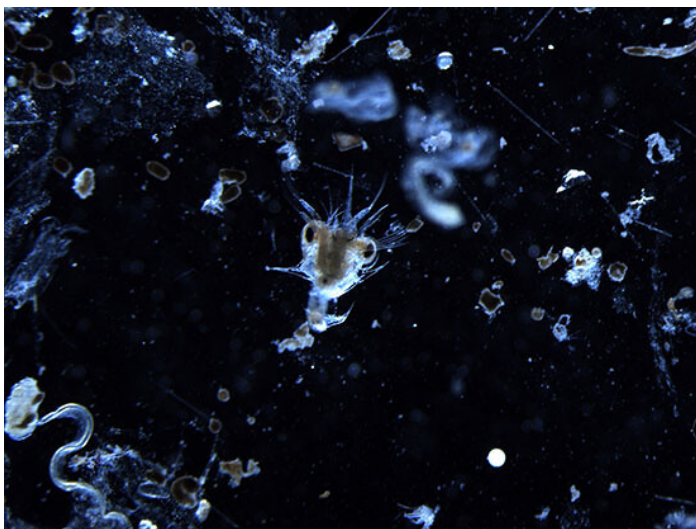
An image of unknown origin shows plankton enlarged. Photo: Istimewa

6.

There is, however, also a high tradition of inseparable life. In early Christian literature, the proximity between life and *logos* that is in ques-tion in the prologue to the Gospel of John was taken as the model of an inseparable life. "Life itself," one reads in Origen's commentary, "comes into existence after the Word [*epigignetai toi logoi*], being inseparable [*achoristos*] from it after it has come into existence."[3]

According to the messianic paradigm of "eternal life" (*zoè aionos*), the very relationship between *bios* and *zoè* is transformed in such a way that *zoè* can appear in Clement of Alexandria as the supreme end of *bios*: "Piety toward God is the only truly universal exhortation that clearly concerns *bios* in its entirety, stretched out in every instant toward the su-preme end, *zoè*."[4] The reversal of the relation between *bios* and *zoè* here allows for a formulation that simply would not have made sense in classical Greek thought and that seems to anticipate modern biopolitics: *zoè* as *telos* of *bios*.

In Victorinus the attempt to think the relationship between Father and Son produces an unheard-of ontology, according to which "every be-ing has an inseparable species [*omne esse inseparabilem speciem habet*], or rather, the species is the substance itself, not because the species is prior to being, but because the species de nes being."[5] Like living and life, so also being and form here coincide without re-mainder.

7.

It is from this perspective that one can read the way in which Fran-ciscan theorists completely rethought the Aristotelian division of souls (or lives), to the point of radically calling into question both the very reality of the division and the hierarchy between vegetative, sensitive, and intellectual soul that Scholasticism had drawn from it. Intellectual life, writes Scotus, contains in itself vegetative and sensitive life not in the sense that the latter, being subordinated to the former, are to be abolished or formally destroyed but, on the contrary, only in the sense of their greater perfection (*Intellectiva continet perfecte et formaliter vegetativam et sensiti-vam per se et non sub ratione destruente rationem vegetativae et sensitivae, sed sub ratione perfectiori quam illae formae habeantur sine intellectiva*). Richard of Middleton can thus af rm that "the vegetative, sensitive, and intellective are not three forms, but one sole form [*non sunt tres formae, sed una forma*], by means of which there is in the human being a vegetative, sensitive, and intellective being." And beyond the Aristotelian division, the Franciscans elaborate the idea of a "form of corporeity" (*forma corporeitatis*), which is already found perfected in the embryo before the intellectual soul and later coexists with it. This means that there is never anything like a bare life, a life without form that functions as a negative foundation for a superior and

more perfect life: corporeal life is always already formed, is always already inseparable from a form.

8.

How to describe a form-of-life? At the beginning of his *Parallel Lives*, Plutarch evokes an *eidos*, a form that the biographer must know how to pick out beyond the muddle of events. What he seeks to grasp is not, however, a form-of-life but an exemplary trait, something that, in the sphere of action, allows him to unite one life to another in a single paradigm. In general, ancient biography—the lives of philosophers and poets that it has transmitted to us—does not seem interested in describ-ing the real events nor in composing them into a unitary form so much as instead choosing a paradigmatic fact—extravagant and signi cant—deduced from the work rather than the life. If this singular projection of work over life remains problematic, it is nonetheless possible that pre-cisely the attempt to de ne a life starting from a work constitutes some-thing like the logical place where ancient biography had a presentiment of a form-of-life.
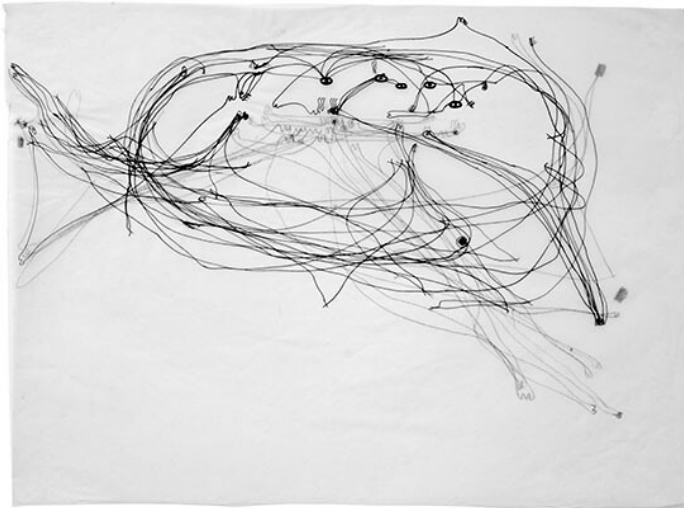
This illustration by educator Fernand Deligny shows the patterns autistic children trace in walking, from the book Maps And Wander Lines, (2013). Photo: Anaıs Masson, Archives Jacques Allaire and Marie-Dominique Guibal.

9.

Fernand Deligny never sought to recount the life of the autistic children with whom he lived. Instead, he attempted to scrupulously tran-scribe on tracing paper the routes of their movements and encounters in the form of what he called "lines of drift" (*lignes d'erre*). Placed on top of one another, the tracing papers allow a sort of circular or elliptical ring (*cerne*) to appear, beyond the tangle of

lines, which include within them-selves not only lines of drift but also the points (*chevêtres*, from *enchevrê-ment*, "entanglement"), strikingly constant, at which the routes cross. "It is clear," he writes, "that the routes—the lines of drift—are transcribed and that the ring area each time appears as the *trace* of *something else* that was not *foreseen* or pre-thought by those doing the tracing nor by those being traced. It is clear that it is a question of the effect of *something* that is not due to language, nor does it refer to the Freudian unconscious."[6]

It is possible that this striking tangle, apparently indecipherable, ex-presses more than any account not only the mute children's form of life but any form of life. In this sense it is an instructive exercise to attempt to mark on the map of the cities where we have lived the itineraries of our movements, which prove to be stubbornly and almost obsessively constant. It is in the tracks of that in which we have lost our life that it is perhaps possible to   nd our form-of-life. In any case, Deligny seems to attribute to his *lignes d'erre* something like a political meaning that is prelinguistic and yet collective: "It is by observing this ring area that there came to us the project of persisting in transcribing the simple *vis-ible* waiting to see *appear* there a trace of what we write with a capital W, inscribed in us since our *species* had existence, a primordial We that insists on foreshadowing, beyond every will and every power, for *nothing*, immutable, just like, on the opposite pole, ideology."[7]

10.

I have in my hands the page of a French newspaper that pub-lishes personals ads for people who are seeking to meet a life companion. Curiously, the column is called "modes of life," and it includes, along-side a photo, a brief message that attempts to describe through small, laconic traits something like the form or, more precisely, the mode of life of the advertisement's author (and sometimes of the ideal addressee as well). Under the photograph of a woman seated at a café table, with her serious—indeed, decidedly melancholy—face resting on her left hand, one can read: "Parisian, tall, thin, blonde, and classy, in her   f-ties, lively, good family, sports: hunting,   shing, golf, horseback riding, skiing, would love to meet serious man, witty, sixty, the same pro le, to live happy days together, Paris or country." The portrait of a young bru-nette who is   xated on a ball suspended in the air is accompanied by this caption: "Young juggler, pretty, feminine, spiritual, seeks young woman 20–30, similar pro le to be united in the G-spot!!!" At times, the photo-graph also tries to present the occupation of the one who is writing, like the one that shows a woman who is throwing a rag into a bucket to clean   oors: "50, blonde, green eyes, 1m 60cm, porter, divorced (3 sons, 23, 25 and 29, independent). Physically and morally young, charming, desire to share the simple joys of life with lovable companion 45–55." Other times, the decisive element for characterizing the

form of life is the presence of an animal, who appears in the foreground in the photograph alongside its owner: "Gentle Labrador seeks for his mistress (36) a sweet master who is a lover of nature and animals, to swim in happiness in the countryside." Finally, the close-up of a face on which a tear leaves a trace of mascara reads: "Young woman, 25, with a skin-deep sensibility, seeks a tender and spiritual young man, with whom to live a river-romance."

The list could continue, but what is both irritating and moving each time is the attempt—a complete success and, at the same time, an ir-reparable failure—to communicate a form of life. How indeed can this certain face, this certain life coincide with that italicized list of hobbies and character traits? It is as if something decisive—and, so to speak, un-equivocally public and political—has collapsed to such a degree into the idiocy of the private that it is becoming forever unrecognizable.

11.

In the attempt to de ne oneself through one's hobbies, there comes to light in all its problematicity the relation between singularity, its tastes, and its inclinations. The most idiosyncratic aspect of everyone, their tastes, the fact that they like coffee granita, the sea at summertime, this certain shape of lips, this certain smell, but also the paintings of the late Titian so much—all this seems to safeguard its secret in the most impenetrable and insigni cant way. It is necessary to decisively subtract tastes from the aesthetic dimension and rediscover their ontological char-acter, in order to nd in them something like a new ethical territory. It is not a matter of attributes or properties of a subject who judges but of the mode in which each person, in losing himself as subject, constitutes-himself as form-of-life. The secret of taste is what form-of-life must solve, has always already solved and displayed—just as gestures betray and, at the same time, absolve character.

Two theses published in *Tiqqun* 2 (*Introduction to Civil War*) gura-tively summarize the ontological meaning to "tastes" in their relation to a form-of-life:

> Every body is affected by its form-of-life as if by a clinamen, a leaning, an at-traction, a *taste*. A body leans toward whatever leans its way. (§3)

> "My" form-of-life relates not to *what* I am, but to *how* I am what I am. (§5)

If every body is affected by its form-of-life as by a clinamen or a taste, the ethical subject is that subject that constitutes-itself in relation to this clinamen, the subject

who bears witness to its tastes, takes responsibility for the mode in which it is affected by its inclinations. Modal ontology, the ontology of the *how*, coincides with an ethics.

12.

In his letter to Milena of August 10, 1920, Kafka recounts his eeting encounter with a girl in a hotel. During this encounter, the girl did "in perfect innocence" "something slightly disgusting" and "said something slightly obscene"—and yet Kafka realized in that precise in-stant that he would never forget it, as if precisely this small gesture and this small word had drawn him irresistibly into that hotel. Ever since then, adds Kafka, for years and years his body "was shaken almost un-bearably" by the memory and by the desire for that "very particular, triv-ial, disgusting thing."[8]

The decisive element, what renders this trivial disgusting thing un-forgettable, is obviously not the thing in itself (Kafka says that it is "not worth mentioning"); it is not only the girl's abjection but her particular mode of being abject, her bearing witness in some way to her abjection. It is this and only this that renders that abjection perfectly innocent, which is to say, ethical.

Giovanni di Paolo, St. Thomas Aquinas Confounding Averroës, 1445–50. Tempera and gold leaf on panel, collection Saint Louis Museum of Art.

It is not justice or beauty that moves us but the mode that each one has of being just or beautiful, of being affected by her beauty or her justice. For this reason even abjection

can be innocent, even "something slightly disgusting" can move us.

13.

A double tendency seems to be inherent to form-of-life. On the one hand, it is a life inseparable from its form, an indissoluble unity in itself, and on the other, it is separable from every thing and every context. This is evident in the classical conception of *theoria*, which is in itself united but separated and separable from every thing, in perpetual   ight. This double tension is the risk inherent in form-of-life, which tends to separate itself ascetically into an autonomous sphere, theory. It is neces-sary instead to think form-of-life as a living of its own mode of being, as inseparable from its context, precisely because it is not in relation but in contact with it.

The same thing happens in sexual life: the more it becomes a form-of-life, the more it seems separable from its context and indifferent to it. Far from being a principle of community, it separates itself to constitute a special community of its own (the castle of Silling in Sade or the Califor-nia bathhouses for Foucault). The more form-of-life becomes monadic, the more it isolates itself from the other monads. But the monad always already communicates with the others, insofar as it represents them in itself, as in a living mirror.

14.

The arcanum of politics is in our form-of-life, and yet precisely for this reason we cannot manage to penetrate it. It is so intimate and close that if we seek to grasp it, it leaves us holding only the ungraspable, tedious everyday. It is like the form of the cities or houses where we have lived, which coincide perfectly with the life we have frittered away in them, and perhaps precisely for this reason, it seems suddenly impenetrable to us, while other times, at a stroke, as in revolutionary moments according to Jesi, it is collectively innervated and seems to unveil to us its secret.

15.

In Western thought, the problem of form-of-life has emerged as an ethical problem (*ethos*, the mode of life of an individual or group) or as an aesthetic problem (the style by which the author leaves his mark on the work). Only if we restore it to the ontological dimension will the problem of style and mode of life be able to   nd its just formulation. And this can happen only in the form of something like an "ontology of style" or a doctrine that is in a position to respond to the question: "What does it mean that multiple modes modify or express the one substance?"

In the history of philosophy, the place where this problem has been posed is Averroism, as a problem of the conjunction (*copulatio*) between the singular individual and the one intellect. According to Averroës, the mean term that allows this union is the imagination: the singular is joined to the possible or material intellect through the phantasms of its imagination. The conjunction can happen, however, only if the intellect strips the phantasms of their material elements, to the point of produc-ing, in the act of thought, a perfectly bare image, something like an ab-solute *imago*. This means that the phantasm is what the singular sensible body marks on the intellect to the same extent to which the inverse is true, namely, that it is what the one intellect works and marks in the singular. In the contemplated image, the singular sensible body and the one intellect coincide, which is to say, fall together. The questions "who contemplates the image?" and "what is united to what?" do not have a univocal response. (Averroistic poets, like Cavalcanti and Dante, made love the place of this experience, in which the phantasm contemplated is at once subject and object of love and the intellect knows and loves itself in the image.)

What we call form-of-life corresponds to this ontology of style; it names the mode in which a singularity bears witness to itself in being and being expresses itself in the singular body.

X

This is the fifth chapter of the third part of The Use of Bodies, *the ninth and final volume of Agamben's Homo Sacer series. The excerpt is published courtesy of Stanford University Press.*

Giorgio Agamben is a prominent Italian philosopher and radical political theorist.

1
Agamben's Homo Sacer series has previously traced as characteristic of the modern period the forcible separation of *bios* – or bare, physical, animal life – from *zoè* – the social-historical, transindividual capacity that Aristotle thought defined the human species. Anyone who has ever interacted with immigration enforcement will understand *bios* as what remains of someone once their arbitrary and indefinite detention as a "foreigner" of whatever kind has subtracted their *zoè* from them. Such prisons are instances of "the camp" – in the sense of "internment camp" – which Agamben argues is the exemplary apparatus for removing the body from political life to produce it again as mere *bios*. Now, the problem is considered in reverse as *bios* and *zoè* are reconciled in a theory of their original unity, the concept "form-of-life," which develops towards an ontology of style.

2
The Prophet of Islam in Old French: The Romance of Muhammad *(1258) and* The Book of Muhammad's Ladder *(1264)*, ed. and trans. Reginal Hyatte (Leiden, Netherlands: Brill, 1997), 126.

3
Origen of Alexandria, *Commentary on the Gospel According to John, Books 1–10* , trans. Ronald E. Heine (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 1989), II, 129.

4
Clement of Alexandria, *Exhortation to the Heathen* , trans. William Wilson, in *Ante-Nicene Fathers* , vol. 2, eds. Alexander Roberts, James Donaldson, and A. Cleveland Coxe (Buffalo, NY: Christian Literature Publishing, 1885), XI.

5
Marius Victorinus, *Theological Treatise on the Trinity* , trans. Mary T. Clark (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 2002), 116.

6
Fernand Deligny, *Les enfant et le silence* (Paris: Galilée, 1980), 40.

7
Ibid.

8
Franz Kafka, *Letter to Milena*, trans. Philip Boehm (New York: Schocken, 1990), 147.

From 1772–75, Reinhold and Georg Forster, a father and son team of German naturalists, accompanied Captain James Cook on his second Pacific expedition. The voyage sought to map the unknown reaches of the South Pacific, and to discover the imagined Great Southern Continent. While anchored in the Melanesian archipelago (now New Caledonia), Third Lieutenant Richard Pickersgill encountered the social body of the ship's map-making. The Forsters's journal records the following scene in the course of their disembarking:

> Mr. Pickersgill found it advisable to draw lines on the sand in order to secure the clothes of his people. The natives very readily came into his proposal, and never crossed the lines. One of them, however, seemed to be more surprised than all the rest at this contrivance, and with a great deal of humor drew a circle round about himself, on the ground, with a stick; and intimated, by many ludicrous gestures, that everybody present should keep at a distance from him.[1]

Vivian Ziherl

On the Frontier, Again

Like the stick pulled through sand to create a line, the frontier marks the point at which the soaring ideals of modernity touch ground. In this morphology of contact, the frontier concerns how the "outside" is produced, exploited, and policed. Today the frontier is marked by its troubling persistence; the pan-European "Frontex" recalls the brute politics of Europe's imperial era; the cyber security industry hails news forms of lawlessness across the "digital frontier," and technological advancement offers new extractive possibilities both at territorial extremes (offshore drilling) and underneath urbanized lands (fracking).

What follows is a set of five departures from the Forsters's tale, each of which works toward a concept-image of the persistent presence of the frontier within the globalizing era. The move to recover the frontier as a critical tool turns again toward the clash between enlightenment ideals such as "justice" and "equality" and the obdurate violence of the world those ideas must inhabit. The lens of the frontier shifts the point of view to the margins, reframing these ideals as encounters with the violence of the world *they create*.

1. A Line in the Sand: The Frontier as a Ground of Reinscription

The hand that marks a line in the sand separating "yours" from "mine" is a hand that inscribes its name into territory. It is a hand that vests authority in the signature, and that upholds contractual relations in the written form.
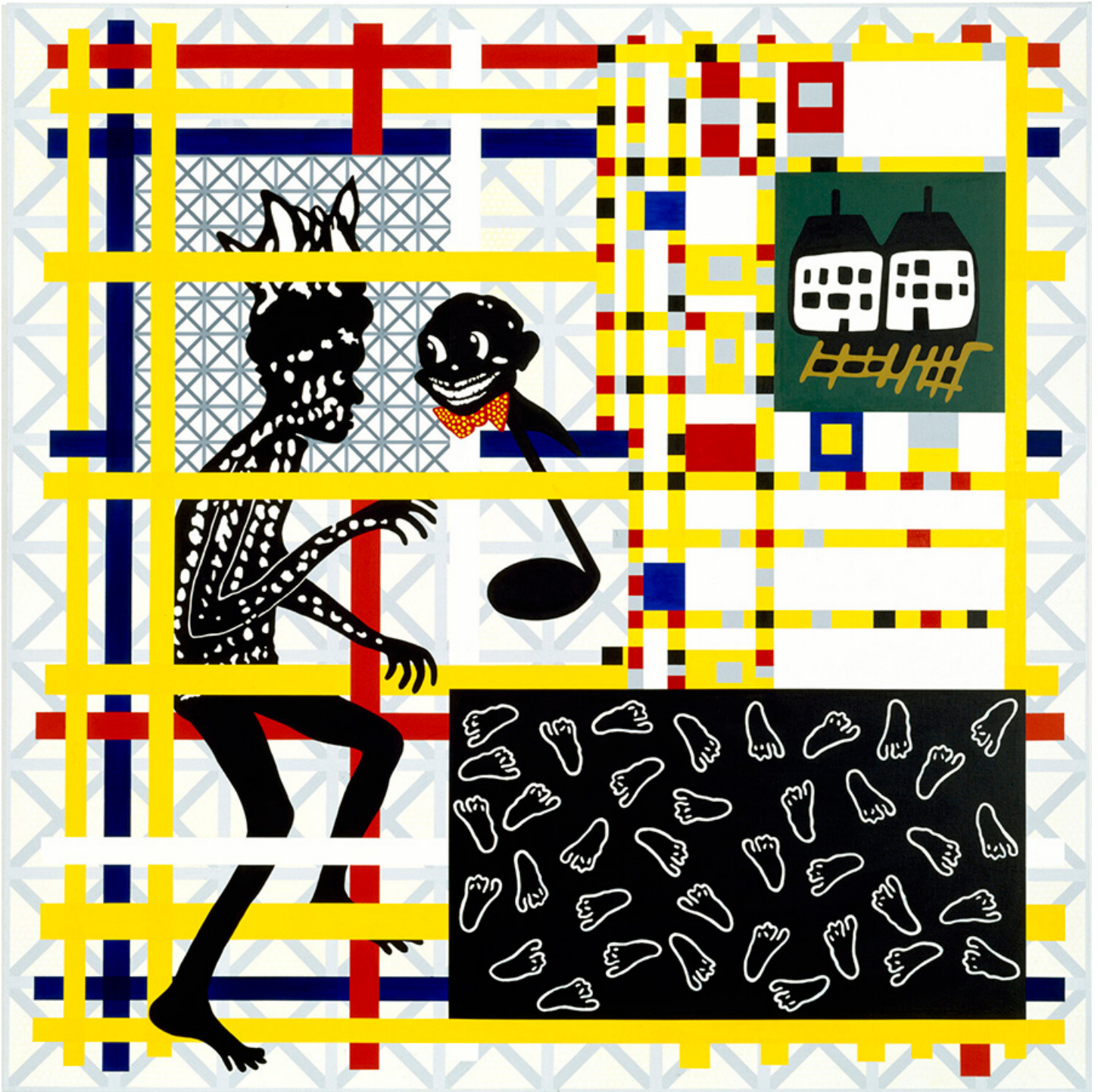
Gordon Bennett, Home Decor (Preston + De Stijl = Citizen) Dance the Boogieman Blues, 1997. Synthetic polymer paint on canvas. Private collection.

My interest in the frontier began in Brisbane, Australia more than two years ago, during separate conversations with two senior artists dealing with aboriginality: the provocateur Richard Bell, and the painter Gordon Bennett, since deceased. While the two disagreed sharply on questions of identity politics, the story of their path toward becoming artists shared a common turn; both withdrew from regular employment on account of the unendurable racism within the Australian system.

Their embrace of the role of the artist rehearses the "problem" of aboriginal Australia as an instance of the frontier predicament of capital: How to turn a rebellious population into a value-producing labor force? The Marxian account of primitive accumulation as the horizon of capitalist modernity locates this problem firmly in the

past, as the precondition for capitalist accumulation. Yet the resilience of the frontier points to its beyond; upsetting historical materialist conditioning and its notions of temporal progress.

From 1720 to 1832 the Enclosure Acts inaugurated a legal process of land dispossession in Britain, allowing landowners to turn farms and common spaces into pastures for sheep. This sent tens of thousands of suddenly unemployed farmworkers streaming into the cities in search of a way to make a living. The eighteenth-century rebirth of the Roman *proletarii*— or propertyless—shifted power toward the sovereign, inaugurating the modern relations of capital/labor.

However, the relations of capital/labor have always been underpinned by those of nature/culture. The work of autonomist feminist Sylvie Federici, for example, has left no doubt as to the disciplining of women that is required to secure the relations of capital, as well as the persecution of local, herbal knowledge and of pagan worlds. The work of primitive accumulation has always relied upon vast and intimately etched reinscriptions at the cosmopolitical level. Attention to the frontier itself makes this known.

Take for example the mass de-registration of sacred sites in Western Australia, occurring conspicuously amid the tail end of a mineral resources boom. Between 2010- and 2015 the government regulator has actively de-registered over three thousand sites that had been marked for protection in relation to Aboriginal heritage. The scales have been tipped dramatically; what used to be a 90 percent acceptance rate of sites submitted for recognition has fallen to just 14 percent.

In a recent interview, anthropologist Elizabeth A. Povinelli toyed with the idea of writing an article titled "The Australian Taliban"—equating the scale of the destruction wrought by the non-recognition of sacred sites with the dynamiting of the Bamiyan Buddhas by the Afghan Taliban in 2001. The weapon in the Australian case, however, is not dynamite, but rather a shift in juridical language—a redrawing of the frontier—between a "site" and its "sacredness." As Povinelli explains:

> The Western Australian government ... changed the definitional criteria of sacred sites, demanding every site conform more tightly to the practices and activities of religions of the book—that they be a holy site in the sense of a place where worshipers come and practice the tenets of their faith. Wherever two or more are gathered constantly and regularly, now there is a sacred site, and thus banished from legislative protection is a core Indigenous ontological analytics—that [the sacred] is the place that contains and concentrates the energies of the land and that constitutes the world regardless of whether or not

humans are there from one moment to the next.[2]

Once we understand the frontier as a ground of perpetual reinscription, the *narrative* requirements for its re-mattering become clear. The frontier arises first and foremost as a ground of reinscription. Deregistration is an official story told for the operations of legally sanctioned dispossession. It is one that clears the way for extractive profiteering through a ricochet between the legal and the literal emptying out of the land. Povinelli adds:

> These are not deserted lands. These are desecrated lands being made into deserts. They are expressions of geontopower—the management of life and nonlife, what must be made into the inert in order to continue to fuel capital.[3]

As such, the cut of the frontier goes beyond the creation of wage labor—as in the Marxian reading of the Enclosure Acts, for example—impacting infrastructures of kinship and land relations that are always already implicit in the economic workings of the political.

2. The Property of Clothes and the Clothing of Property

The frontier, at its base, checks dis/possession and the moral economy of propriety against the "proper" relations of gender and sexuality vis-à-vis the Racial and Colonial Other. This appears to be figured into the Forsters's account in its focus on the property of clothes as part of a vast and gendered socio-cosmology that adjudicates and disciplines touch, intimacy, dwelling, and inheritance.

This is made beautifully and hilariously clear in Marco Ferreri's 1971 spaghetti-western farce *Don't Touch the White Woman.* In a stunning feat of location filming, the 1876 Battle of Little Bighorn (Custer's Last Stand) is restaged against the backdrop of the raw excavations of Paris's Les Halles of the 1970s. It is set against a backdrop, that is, consisting of an enormous hole in the ground in inner-city Paris awaiting urban development.

At the time Les Halles was an ulcer in Paris's urban skin. Abandoned, and by then long overdue for reconstruction, it became known as "Les Trous des Halles," or the hole of Les Halles. Its 1970s renovation was the second for the site, marking three distinct epochs in the commercialization of French civil society and its relation to state or sovereign control.

In 1183, Philip II—the original monarch to style himself as King of France—enlarged and formalized Les Halles, the

A plate from the book The White King; or, The Life and Reign of Emperor Maximilian I, Part 2, Chapter 23, is captioned "How the Young White King learned the Black Arts."

traditional market place of Paris, by building a shelter to host its merchants and protect their wares. In the 1850s, as part of a wave of reforms designed in part to facilitate control over rebellious urban populations, the market was
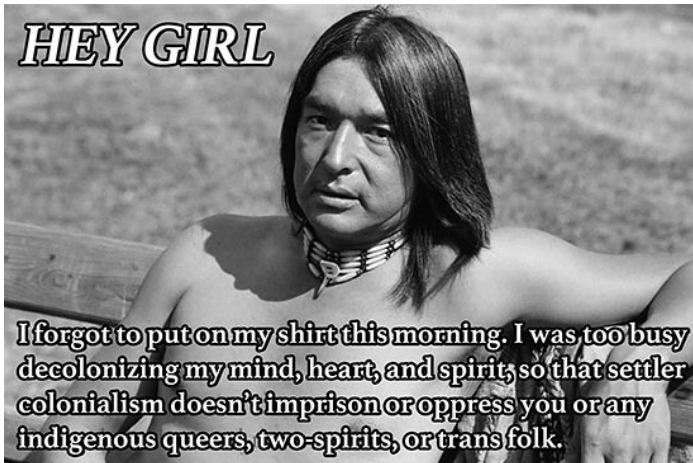
Demian DinéYazhi', Hey Girl! Deconstruct Indigenous Masculinity Roles, 2015.

transformed into a long grid of iron and glass pavilions—a secular cathedral dedicated to the products of France's industry and agriculture. The next wave or reform—the gentrifying redevelopment of the 1970s—continues more or less to the present, with rounds of "starchitect" competitions held to more impressively service the Parisian citizen now recast as lifestyle consumer.

This dynamic is captured perfectly in the trailer for *Don't Touch the White Woman*. In it, a compelling physiognomy of the sheer rock faces of Les Halles is layered with the frontier melee of the Wild West. Dust and bullets fly as hooves rumble and cries ring out from the Sioux and Cavalry forces. Spliced into the end of these scenes is Catherine Deneuve—a.k.a. the white woman—alone in a boudoir gasping in erotic paroxysms.

The effect of this splicing is at once hilarious and profound. Deneuve's female libidinal transmissions—separate from and yet underpinning the battlefield—sound the site's threefold history, marking a defensive genealogical column among them. These forces of sex and desire, organized as geneaology, serve to stabilize the market's historical architecture of property, even as its physical architecture is shattered and re-formed.

For researcher and activist Angela Mitropoulos, the genealogical takes on a specific force amid crises in the relations of capital. These appear as destabilizations in the proper socioeconomic order and can mark the transitions between different phases of capital, such as the three waves of commercial history inscribed in Les Halles and depicted as the crisis of gentrification in Ferreri's image of frontier battle. According to Mitropoulos: "Genealogy inscribes and reinscribes the lines of legitimate production and reproduction in the midst of their deepest contestation and uncertainty."[4]

This genealogical frame raises a queer lens to the critique of capital. It explains, among other things, the increasing acceptance of same-sex marriage by reading it against the evaporation of the cross-border potential of marriage, as—across much of the OECD world—matrimonial rights to citizenship are rapidly replaced by means-testing. Hence, as the global relations of labor take on a mass-migratory dimension, and the proper social order is recalibrated to privilege a new propriety of the same-sex couple against the arch impropriety of the rights-claiming migrant.

3. The Frontier Is Territory Turned Away From Itself

The maritime era saw the frontier expand with a twofold movement. While the forces of industrializing modernity were propelled toward the recognizable resource value of new territories, the colonial disposition was, by and large, turned against the eco-social worlds that encompassed them. As such, the settler society of the frontier is marked by a fortressed and defensive architecture.

The settler mentality—made tangible in the form of the fortressed frontier—is currently exemplified in the Israeli separation wall, though it also proliferates on another scale through the picket and wire fencing of Australian and North American suburbia. The settler psyche—simultaneously fearful and in denial of its surroundings—is distilled in a staged photograph from Archibald Meston's *Wild Australia Show* (1982–1993). Here a group of armed locals—who were in fact plucked from indigenous nations across the north and east coast—loom menacingly over the tent of two colonists who are oblivious to their apparently imminent demise.[5]

Thinking again of the performance recorded by the Forsters: What is it to arrive at a place, inscribe a portion of territory to oneself, and "with many ludicrous gestures" seek to banish what came before? The settler condition is to dwell in a place where one refuses to *be*—refusing one's context by imagining a malicious environment and laboring to impose a fantasy of European origin. This profound ambivalence produces a cognitive dissonance within the settler society, managed in part through temporal displacement.

The history of this concept-structure within European epistemologies has been variously diagnosed. Johannes Fabian, for example, discusses an *allochronic* discourse by which the anthropologist's subjects are posited in an ethnographic past.[6] Elizabeth Povinelli points to a "governance of the prior," extending her analysis by way of current Australian governance to consider the juridical forms of temporal disavowal that are particular to the post-Fordist (late-liberal) period.[7]

As anarchist geographer and communard Elisée Reclus

Thor H. Jensen, The Hill Farm Estate, Logan Road: Sale on the Ground Saturday 16th May 1914. Copyright: State Library of Queensland.

noted in 1872, "geography is nothing but history in space."[8]

The frontier thus becomes a territorial composite of modern eschatology: now the horizon towards which modernity confidently sails, seeking wealth and glory; now the encroaching, racinated darkness before which it recoils, imagining the ahistoric, the primitive, the unfathomable, and the monstrous.

Meston's "Wild Australia" an included aboriginal performance troupe. The caption to the photograph reads "Part of Meston's Wild Queensland" ; "WISHING YOU, A Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year" Brisbane, 1892. Photo: Will Stark. Courtesy of the Macleay Museum, University of Sydney.

4. The Frontier Anticipates an Axiomatic Order

Once the proprietorial line in the sand is enclosed in a circle, the imperative is to expand. The modus for doing so is the axiomatic, a reproduction of the same.

The frontier anticipates an order governed through calculable—i.e., endlessly exchangeable and hence indifferent—relations. This ordinal formation that grasps geographic expanse through metrics of projection has also been variously theorized, for example by media theorist McKenzie Wark as the "vectoral," by anthropologist Rosalind C. Morris as an "Actuarial Age," and which historian of science Lorraine Daston describes, referring to Cold War rationality, as an era in which "reason almost lost its mind."[9]

An inscription upon a tombstone outside the town church of Prebberede-Belit, north of Berlin, bears witness to this axiomatic drive. It is the grave of Johann Heinrich von Thünen (1783–1850), widely considered the founder of economic geography and proponent of the mathematical modeling of land use. Here, upon a stone scroll, a small algorithm is engraved: $\sqrt{ap}$. It is a formula for the "frontier wage"—von Thünen's solution to history in general—wherein "a" is the essential subsistence needs

of the worker and "p" the product of his labor.

By von Thünen's reckoning, this formula offered an approximation of the natural wage, the equilibrium point in the distribution of wealth at which both "workers and capitalists have a mutual interest in increasing production."[10] Its calculation was derived from the "Isolated State," a completely flat territory with even soil type and a city located perfectly at the center.

For von Thünen, the natural wage could not be calculated within Europe on account of inherited inequality in land ownership. The frontier, however, could be envisioned as a limitless "laboratory" for the "world spirit" of capital. Von Thünen:

> On the frontier of the cultivated plane of the Isolated State, where free land is to be had in unlimited quantities, neither the arbitrariness of the capitalists nor the competition of the workers, nor the magnitude of the necessary means of subsistence determines the amount of wages, but the product of labor is itself the yardstick for wages.[11]

In short, the frontier is modeled as an unpopulated Eden. The attendant denial of the worlds prior to the arrival of the frontier goes hand in glove with the denial of the brute violence by which these lands were evacuated and made ready to host the exchange relations of capital. As with Australia's deregistration of sacred aboriginal sites, this dispossession is not just that of real estate and of resources; it is the dispossession of difference itself. The imperative of erasure is standardization, first of "property and rights" and more recently of "risk-exposure and insurance."

5. The Imperial and the Global Frontier, and the "New" Arts of Possession

The frontier advanced across the flattened Earth of the Mercator projection as a line that marked knowing as possessing. It was only a few years before the Forsters's diary, in 1770, that Captain Cook had laid claim to the east coast of Australia and the islands of Aotearoa/New Zealand from the northern point of Possession Island, a small landmass in the Torres Strait north of Queensland and south of Papua New Guinea.

This claim was itself inscribed in a poetics of possession sealed in the ritual of violence. In a three-part performance—on the cusp of the sunset—Cook raised the English Colors, read aloud a declaration in the name of King George the Third, and then "fired three Volleys of
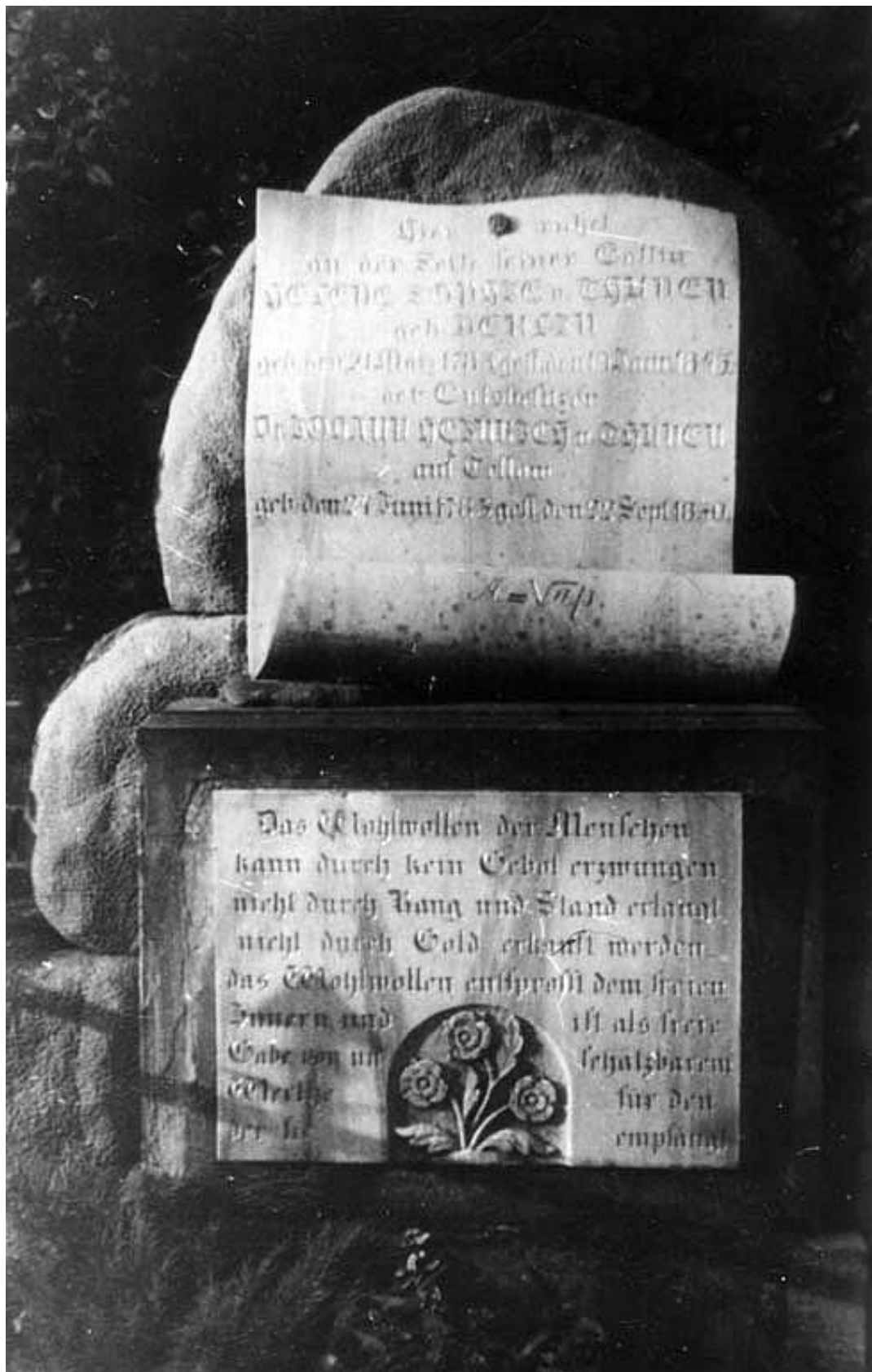
The tombstone of Johann Heinrich von Thünen (1783–1850), considered to be one of the founders of economic geography and a proponent of the mathematical modeling of land use, displays his formula for formula "frontier wage" engraved on its surface.

Gordon Hookey, Hoogah Boogah, 2011. Charcoal and crayon on paper. 76 x 56 cm. Courtesy of Milani Gallery.

small Arms which were Answerd [*sic*] by the like number from the Ship."[12]

There is a question arising from the urban swamps of the global age: What happens to the frontier once its cartographic line collapses—as the singular force of its horizon is overwritten by satellite grids and by the air, sea, and data routes of global commerce? How, where, and for whom does the frontier rematerialize as a territorial condition? And what form does it take in the era that follows formal—politico-juridical—decolonization; a period that has witnessed a proliferation of nation-states swiftly followed by the deterritorialization (denationalization) of their currencies and markets?

This transition has produced what can be differentiated as the "imperial" and the "global" frontier. Geography—understood via Reclus as territory inscribed with history—has folded. The terrestrial twist of the global denies history the proper spacing it needs in order to separate "back then" and "over there" from "right now" and "right here," to cite Denise Ferreira da Silva.[13]

As the hybrid nation/colony of a settler state, Australia exhibits this contrapuntal (parallel yet interwoven) dynamic in its current *pioneering* advancement of bordering technologies. These operate on two fronts to secure the accumulation of wealth against the governance of the noncitizen: (1) the qualification of citizenhood in justifying the exceptional and punitive treatment of aboriginal people, up to and including the deployment of defense forces (*imperial frontier*); and (2) in the divesting of obligations of care towards those seeking to migrate or to claim asylum (*global frontier*).

The repercussions of these new arts of dis/possession are felt throughout the intimate politics of Australian *oikonomia* (householder and intimate politics, via Mitropoulos). They self-perpetuate a punitive attitude toward the poor and the moral policing of the Racial and Colonial Other.

Far from an outlier case, Australia's innovations in this realm impact the global order as the United Kingdom borrows Australian "workfare" policy prototypes in penalizing its own poverty classes;[14] as Australia's reliance on third countries for refugee processing produces flow-on effects throughout Southeast Asia; and as European Frontex-administered island "hotspots" increasingly resemble Australian offshore detention, albeit more in their effort to filter and select a small number of "worthy" arrivals than in the exemplary cruelty of the Australian deterrence model.[15]

The shift from the imperial to the global frontier denotes a shift toward value accumulation in the leveraging of "marginal productivity." An economic term initially associated with von Thünen, marginal productivity is a concept that may encompass many of the present-day tools of finance, such as the asset-backed securities that precipitated the 2008 subprime mortgage crisis. These margin practices may take the form of a yield to waste calculus of Earth and environment. Such is the case in the "exceptional mining leases" executed by sovereign debt-crisis states, e.g., Greece and Portugal, by which mining companies, such as Canada's Eldorado Gold, exploit trace amounts of mineral using new high-intensity and high-contamination extraction technologies.

The logic that cuts across both the imperial and the global frontier is that of extraction—the technologies and ideologies of separating "value" from "undifferentiated mass," to borrow the terms of an Australian court ruling over mineral versus non-mineral sands.[16] The drive to separate "compliant" from "noncompliant" citizen doubles as a means of separating mineral-rich land from sovereign peoples. This same drive is echoed in the spectacle of German journalists sifting through the mass data of the Panama papers leak seeking criminal cases, and in Frontex EU agents sifting through arrivals for "innocent" or "worthy" cases. In this frontier logic of the new arts of possession, the proper order of justice and

rightful ownership is resolved through the identification of exception, and in backgrounding the normative mass.

To receive the message recorded in the Forsters's journal—transmitted by a Kanak man over two centuries ago—is to recognize the depth of the extractive cut in (the) time of the frontier. It is to apprehend in that performance-image *back then* the image-message *right now,* given by Waanyi artist Gordon Hookey—for example—in defiance of separation, and drawn with the line:

> "They Want Our Spirituality But Not Our Political Reality. The Peddlers of Hoogah Bhoogah. The Perpetrators and Perpetuators of Cultural Colonialism."

X

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1
Georg Forster, Nicholas Thomas, and Oliver Berghof, *A Voyage Around the World* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2000).

2
Elizabeth A. Povinelli, "Interview: Forced Closures," *L'Internationale* , June 26, 2015 http://www.internationaleonline.org/opinions/72_interview_forced_closures .

3
Ibid.

4
Angela Mitropoulos, *Contract and Contagion* (New York: Minor Compositions, 2012), 92.

5
The entire sorry chronicle of Meston's tour—which ended in his abandoning around Melbourne the group that he had taken from various north Queensland peoples—is catalogued in the extensively illustrated publication *Wild Australia: Meston's Wild Australia Show 1892–1893* , eds. Michael Aird, Mandana Mapar, and Paul Memmott (Southport: Keeaira Press, 2015).

6
Fabian's term for this is a "denial of coevalness," or the denial of being together in time, by which the ethnographic Other is regarded as static and unchanging, and thus available to be studied. Johannes Fabian, *Time and the Other: How Anthropology Makes Its Object* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2002).

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Elizabeth A. Povinelli, *Economies of Abandonment: Social Belonging and Endurance in Late Liberalism* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2011), 36.

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Elisée Reclus, 1871.

9
McKenzie Wark, "The Vectoralist Class," in "Supercommunity," special issue, *e-flux journal* 65 (May 2015) http://supercommunity.e-flux.com/texts/the-vectoralist-class/ ; and Wark, "The Vectoralist Class, Part II," *e-flux journal* 70 (February 2016) https://www.e-flux.com/journal/70/60567/the-vectoralist-class-part-ii/ . Rosalind C. Morris, "Accidental Histories, Post-Historical Practice?: Re-reading *Body of Power, Spirit of Resistance* in the Actuarial Age," *Anthropological Quarterly* , vol. 83, no. 3 (Summer 2010): 581–624. Lorraine Daston et al., *How Reason Almost Lost Its Mind: The Strange Career of Cold War Rationality* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2013).

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Johann Heinrich von Thünen, cited in David Harvey, "The Spatial Fix: Hegel, von Thünen and Marx," *Antipode*, vol. 14, no. 3 (1981): 3.

11
Ibid.

12
"Secret Instructions to Lieutenant Cook July 30, 1768," Museum of Australian Democracy .

13
Denise Ferreira da Silva, *The Racial Event: That Which Happens Without Time* , forthcoming 2016.

14
For the influence of Australian 2006 workfare platforms such as the "Mutual Obligation Initiative" and "Welfare to Work" on UK policy, see S. Wright, G. Marston, and C. McDonald, "The Role of Non-Profit Organisations in the Mixed Economy of Welfare-to-Work in the UK and Australia," *Social Policy & Administration* , vol. 45, no. 3 (2011): 299–318. Layering this with 2006 legislation anticipating the Northern Territory intervention with the Aboriginal Land Rights (Northern Territory) Amendment Act 2006 (ALRAA) summarized as "the principal objectives of this Bill are to improve access to Aboriginal land for development, especially mining," see Rebecca Stringer, "A Nightmare of the Neocolonial Kind: Politics of Suffering in Howard's Northern Territory Intervention," *Borderlands,* vol. 6, no. 2 (2007) http://www.borderlands.net.au/vol6no2_2007/stringer_intervention.htm .

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For a report on the Lampedusa "hotspot" current at the time of writing, see G. Garelli and M. Tazzioli, "The EU hotspot approach at Lampedusa," *Open Democracy* , February 26, 2016 https://www.opendemocracy.net/can-europe-make-it/glenda-garelli-martina-tazzioli/eu-hotspot-approach-at-lampedusa .

16
Unimin Australia Limited v State of Queensland (2010) QCA 169. Supreme Court of Queensland transcript https://bushtelegraph.files.wordpress.com/2010/09/unimin-v-state-of-qld-court-of-appeal-decision-qca10-169.pdf .

Claire Fontaine

Our Common Critical Condition

The fiftieth-anniversary issue of *Artforum* included an article by Hal Foster entitled "Critical Condition," with the subtitle "On criticism then and now." The adjective "critical," which he uses here to define a condition, refers both to the medical sense of the term, as well as its philosophical sense, where "critical" comes by way of the Greek verb *krino*, meaning *to discern*, *to separate things by means of the intellect*. Having no need to remind us of this, Foster moves directly to the heart of his problem, which is also our own: he locates the historical moment where criticism lost both its prestige and power, and aims to describe, in as detached a manner as possible, the cause of this catastrophe. He evokes the motives and questions that inhabited the context and milieu of the arts before 1968, both in the pages of *Artforum* and elsewhere. He does so by recounting a series of essential memories from the past in order to produce an illuminating diagnosis of our present moment; the whole thing is so brief that we are left with the impression of having heard an important conversation suddenly cut off.

From the first lines of the article, we are transported to the heart of the impassioned debates surrounding minimalism and theatricality; the temperature of the conversations is summery, their tone fervent. Foster cites Krauss, Fried, Stella, Judd, and Greenburg, among others. The art world of the time, seen from where we now stand, seems small, fueled by authentic enthusiasm; the practices that artists experimented with back then aspired to an existential dimension, and were read as metaphors for attitudes, methods for figuring out ways to participate in the public sphere, or to distance oneself from it. The market was only one background noise among many, and not yet the endless, deafening throbbing we have now grown accustomed to. But Foster doesn't stop here: the text is by no means nostalgic, but explains that art writing at that pivotal time was, as Fried himself confessed, terribly stressful; anxiety and ambition were its principal motors, and the fear of being unable, with art writing's theoretical language, to equal the heights of art's expressive power, reigned supreme. The entire aesthetic field, as Foster describes it, found itself under enormous strain; it was, he writes, "already breached from without and eroded from within."[1] "As we know," he continues,

> the external enemy was called "kitsch," "theatricality," or simply "mass culture" (Pop was the open traitor here), while the internal enemy was the extended arena of artistic activities opened up by Happenings, Fluxus, and Minimalism. These activities were problematic for late-modernist critics not merely because they exceeded the proper media of painting and sculpture but because they threatened to push art into an arbitrary realm beyond aesthetic judgment.[2]

The "arbitrary": behold the name of the troublesome guest

Allan Kaprow, Yard: Overhead View, 1961. Gelatin Silver print. Copyright: Ken Heyman-Woodfin Camp.

that was soon to invite itself into all art writing and every exhibition space around the world, with no plans to leave. Foster concludes his article by catapulting us into the present day, though not without bitter irony regarding the prophecies of the pre-'68 era that never played out. Speaking of the pairing (today obsolete) of art/criticism, he describes it as a means of accessing the past, which opens onto both the present and future:

> Today this concept seems almost bizarre. We can call it what we like—naive, parochial, chimerical—and we can dismiss it as a petty expression of a will to power whereby art history is read forward into contemporary practice in such a way that an elect few are scripted in and everyone else is dropped out. Yet, forty years on, we should also acknowledge what was lost when this concept was junked.[3]

These final lines are all the more troublesome as they seem implicitly to condemn *Artforum* and the regions of the art world it has been exploring now for fifty years. But how can we judge something that deliberately abolishes its own limitations for good, all while remaining unhealthily attached to the need to be recognized as "art"? What other possibility could have presented itself?

If, in that moment of profound crisis, art had dissolved into life, or—which is much less likely—revolutionized life had transformed into a work of art, a radical transformation would have taken place, entailing a reorganization of labor, affect, economy; making — or not making —"work *"* would have become the true question of human life. Maternity, friendship, the labor of love, and care for each living thing would now be approached as works of art with a beauty as much ethical as aesthetic—approached as worthy sources of inspiration and imitation.

But that didn't happen.

"When you do life consciously, however," writes Kaprow in 1979, "life becomes pretty strange—paying attention changes the thing attended to—so the Happenings were not nearly as lifelike as I had supposed they might be. But I learned something about life and 'life.'"[4] This conscious, reproducible life, imprisoned by quotation marks, can be imitated and disturbed by performance, but it cannot, even when liberated from these quotation marks, be as fascinating and intense as Happenings aspired to make it. Kaprow was reflecting here on the outmodedness and insufficiency of traditional art practices, whose ambition remained too modest to measure up to the concerns raised by the expansive practices in the arts. But he also made us face the impossibility of imagining a truly revolutionary art in the absence of radical change in life, which art was unable to produce, and which various social movements had promised but failed to realize.

It's at this point that the debate on art had to laboriously enter back into the narrow (and vague) field of what is, at present, contemporary art. The "arbitrary" appeared then as the ideal analgesic for dealing with this failure, the adjuvant of a return to the confused order which could only occur under the sign of the progressive marketization of art and its inevitable loss of cultural relevance.

The alternative was certainly not—as history has sufficiently proved—a return to the paternalist dictatorship of modernism, with its ludicrous religion of the autonomy of art. But the avant-garde provided no credible counterpoint, for it had not adequately resolved its relationship to politics as the governing of men, as administration, and as repressive apparatus. This is how we have found ourselves in a present where everything is at once contained and forgotten, at least when it comes to our dominant aesthetic experiments and their accompanying commentaries; but given that in this present everything is possible at every moment, this analysis itself is incomplete and surely obsolete already.

The poignant lack of reference points, the feeling of being faced with both a virtually infinite field of possibilities and a fear of being unable to escape repeating, however unwittingly, something that has already been done—these are the consequences of this state of affairs; these are the demons with which every contemporary artist must converse, starting with their first experiments within school walls, up until the end of their days. Unbeknownst to them, the arbitrary has multiplied singularities, but made them *whatever singularities*: every artist develops his or her own language and nurtures the impression of being the only one to speak it. We no longer write or create in order to intensify life, for life is no longer something we all share, something in which we all accompany one another, but an individualized affair of accumulation, labor, and self-affirmation.

We live like this with no hope for political change (however necessary) in our lives, nor a common language capable of naming this need or allowing us to define together what is particular to our present. This condition is new, no doubt unique in Western history; it is so painful and engenders such a profound solitude and loss of dignity that we sometimes catch ourselves doubting the sincerity of artworks that are created under such conditions—for we know that their fate is uncertain, and will most likely disappoint.

Nevertheless, the field of art has never been so free, vast, and attractive to the general public—and this is perhaps precisely what makes our present condition a profoundly critical one.

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Translated from the French by Kit Schluter.

Claire Fontaine is a Paris-based collective founded in 2004.

1
Hal Foster, "Critical Condition: On
criticism then and now," *Artforum*,
September 2012, 147.

2
Ibid.

3
Ibid., 148.

4
"Performing Life," in Allan
Kaprow, *Essays on the Blurring of
Art and Life* (London: University
of California Press, 2003), 19.

1.

Rebekah Sheldon

Queer Universal

Recent feminist and queer theorizations have turned emphatically away from the ambitions of late twentieth-century universalism in favor of particular forms of life. Lightning, atoms, jellyfish, and fetuses teem from the pages of prominent journals, as do HeLa cells, extinct aurouchs, wooly coral reefs, sacred pipestone, indigenous cosmologies, toxic dumps, and transgender frogs.[1] This patchwork of objects and life-forms has much to say about the ineradicable openness of the world, its disregard for niceties of category and scale. Think, for example, of the many and varied effects of plastic. From problems of sexual differentiation feared for BPA-exposed children to the marine life slowly starving from the microplastic remains of tampon applicators they have mistakenly consumed, plastics make palpable the interchanges between gender, sexuality, and ecology. In a similar fashion, HeLa cells underscore the inextricability of biomedical mattering from racial pseudoscience, a formation Harriet Washington calls "medical apartheid."[2] Humbled before the animations of objects, contemporary queer and feminist theorists are content to let them speak—at least mostly—for themselves.

This reticence also takes the form of the imperative. We are enjoined to resist the temptation to add things up. In their introduction to *GLQ*'s "Queer Inhumanisms" issue, Dana Luciano and Mel Chen argue that "particular situations" cannot be summarized in total or "proclaimed from above" without undue violence to the specificity of each life world.[3] In like manner, Karen Barad, whose work on the philosophical implications of quantum physics raises thorny questions about the universal and the particular, explains that the queer critters that march through her writings are not there to "make trans or queer into universal features" but instead "to make plain the undoing of universality, the importance of the radical specificity of materiality as iterative materialization."[4] A physicist herself, Barad's most striking formulations describe the basic units of reality. Yet rather than setting out the laws of physics, Barad labors to reveal the fundamental contingency of all things, even the most apparently immutable. In these feminist and queer returns to the natural and the ontological—territories once considered coextensive with racist and misogynist essentialisms—it is the material world itself (and not discourse, language, history, or culture) that is radically open to revolutionary change, if not its very wellspring. It is for this reason that J. Jack Halberstam finds that attending to individuals in their precarious specificities "allows us to find our way through the thick material of the universal to the queer theoretical spaces of possibility."[5]

We are, in other words, in the midst of a new queer particularism. While universalizing theories engender powerful explanatory structures, queer particularism is less committed to knowing things than it is to feeling

them.[6] Under the sign of epistemology, humanists and social scientists have staked their claims for political efficacy on the ground of vigorous, truthful, and well-formed descriptions of urgent social problems, with the tacit assumption that such descriptions will engender changed attitudes and actions. Queer particularism takes root in the several schools that have arisen to challenge this assumption, most notably affect theory, new materialism, and speculative realism. These schools seek to evade the closed circle of knower and known and to allow for the agency of other-than-human forces. Together, these fields have begun to put pressure on *how* knowledge leads to social change. They point to the powerful persuasive effects of aesthetics and style, of sensory intuition, bodily habit, collective entrainment, and other modes of noncognition as well as the force exerted by nonhuman agents of various kinds, from the built environment to the unintentional distribution of psychopharmaceuticals in the waterways.
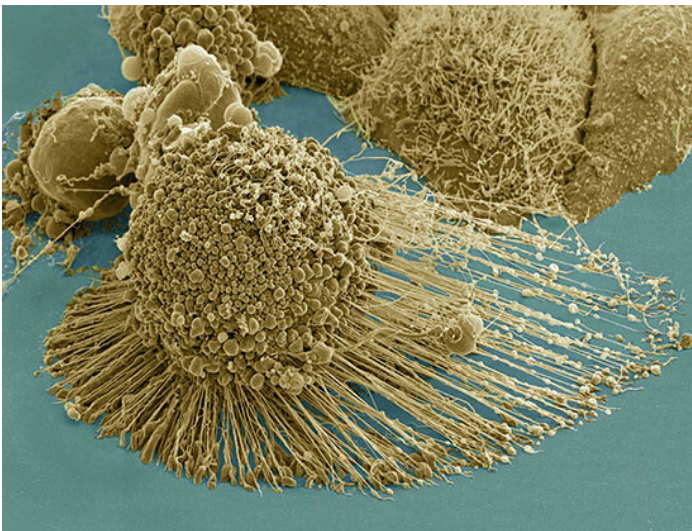
The above is an electron micrograph scan of an apoptotic HeLa cell. These controversial cells, widely used in laboratory, descend from Henrietta Lacks, an African American woman who was the unwitting donor of cells from her cancerous tumor. Photo: Zeiss Merlin HR-SEM, wikimedia commons

Or, as Barad asks, "What could be more queer than an atom?"[7] This queer particularism is new, then, insofar as it locates queerness outside of both desire and epistemology. In this sense, it repeats with a difference the terms of the binary opposition upon which queer theory first found its method and its motive. For, in many ways, it was Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick's decision to situate the particularity of gay and lesbian experience within the matrix of heterosexual definition that founded the contemporary practice of queer theory as universalist. Rather than arguing for inclusion or touting a uniquely

queer aesthetics, Sedgwick's monumental and field-defining *Epistemology of the Closet* (published in 1990) argues for the structuring co-constitution of hetero- and homosexual definition. Her question is not how best to support and advocate for queer communities and persons, but why such support is necessary to begin with. She asks what forces drive the explosiveness of homophobic violence just as we might summarize Judith Butler's contemporaneous *Gender Trouble* as asking what fuels misogyny. What Sedgwick finds requires leaving aside particularist (or what she calls "minoritizing") identity formations to recognize the mutually constitutive double bind of homo/heterosexual definition, its structuring paranoia, and its many costly disavowals. It is this sense that she gives to the universalizing view, which sees sexuality as "an issue of continuing, determinative importance in the lives of people across the spectrum of sexualities."[8] Sexual definition precedes the sense and meaning of particular forms of sexual subjectivity and sexed materiality. What matters is the terrain of sexual subjectification from which both hetero- and homosexualities derive their meanings and worldly dispositions.

So when Luciana and Chen warn against pronouncements from above, it is with skepticism about the most high (the general, the abstract) but also the most low (the subtending, structuring, pre-individual matrix from which specific forms surface as symptoms), just as Barad takes the most fundamental (the atom) and finds in it the principle of radical contingency. Finally, the labor to reveal the source of homophobic or misogynistic violence becomes in queer particularism a desire to seek out joyful community and experiences of surprise, beauty, and care. For Halberstam, for example, exploring particular things recalls the "dream of ecstatic contact that we continue to seek out in life, in love, in dreams, and in material objects."[9] Punning on the role of feeling in affect theory as well as the felted wool used in constructing one of her essay's particular objects, the *Crochet Coral Reef*, trans studies theorist Jeanne Vaccaro calls for a "felt method." The *Crochet Coral Reef* employs as well as exemplifies this method. A collective experiment in critical handmaking, the *Crochet Coral Reef* is a form of affective practice that subsists in the concrete space of shared work where "bodies lean, eyes dart, and hands touch to repair stitches, learn and exchange technique, and create and share a feeling of community."[10] In it Vaccaro finds what Luciana and Chen call "corporeal communing."[11] In contradistinction to the universal-epistemological demand for change against obdurate social institutions, projects like the *Crochet Coral Reef* work toward stabilizing communities, engendering new norms, and building a sense of collective responsibility for a rapidly changing ecosphere. In this context, the old project of queer culture-building expands to include all of the many thousands of cultures that go into multispecies thriving.

Vaccaro's example teaches us how much of the

persuasive power of this method rests on exemplification. For Eileen Joy, it is from these suggestive glimmers of other lifeworlds that we might "invent improbable murmurs of being, new modes and styles of living, polymorphous affective intensities, and new relational virtualities and friendships."[12] But something unexpected has happened here. For as emphatic and explicit as these authors have been about refusing the impulse to abstract general principles or subtending structures from particular lives and objects, looking at particular queer critters nonetheless has enabled surprisingly robust claims about what theory can do. Indeed, the cogency of these perspectives—their shared desire for what Jayna Browne names "life on other terms"[13]—suggest a underlying conviction about forms of causation whose thrust is, yes, universal even if it explicitly orients to the particular.

2.

In "Eve's Triangles, or Queer Theory Beside Itself," Robyn Wiegman looks back to *Epistemology of the Closet* to disinter what she sees as an overlooked discomfort with the universal fueling Sedgwick's analysis.[14] As Wiegman reminds us, the presumptive opposition between universalizing and minoritizing views is one of the many binaries that Sedgwick works to deconstruct. Sedgwick, she recalls, vigorously maintains that "no standpoint of thought [exists] from which the rival claims of minoritizing and universalizing understandings of sexual definition could be decisively arbitrated as to their 'truth.'"[15] The universal/particular bind was never about choosing sides but instead about the impossibility of selecting a side at all without inadvertently activating the logic of the other. This would seem to imply that the anti-universalist position isn't

In this detail of Crochet Coral Reef the technique of "hyperbolic crochet" discovered in 1997 by Cornell University mathematician Dr. Daina Taimina becomes a taxonomy of reef-life forms in the ongoing art project by Christine Wertheim and Margaret Wertheim. Crochet Coral Reef "fuses art, science, mathematics, handicraft, and community practice." Photo: Steve Jurvetson.

available in the straightforward way that so many particularisms imagine it to be. Yet Wiegman's essay goes on to make a ferocious case for choosing the affective *over* the epistemological, citing Sedgwick's own ferocity in her late work against the paranoia of the universalizing, epistemological drive and its fatal thinness. Indeed, Wiegman's rallying cry—which we might condense as "touch feeling, don't know it"—is as good a summary of Sedgwick's later work as it is of the new queer particularism I have been describing.

It is in her 2002 book *Touching Feeling* that Sedgwick dramatically turns away from the universalist stance that had animated her earlier work, thus setting a course for subsequent queer theorists. This turn is especially clear in three essays in *Touching Feeling:* "Shame in the Cybernetic Fold: Reading Silvan Tomkins," "Paranoid Reading, Reparative Reading, or You're So Paranoid You Probably Think This Essay Is About You," and the "Introduction," which together represent a trenchant intercession into the scenography of criticism and an effort to recall the pleasures of reading in directions other than from above. "Shame in the Cybernetic Fold," for example, asks the reader to consider the "beside." "As any child knows who's shared a bed with siblings," Sedgwick writes, " *beside* comprises a wide range of desiring, identifying, representing, repelling, paralleling, differentiating, rivaling, leaning, twisting, mimicking, withdrawing, attracting, aggressing, warping, and other relations."[16]

In giving flesh to the idea it advocates, this list calls out in this reader a painfully rich cascade of memories and associations whose lateral spread threatens to overwhelm the vertical thrust of argumentation. These variegated and modular relations come from the constraints of the bed, the temporal plenitude of siblinghood, and the basic assumption of companionate sharing. Planar, horizontal, I want to say rolling, this world isn't even in the same galaxy as what Sedgwick calls the "tracing and exposure" methods of universalizing, epistemological, antinormative criticism, or "what theory knows today"[17] in which theory is

"diagrammatically sharp" ("Introduction," 18)
"vigilant" ("Paranoid," 130)
"hypervigilant" ("Shame," 17)
"cruel and contemptuous" ("Paranoid," 144)
"ascetic" ("Paranoid," 132)
"hygienic" ("Shame," 17)
"evacuative" ("Shame," 15)
"exposing" ("Paranoid," 139)
"totalizing" ("Paranoid," 130)
"reifying" ("Introduction," 13)
"detoxifying" ("Shame," 20)
"stringent" ("Shame," 17)
"bossy" ("Introduction," 8)
"coercive" ("Paranoid," 146)
"grim" ("Paranoid," 144)

"defensive" ("Paranoid," 147)
"monopolistic" ("Paranoid," 145)
"tautological" ("Paranoid," 144)
and again and again "moralistic."

Despite the emphasis on "knowing" in the phrase "what theory knows," these terms seem to me nonsensical when taken as if they were only about the "heuristic habits and positing procedures of theory today."[18] Instead, they form a clear picture of a reader in pain. Particularly in "Paranoid Reading, Reparative Reading," that pain forms the evidence for a diagnosis. Personified and diagnosed, theory appears here as a paranoiac driven by disgust to expose and hold up for disapprobation its denigrated object. The central word around which all the others seem to radiate, even more than "moral," is "hygiene." If moralism divides the world into binary categories, hygiene represents the extirpation of the invading other within. In repudiating it, however, Sedgwick uses the enormous force of her writing to transmit her pain to the reader. If "even to talk about affect virtually amounts to cutaneous contact," as she writes of the phrase "touchy-feely," then these essays remind us that not all skin-to-skin contact feels good.[19] They may be palliative, they may be searching for nourishment—and they certainly seem to have nourished—but they also cut.

Sedgwick uses another bed metaphor to convey the problem with what she calls the "binarized, highly moralistic allegories of the subversive versus the hegemonic, resistance versus power."[20] She writes:

> It's as if A and B are in bed together under a dual control electric blanket, but with the controls accidentally reversed: if A gets cold and turns up the temperature, B's side of the bed will get warmer, whereupon B will turn down the temperature, making A's side even colder, so A turns up the temperature further—on B's side, and so on ad infinitum.[21]

It is easy to imagine an overheated, hypochondriacal "theory" forced to share a bed with its other and convinced, both rightly and wrongly, that it at least is actively working to make the bed more livable. Stuck inside this autocatalyzing feedback loop, the heat keeps rising. "Stultifying" and "impoverishing"[22] are two of the words she uses to characterize the effect of this loop as it elevates one condition, feeling, or explanation to the status of universal, as Sedgwick argues by way of a joke:

> A disturbingly large amount of theory seems explicitly to undertake the proliferation of only one affect ... It's like the old joke: "Comes the revolution, Comrade,

everyone gets to eat roast beef every day." "But Comrade, I don't like roast beef." "Comes the revolution, Comrade, you'll like roast beef."[23]

The joke's humor arises from Comrade B's dogged refusal to renounce his gastronomical preference in answer to what is clearly supposed to be a persuasive speech, as if, in the prior example, bedmate B were sullenly to insist that he is hot despite A's quite accurate depiction of the bed as cold. Resituated into the critical scene and yoked to the prior analogy, the joke suggests that critical exposure does a bad job of attending to political realities but a very good job of making the reader want to like what the speaker likes. Because roast beef functions as a symbol, to not like roast beef is to abjure revolution; but in this reversible metonymic chain, the promise of a better life symbolized by roast beef loses its connection to the myriad, specifiable ways that life might be bettered and becomes instead the idea of the betterment. Excitement is not only contagious, it also has little interest in its own diminishment.

When theory takes itself as "a triumphant advance toward truth and vindication," it is more likely the triumph than the advance that operates.[24] In other words, theory is deeply committed to the persuasive power of its style despite its "practice of disavowing its affect motive and force and masquerading as the very stuff of truth."[25] The lesson queer particularism takes from this critique results in its modesty of tone, its tendency to linger on the surface, and its preferences for the flat ontologies that allow it to get into bed with its objects. Yet the essays I have been citing from *Touching Feeling* offer no especially strong reasons to consider some affective registers as intrinsically mendacious and other as palliative. What concerns Sedgwick about the use of theory as a hygienic procedure is the way it rigidifies the difference between self and other and so makes it more difficult to fit the other into the partial, multiple, contradictory worlds we inhabit and therefore "to unpack the local, contingent relations between any given piece of knowledge and its narrative/epistemological entailments for the seeker, knower or teller."[26]

The same, I say, is true for the divisions between the paranoid and the reparative, the universalist and the particularist, the epistemological and the affective, the righteous and the joyful. What theory knows today is not terribly different in form and mode than it was for Sedgwick. It is just such a hygienic procedure. And if it is strange to find Sedgwick using the very strategies she lampoons, it is quite a bit stranger still to find them repeated in Wiegman—and indeed across the queer particularisms—over a decade later.[27] For the purpose of Sedgwick's double binds in *Epistemology of the Closet* was to assert the absence of grounding sufficient to either adjudicate or frankly to recognize the difference

between the two sides of any closely entwined binary. So why parse out the epistemological from the affective? After all, to the extent that the power of the affective comes from its potential to renew critical perspective and to engender a new stance toward the subject of our writing, it carries the implied but still crucially operative promise of causal effect. It is not a feeling or a way of knowing, but a method for generating effects. We may not all like roast beef, but that hardly means that we are not committed to persuasion, however it may be theorized and to whatever end it is pursued. The real question then, it seems to me, is how to understand the content of that promise; how, that is, to embrace a queer universal method.

Perhaps it is simply that the capacity of these oppositions to produce each other is built into the foundation pits of any transformative criticism that understands itself as having political affects without specifying the nature of the effects. Rather than try again to make sense of the real differences between the universal and the particular, the epistemological and the affective, I'd like to ask what it might mean to come to different terms with the universal, or better, to come to terms with a different universal, one that openly courts the potential embarrassment of seeking to specify the universal immanent to transformative scholarship in toto. That is to say, to risk the embarrassment of asking *how scholarship produces effects* at all. For we might draw a different lesson from Sedgwick's work with the affective and say that it is the routinization of affects and the undertheorization of their rhetorical purpose that deadens and stultifies and therefore that we should cultivate a rigorous, supple, and nuanced approach to affective causation. In this way, it is the particular details of local relations that determine the choice of tone, mode, mood, or stance. Such a contention, however, requires and is premised upon a universalist account of the persuasive power of critical affects.

3.

Perhaps most surprising of all, the problem of critical causation animates an assertion made at the very beginning of the queer theoretical enterprise, in the very first passage of *Epistemology of the Closet*. Of the many sumptuously layered and incisively rendered paragraphs that make up the queer theory canon, this is surely one of the most captivating:

> *Epistemology of the Closet* proposes that many of the major nodes of thought and knowledge in twentieth-century Western culture as a whole are structured—indeed, fractured—by a chronic, now endemic crisis of homo/heterosexual definition, indicatively male, dating from the end of the nineteenth century. The book will argue that an

Rembrandt van Rijn, Ahasuerus and Haman at the Feast of Esther, 1660. Oil on canvas. Credit: Pushkin Museum

understanding of virtually any aspect of modern Western culture must be, not merely incomplete, but damaged in its central substance to the degree that it does not incorporate a critical analysis of modern homo/heterosexual definition; and it will assume that the appropriate place for that critical analysis to begin is from the relatively decentered perspective of modern gay and antihomophobic theory.[28]

Here is a universal! But this is not the same universalization we have already seen. In fact it contains two different kinds of universalizing claims. The first claim (that "many of the major nodes of thought and knowledge in twentieth-century Western culture as a whole are structured—indeed, fractured—by a chronic, now endemic crisis of homo/heterosexual definition, indicatively male, dating from the end of the nineteenth century") is her universalizing account of the contouring effect of sexuality on modern Western knowledge-production writ large. The second claim (that "an understanding of virtually any aspect of modern Western culture must be, not merely incomplete, but damaged in its central substance to the degree that it does not incorporate a critical analysis of modern homo/heterosexual definition") is no restatement of the first, but a dramatic upping of the theoretical wattage of her argument, moving as it does from saying something about her *subject* to saying something about her *writing and its methods and its effects*. Put together, these two universals add up to a stunning methodological claim. The first relies for its sense on the idea that knowledge is world-making; the second claims that a particular kind of knowledge is damaged. To produce damaged knowledge is to *do* damage far beyond the reach of the individual knower. And the redemptive force of the corrective is

likewise amplified.

Sedgwick never stops thinking about this question. She takes it up again in *Touching Feeling* in the form of her sustained inquiry into the performative and the periperformative—categories derived from linguist J. L. Austin that seek to elucidate the conditions by which speech acts make things happen in the world. Or as she puts the question: "What does knowledge *do*? The pursuit of it, the having and exposing of it, the receiving again of knowledge of what one already knows? *How*, in short, is knowledge performative and how best does one move among its causes and its effects?"[29]

This autonomy and agency of knowledge in this formulation—the perambulations of writing away from the scene of reading relations—is markedly uncomfortable for Sedgwick, calling as it does for a universal but still highly specified account of critical causation and raising the specter that such an invention might work. Her discomfort is clear in the long digression through the story of Esther in *Epistemology of the Closet's* first chapter. Esther is the Old Testament queen whose act of self-disclosure saves her people from genocide. When her gentile husband is advised to purge the country of Jews, Esther's desperation to save them forces her to admit what she has long withheld, that she is a Jew—a speech act whose effect is not to make her unlovable (as one might worry) but instead to prevent the massacre, as she had hoped. Much later in the book, Sedgwick makes a confession of her own about the scene of confession she relates. The section on Esther, she writes, reveals "all too visibly" her own "salvational fantasies."[30] By refusing the relations these coordinates could confirm—Esther as mirror for her own authorial intent—Sedgwick augurs the violence with which she will later turn away from the universal and the epistemological both. In doing so, however, she lets go as well of the book's second claim to universality—a claim about what knowledge does and could do—that is neither vanquished by that violence nor ceases to haunt the scene of the affective and ontological.

It is the repetition of Esther's triumph—as if that speech act and only that one contained revolutionary force—that Sedgwick came to find so distressing in the theoretical enterprise of her day. In its desire to let the object speak for itself, however, queer particularism merely shifts the locus of the Esther-function from the critic to her objects; it continues to presume the causal efficacy of the speech acts whose universalizing implications it also and at the same moment disavows. The question that results from Sedgwick's second universal—which we might condense here as the hopelessly naive and embarrassingly grandiose "how does criticism effect change?"—puts us back in Esther's role and brings with it the danger of presuming too imperial, indeed too universal, a point of view. A *queer* universalism, however, would begin from the recognition that epistemology is affective (and affect epistemological), that particular objects and lifeworlds

evoke speculations about their enabling conditions, that if essence is contingent then contingency is a form of essentialism, and that the most modest of critical claims opens onto breathtakingly vast ontological vistas.

X

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1
See for example *GLQ* 21, no. 2–3*,* "Queer Inhumanism," eds. Dana Luciana and Mel Chen (2015); *WSQ* 40, no. 1–2, "Viral," eds. Patricia Clough and Jasbir Puar (Spring–Summer 2012); *differences* 26, no. 1,"Queer Theory Without Antinormativity," eds. Robyn Wiegman and Elizabeth A Wilson (May 2015); *philoSOPHIA* 5, no. 2, "Anthropocene Feminisms," eds. Claire Colebrook and Jami Weinstein (2016); and *Feminist Theory* 12, no. 2, "Nonhuman Feminisms," eds. Myra Hird and Celia Roberts (2011).

2
Harriet A. Washington, *Medical Apartheid: The Dark History of Medical Experiments on Black Americans from Colonial Times to the Present* (New York: Doubleday, 2006).

3
Mel Chen and Dana Luciana, "Introduction: Has the Queer Ever Been Human?" *GLQ* 21, no. 2–3: 189.

4
J. Jack Halberstam, "In Human—Out Human," ibid.: 241.

5
J. Jack Halberstam, "In Human—Out Human," ibid.: 241.

6
The term "universal" is sometimes set in opposition to identitarian categories. This is the sense in which Madhavi Menon uses it, for example, in her recently released *Indifference to Difference: On Queer Universalism* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2015). For my purposes, the universal is a matter of scope and scale regardless of the analytic object or point of view.

7
Karen Barad, "Nature's Queer Performativity," *Kvinder, Køn & Forskning NR* 1–2 (2012): 39.

8
Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, *Epistemology of the Closet* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990), 1.

9
Halberstam, "In Human—Out Human," 242.

10
Jeanne Vaccaro, "Feelings and Fractals: Wooly Ecologies of Transgender Matter," *GLQ* 21, no.

2–3: 280.

11
Chen and Luciana, "Introduction," 185.

12
Eileen Joy, "Improbable Manners of Being," *GLQ* 21, no. 2–3: 222.

13
Jayna Brown, "Being Cellular: Race, the Inhuman, and the Plasticity of Life," ibid.: 325.

14
Robyn Wiegman, "Eve's Triangles, or Queer Studies Beside Itself," *differences* 26, no. 1: 48–73.

15
Sedgwick, *Epistemology*, 9.

16
Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, *Touching Feeling* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2002), 8.

17
Sedgwick, "Introduction," ibid., 1.

18
Sedgwick, "Introduction," 1.

19
Sedgwick, "Shame," 17.

20
Ibid., 16.

21
Sedgwick, "Introduction," 12.

22
Sedgwick, "Paranoid," 124; Sedgwick, "Introduction," 18.

23
Sedgwick, "Paranoid," 146.

24
Ibid., 135.

25
Ibid., 138.

26
Ibid., 124.

27
On the other hand, Sara Ahmed's *Queer Phenomenology: Objects, Orientations, Others* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2006) is notable for the way it attends to particular objects in order to elaborate a critical methodology and a metaphysics.

28
Sedgwick, *Epistemology*, 1.

29
Sedgwick, *Touching Feeling*, 124.

30
Sedgwick, *Epistemology*, 154.

David Claerbout

The Silence of the Lens

Photography is currently undergoing the sort of transformation that music went through roughly fifteen years ago. This transition was a major shift for musicians but was generally considered positive by the listeners. For those young photographers keen on knowing how their profession will evolve, I would suggest they look at the music industry of today, fifteen years later, to get a glimpse of the changes to come.

In the short term, these changes may seem merely technical: simply a strange melting together of image-making and image-seeing, of production and perception. It will be sometime before this process will be complete, if it ever is. Then there will be a disappearance of photography as we know it. Instead of choosing how we want to see the world, we will see the world the way it wants to be seen by us. There will be a perfect equivalence between our gaze onto the world and the signals emanating from it, with no gap between the two where we might locate definitively the specificity of our own contribution. The emancipatory, modern, human point of view—which includes lovers of contingency and the mythical magic of photography—will hate this terminus, because it so resembles what we understand to be utter and total madness. The problem, as we will see, is that it is in the nature of the phenomenon that the subject cannot possibly know when this moment has arrived.

I first started noticing this strange condition on the horizon five years ago when I started an intense practice working in pictorial 3-D animation. I spent fifteen years of my early life as a draughtsman and lithographer—I will leave painting out of this. My second interest in life was photography, a phenomenon without which the more traditional forms of art today would not be practiced. Photography saved magic in modernity, and thereby probably saved modernity as a whole.

Vilém Flusser explains that those moments in history when the balance between representation and linear thinking gets disturbed are moments of great danger. Especially when the varieties of linear thinking, like linear writing or the production of history, weigh heavier in the balance. Such a moment occurred during modernity. I understand from Flusser that photography and its apparatus allowed for a semi-automated production of contingency, and magic, prohibiting and preventing radical, fundamentalist ideas from maturing unchecked. The magic of photography produces a possibility of another, uncontrollable situation, restoring the nevertheless explosive balance between representation and linear thinking.

I should add that I never particularly liked psychological realism in cinema and film montage, because it falls rather too quickly into the grip of narrative, an influence that has affected all forms of art and which is already part of this strange phenomenon taking shape on the horizon. Narrative is this annoying big head with a voice hanging

This production still shows one of the subjects of David Claerbout's Oil Workers (from the Shell Company of Nigeria) Returning Home from Work, Caught in Torrential Rain, 2013. All images below are production images of the same work.

This research image was found in preparation for David Claerbout's Oil Workers.

over the scene, which is part of my headache here because of the way it coaches perception.[1]

Ultimately, I appropriated some cinematographic skills, until my studio—populated by old-timers of the camera and traditional arts—rebooted itself as an animation studio and thus, once again, began to resemble a painting studio with lots of pupils and "easels."

Pictorial 3-D produces images generated with the help of geometric shapes, polygons that are subsequently textured, their surfaces structured and lit by virtual light sources which mimic real-world lighting in ways that are astonishing. As a traditionally trained painter and draughtsman who later studied film technique on his own, I was stunned by the intense overlap between Western historical painting and cinematic techniques, which were applied as if the modern rift had never occurred. I am, in other words, stunned by the radical conservatism of 3-D. I would never have expected that so many sciences would come together to form a mighty bastion of pictorial, "realistic" conservatism. Even the most radical undertaking is in one way or another pre-corporated. Maybe our current situation is the result of decades of web-thinking, of dwelling within an infinitely expanded horizontal web or network and the lack of a sense of topos this produces.

The new way of image-making is all-encompassing and includes methods that date as far back as the Renaissance, requiring the artist to master all of the traditional skills of painting, cinematography, and sculpture, *and* to have a degree in computer science. In big production studios tasks are broken down into numerous specialties which perhaps make it appear

abstract, but in my studio, where a few people manage "everything," the enormity of it rises right in front of our eyes and leaves me, at least, perplexed.

When working in pictorial 3-D, an artist is working in a finite, disenchanted world. Whatever is to be created will be created from memory, after the fact, based on documents. The visual language is one where the smallest detail in the image is premeditated, and if, by chance, such a detail were forgotten or omitted the result would confront us with that shortcoming in the picture. For example, grass and flowers require choices to be made about the season and geographical area, and whether the grass it is to be wild or cut, which itself requires specifying its proximity to instituted culture. Because if it is cut, who cuts it? And so on. In lens-based photography an image can be produced without deciding these questions authoritatively. Instead, there is a tradition of mutual authentication between who is behind the camera and what is in front of the lens. The photographer and her subject coproduce one another, simultaneously. In pictorial 3-D one must answer for everything, and so every produced image exposes its own ideological motivations. It is in essence no different from tableau painting, about which the most important thing to remember is that it is the opposite of modernist asceticism. Every image becomes an accumulation of decisions, responsibilities, and therefore relies heavily on the known codes of memory and morality. Every image becomes potentially baroque, overflowing with the results of endless discussions and deliberations.

We are no longer in a world of contingency, of possibilities created by the collaboration of lens and world—that magical environment—but have become makers of everything down to the smallest detail. We are playing God, and by god, not even God had time to think of all

these elements. No. God is a shortcut here: an assumption that further betrays the ideals of which we are unaware but according to which we nonetheless think and observe. This total fabrication implies that we are "observing from memory" and brings with it a sense of nostalgia and a feeling of loss, of having given up on a naive perception that supposedly happened spontaneously, without thinking. Such perception is remembered as being happy, because it was *Unbewusst*, unconscious—remember that consciousness, *Bewusstsein*, is unhappy—unencumbered by observing one's own thinking, as Flusser reminds us in his simple but beautiful elaborations on representation (*Vorstellung*) and consciousness (*Bewusstsein*).

A depth pass rendering allows for a view of each of the subjects' distance to the virtual 3-D camera.

I—like may others—feel that *Vorstellung* better depicts the paradox that in order to see something, you have to put something in front of it. *Bewusstsein* implies stepping out of one's own subjectivity, standing next to oneself, and observing one's own situation. I would imagine that for Freud, the lens-based photograph is like the successfully cured patient, who is not turned inwards questioning his own state of happiness, but happily goes about absorbing light sensitively. Pictorial 3-D would then be a living person gone blind, spending days compulsively retracing what lies in the past and reaffirming it into the present.

This gets more worrying with what I call, somewhat simplistically, second-generation 3-D perception, which is born without having seen the world, so to speak, and which does not have living memory to rely upon for pictures. A good example of this is the concept of the scan. Scanning differs from photography in that a scan literally moves like a mole in the dark. It does not need daylight to record, while photography is by definition a medium of hope because light is its essential condition.

Scanning records only what we could hit or what could hit us in the dark. It reduces the world to a collection of obstacles. Scanning is a logic of avoiding, while photography follows the logic of encountering. Scanning is oriented towards security, towards determining what is close, or perhaps too close for comfort. We scan for threats.

An early render displays the environment of Oil Workers (2013).

The scan would not have been developed without American defense systems, both military and personal (sometimes I see no difference). At the risk of going too far astray: unlike the photograph, a scan defines individual, personal space around "me"—a scanner is the scared individual who has sensors around him.

Sometimes I feel that we are moving back to the nineteenth century, and have arrived at a place before the modern revolutions, back again to feudalism. This becomes obvious with the well-organized increase of inequality, the new conservatism, and a return of the tableau.

By referencing the tableau and the return of the masterpiece I am trying to draw attention to who is in control and who produces images. Image culture is the fruit of a centuries-long process that rendered the proletariat or the structurally illiterate "verbal," allowing them to produce a language that would be faster and more compact than linear writing, which until then held all the tools of power and put history on paper. I am not suggesting that image culture is the result of an organized revolution by the illiterate, but only indicating the brilliant and frankly moving appropriation of the speed and power of communication previously held by those with political power.

The masterpiece-conclusion can be seen as a sad note, as the return of the master and the end of emancipation. Modern artists were mainly working from a sense of ascetic exclusion. They would rather have "all that was" broken than to continue in a sphere of inclusion, or more

accurately: incorporation. To listen to a master, to pay rent, to be incorporated in the sphere of power is unavoidable today, it would seem. The production of tableau is, in this respect and as I understand it, the opposite of the photographic apparatus and its semi-conscious production of images.

If photography came and eradicated the tableau, well, the tableau is back, this time not merely as a picture but as a masterpiece.[2] The tableau returns alive and well as ideology, waving a definite goodbye to the sensitivity of that modern invention, photography, and its thick glass window on the world, in a renewed attempt to impose order on our thoughts.

David Claerbout, Oil Workers (from the Shell Company of Nigeria) Returning Home from Work, Caught in Torrential Rain, 2013. Single channel color projection, silent.

I call this the world of pure ideologies, where striving towards something is no longer needed because satisfaction is immediate, because the outgoing and the incoming perceptions are instantaneous and equal in strength. This is similar, in some ways, to what Baudrillard once described as "the ecstasy of communication," wherein "all secrets, spaces and scenes [are] abolished in a single dimension of information." This condition relegated the pathologies of hysteria and paranoia to the past and instead inaugurated an era of generalized schizophrenia, which is characterized by "the absolute proximity, the total instantaneousness of things ... It is the end of interiority and intimacy, the over-exposure and transparency of the world which traverses us without obstacle."[3]

Some time ago I tried to explain to an acquaintance what I meant by pure ideologies. It was in vain, until the next day when she described taking a magnificent picture with her iPad as she was watching the sun come up on the horizon. She showed the picture to me. It was indeed one of those images we would all like to see upon waking. Incredible colors, the sun perfectly placed, and below, an undulating countryside where animals and people are peacefully asleep.

I asked her how much of the picture she thought she had taken herself. The vantage point is indicated by the IP address of the device. So is the weather, season, and time of day. Actually, algorithmic processes can "guess" the ideal moment for photographing such a wonderful daybreak, so as to raise the mood of the average person. There was nothing of herself in what she showed me, beyond the coincidence of technology with itself.

In fact, the image was so wonderful to her because it corresponded exactly with the splendor that resides in her memory. We often feel deeply happy, don't we, when we encounter a situation that is also seated warmly inside our memory. We are gratified when observing exists in sync with remembering, holding no nasty surprises, but being an affective revisiting of an old situation as if it were an old friend.

A render shows a scanned actor in Oil Workers.

It is said that a person who has gone mad sees things that are not there. We call these things "projections." Abnormal psychology distinguishes three types of pathology: anxiety disorders, mood disorders, and personality disorders. The first are unhealthy emotional responses to external stimuli. The second are emotional cycles that take place entirely irrespective of anything outside the self. And the third involve the breakdown of self-identity, as with schizophrenia. If the schizophrenic could take a step back, out of the affected self, they would understand their delusions to be delusions, at which point these delusions

would vanish, and self-understanding would return. It is precisely this action of stepping out of the image that enables us to make a *Vorstellung*—to put an image in front of the thing, or to make a representation from memory. The German word, which translates literally as "in-front position," suggests that such constructs obscure the sight of the real.

When images internal to the psyche "appear" or surface on the retina and are projected back inwards before making contact with the world, they generate looping pulses that turn the mind into a continuously repeating mental prison.

This happens, for example, when the affective link with the world is broken, or heartbroken, and in order to handle the grief one has to enter into the isolation I am trying to describe. We may think of this as a terrible thing to happen—and it is—but it also describes a larger social project collectively taking shape. My friend's photograph of the sunset is a document of madness not because it is a delusion, but because it suggests that she had a role in producing it, and this is the delusion. Unlike Baudrillard's schizophrenic, who cannot locate the borders of the self in the world of mass media, the world of pure ideologies perpetually projects borders onto the self that in fact do not exist, deluding us into thinking we produce some particular view on the world, when we do not. The lens was a machine for producing not only images, but authors and worlds as well. But now it has fallen silent. In the past, one had to believe that one was really a long-dead king or an alien from outer space to suffer from delusions of grandeur. Tomorrow it will be enough to consider oneself a photographer.

X

David Claerbout is a Belgian artist working primarily in photography, video, sound, drawing, and digital arts, as well as large-scale video installation.

1
The other thing that bothers me
about cinema is that it manages
to eliminate itself, to make people
think they hate good cinema, and
thereby gets itself forced into
retreating to the internet or into
low-budget productions.

2
My worry is that for the tableau to
be so successful again, it must
mean be that there are illiterates
of image culture, who will be
dominated once again by those
who have the power of words.
This is why I feel that images are
once again produced by words,
and why I fear that a premodern
blindness is back. Economically, it
is not hard to see that feudalism
has returned, but every economy
is the result of a vision. The
current vision holds that the party
is over, that the holiday gone on
long enough, and it is time to go
back from where the poverty
came: spending every day of
one's life struggling, gradually
forgetting the party.

3
Jean Baudrillard, "The Ecstasy of
Communication," in *The Anti-Aest
hetic: Essays on Postmodern
Culture* , ed. Hal Foster (New
York: New Press, 2002), 133.

On November 26, 2016, the fortieth anniversary of the release of the Sex Pistols' "Anarchy in the UK," Joe Corré will burn his £5 million collection of punk memorabilia. This gesture by the son of Malcom McLaren and Vivian Westwood—two icons of punk's first wave—is a response to Punk London, a year-long slate of concerts, films, talks, and exhibitions organized by the British tourism board. As Corré explained to *NME Magazine*:

> You talk to people about it these days and it's almost like *Antiques Roadshow*. "I wish I kept those bondage trousers, they'd be worth a fortune now." What's that got to do with anything? That's why I think it's appropriate [to burn the collection], to say punk rock is extinct. Otherwise, it's all going to end up in some tourist shop, in a glass case, like the Hard Rock Café or something, and they'll be selling "God Save The Queen" mugs with a safety pin through her nose at Buckingham Palace ... To see punk ideas appropriated by the establishment ... punk rock was never that ... The point is that we don't pray on that altar, we don't pray at the altar of money.

Franco "Bifo" Berardi and Marco Magagnoli

Blu's Iconoclasm and the End of the Dada Century

As inspiration for his own conflagration, Corré cites The KLF's decision to burn a million pounds sterling in 1992, as documented in the film *Watch The K Foundation Burn A Million Quid*. The bonfire of punk-historical assets in November won't only be a refusal of value, however; it will also be a destruction of artifacts, and for Corré, a certain erasure of self. Blu, a street artist, recently performed a similar gesture of consistent iconoclasm, nine hundred miles away, in Bologna—a city very different from London.

London is a huge metropolis; Bologna is a small city. London is frantically busy; Bologna is lazier. London is gargantuan and neuropathic; Bologna is more polluted but less monstrous. There was a moment, however, when Bologna and London played a similar role in the zeitgeist. This was 1977, when two similar yet contrasting insurrections took place in the two cities, paving the way for a new imagination of the future. The London punk insurrection was dressed predominantly in black, while the Bologna autonomous insurrection was full of color; but the insurgents were part of the same precarious life. The London punks shouted *no future!*, while the Bologna autonomists shouted *the future is now!*

Bologna is an interesting city. At the end of the Middle Ages, *clerici vagantes* (wandering artists) from the south and the north gathered there and founded what is said to have been the first university of the modern world, the University of Bologna.

For generations new waves of scientists and artists, poets, and social rebels have traversed the streets of Bologna: they have been a nomadic minority in a city where the

A still from the 1994 video K Foundation Burn a Million Quid which documents the K Foundation's action of burning cash from their record sales.

majority of the population is busy with commerce and industry.

Over the centuries the local authorities have dealt in different ways with this nomadic intellectual minority. Many times they have tried to repress, marginalize, and sometimes expel these innovators—these enemies of the established order. At other times the local bourgeoisie has tried to take advantage of the ebullience and creativity of the nomadic outlaws.

But the richness of the city rests upon the nomadic brain that gathers and disperses, leaving traces of its passage: artworks, inventions, technical and political innovations. So it happens that in certain periods the city is ebullient and inventive. In other periods, however, the nomadic brilliance vanishes, and butchers, bureaucrats, and bankers occupy the whole scene, exploiting the products of the nomadic innovators and transforming work into money, creation into value, and art into the Museum.

In the late twentieth century a wave of cultural unrest and political rebellion swept Bologna: poets and activists and technological experimenters revived the early-twentieth-century art vanguard, and mixed it with a freshly imagined social autonomy. Dadaism had a presence in the streets of Bologna in the '70s, when thousands of students, young workers, and women decided to refuse their destiny of exploitation and sadness, and tried to transform daily life into an artwork.

Mao-Dadaism detonated in the '70s as a double ironic prank. It was a way to declare that Maoism and the entire Communist legacy of the twentieth century was a funny remnant of an epoch that was fading away. But it was also a way to marry the tragic thread of Communist revolution to the crazy thread of art ambiguousness. The ironic Mao-Dada rebellion exploded in 1977: for three days police tanks tried to remove thousand of young rebels from the university quarter in Bologna. At the end they succeeded, after killing a student, arresting more than
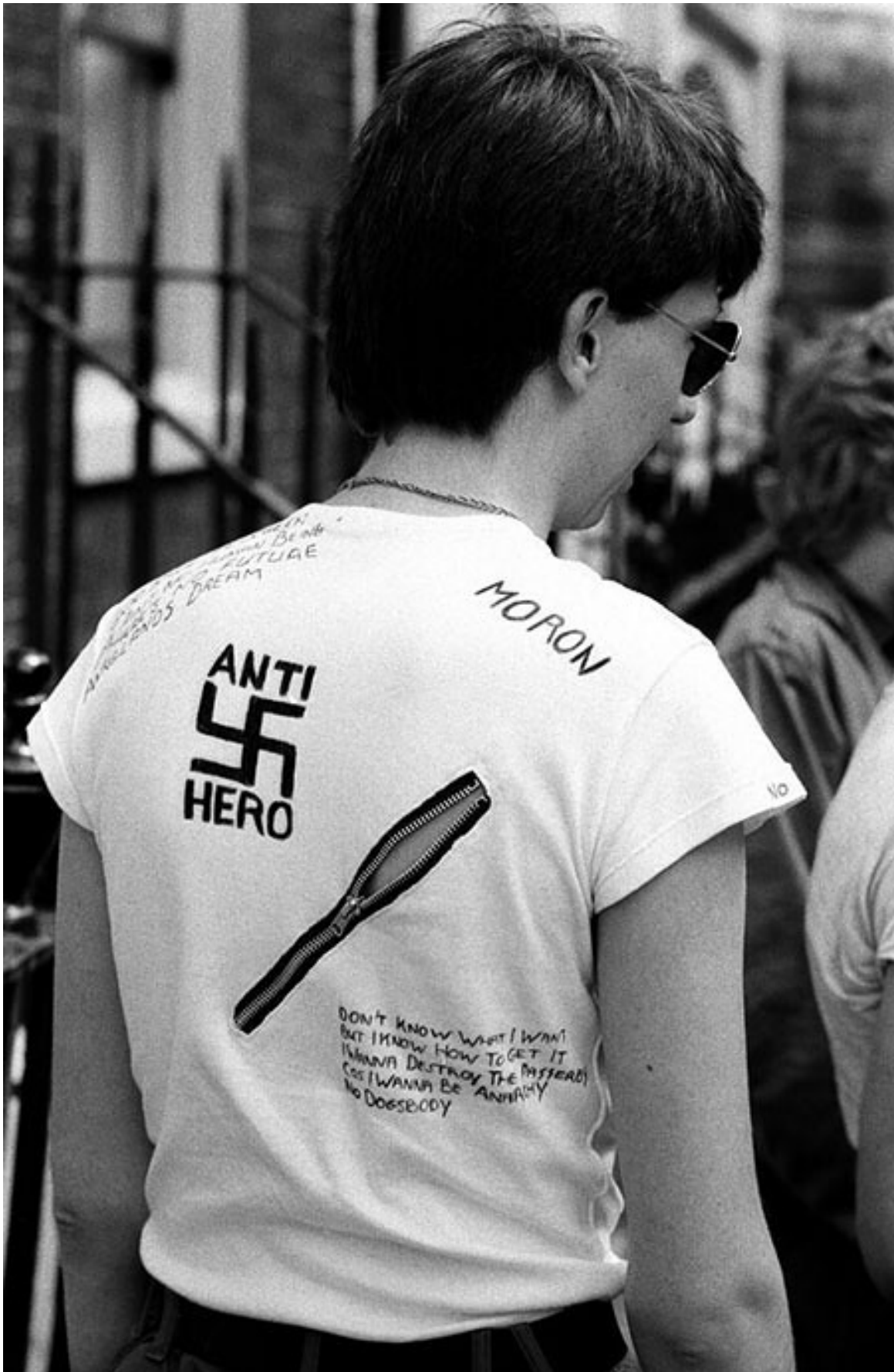
One example shows the punk movement's use of T-shirts as a surface for graffiti.

three hundred people, and shutting down the radio station that was promulgating the schizo-utopian art-transformation of daily life.

This was the last proletarian insurgency of the Communist century, but it was simultaneously the first insurrection of the precarious cognitariat, based on the intuition that the modern imagination of the future was dissolving.

The separation of art and daily life was the enemy of the Mao-Dada rebels. We—for I was one—did not care much about politics, governments, and power. Our mission was to break the separation between art and daily life, in the spirit of Tristan Tzara, the Romanian-French poet who was later accused of being a purveyor of odalisques, narcotics, and scandalous literature. In the spring of 1916, while war raged all over Europe, Tzara launched the Dada project at the Cabaret Voltaire: "Abolish art, abolish daily life, abolish the separation between art and daily life."

Lenin was sitting somewhere in the same cabaret, sipping tea or vodka; I don't remember which. What would the history of the century have been if the poet and the communist became friends, and shared a common ironic style? Would the century have been lighter? Maybe. Dadaist irony might have been a useful antidote to Bolshevik severity.

Protesters from the self-denominated indiani metropolitani march toward the camera, Bologna circa 1977.

Rhetorically at least, the two shared an attachment to immanence, or at the very least a suspicion of traditional forms of representation. Writing, one year later, in *State and Revolution*, Lenin used language not so different from Tzara's to insist on "the *smashing*, the *destruction*"of bourgeois parliamentarianism, which also separated everyday life from what claimed to represent it.

"We cannot imagine democracy, even proletarian democracy, without representative institutions, but we can and must imagine democracy without parliamentarism," wrote Lenin. Such a vision of democracy shares with the Cabaret Voltaire the refusal of separation, and the destruction of the distinction between audience and performer, whether that be understood as spectator/artist or citizen/representative.

The distinction between the Dada and Leninist vanguards lay not in the goal but in the method—in the difference, finally, between an amateur cabaret and a vanguard party of professional revolutionaries. In the first case, it is the space of art as a distinct professional realm that is invaded by the unskilled forces of everyday life. In the second, it is the space of everyday life that is occupied by the imperatives of the professional revolutionary. Lenin's phrase "Everything within the party, nothing without" is the Dada gesture in reverse. Rather than letting everyday life into the theater to crush the division between the audience and the performer, the vanguard party expands outwards to include the audience among its ranks.

Both theories seek the destruction of the professional/amateur distinction, but Dada strategy pursues this goal by championing amateurism and enacting a certain *classlessness*, while Leninism seeks the triumph of the revolutionary professional.

Naturally, the precarious classes that composed the Mao-Dadaists of '77 tried to change the course of history by returning to the immanent co-participation of art and everyday life promised by Dada. But this required acting *autonomously* from the leadership of the Communist Party, whose existence as an institutionalized, professional vanguard placed it in conflict with a movement of the precarious who were, like Dada, aligned against professionalism as the force separating art and life. But it was too late, as the planet in those years was already running out of a future.

At the beginning of the twenty-first century, when the storm of '77 was already a fading memory, Blu came to Bologna as a nomadic artist. He went to the Museum of Natural History and saw those prehistoric fish with long teeth and reptilian scales. He went to anarchist meetings in squatted houses like XM24. At night he painted on the walls of suburban buildings, abandoned factories, ghosts of extinguished industrial capitalism. The paintings were full of primordial aggressive animals and late-modern warriors, and squatters living in moonless cavities. On the walls of derelict dwellings he painted skyscrapers and armies of menacing tanks, shy elephants and aggressive turtles.

In the last ten years Blu has painted graffiti on the walls of Berlin, Los Angeles, and Rome, but in Bologna his paintings are visible in so many places that his style marks the cityscape.

This space-age projection of a future workspace is commonly used today to celebrate the less glamorous administrative assistant day.

However, life in the city of Bologna is not easy for people like Blu. Local authorities and the racist local newspaper *Il Resto del Carlino* have repeatedly denounced street artists as vandals, subverters, and allies of the anarcho-autonomous squatters. Time and again squads of cleaners have walked around the city to erase the graffiti on the walls.

This work by street artist Blu was visible before he made a decision to erase his work with grey paint.

Then finally something happened, and now all of Blu's pieces in Bologna are gone. They have been covered up with grey paint. Not because of an act of repression, not because of the bigotry of good citizens who love order and clean walls, but because of an act of self-erasure by the artist himself.

On the night of March 11, on the thirty-ninth anniversary of the massive riots that followed the killing of the student Francesco Lorusso by the police, Blu, helped by a group of activists, covered over his own works with grey paint.

Why did he do this?

A week later, on March 18, an exhibition called "Street Art: Banksy & Co" was scheduled to open. The exhibition was organized by the Fondazione Carisbo, a local bank-owned foundation whose president is Fabio Roversi Monaco, the former rector of the University of Bologna, as well as the former president of BolognaFiere, a public-private partnership that organizes exhibitions. In Bologna, the name Roversi Monaco evokes power, money, and banks. The exhibition was expected to display works of art removed from walls with the stated intention of "salvaging them from demolition and preserving them from the injuries of time," which means turning them into museum pieces, and eventually transforming them into value.

The situation perfectly epitomized the old story of

separating art from daily life, of the museification of art separated from life.

After his action of self-erasure, Blu wrote on his blog:

> After having denounced and criminalized graffiti as vandalism, after having oppressed the youth culture that created them, after having evacuated the places which functioned as laboratories for those artists, now Bologna's powers-that-be pose as the saviors of street art.

Street artists have been repeatedly denounced and arrested in Bologna. Two have been jailed, and many more have been fined. Recently, the mayor of Bologna welcomed to the town hall a delegation of volunteers who had taken part in a "no tag" clean-up project against "graphic vandalism," organized by the Bologna government. The municipality even pays building owners who remove graffiti from the walls of their properties.

Then the Museum comes to the rescue of what is left of street art, with the Bank supporting the expropriation.

Is Roversi Monaco's act of expropriation legal? Yes, he claims: "We've asked permission from the legitimate owners of the derelict buildings these murals were on."

But Roversi Monaco has also conceded: "The artist remains the author, but the owner is whoever owns the building."

Thus Blu decided not to take part in the show.

Blu's action was performed almost exactly one hundred years after the birth of Dada, so I read it as the final self-erasure of the historical vanguard. The long-standing attempt to translate art into life, and to transform life into art, is over. It was an ambiguous, dangerous project. The will for art-life cross-contamination produced contradictory effects throughout the past century. It fuelled countless collective and individual insurrections that traversed the existence of millions of rebellious bodies, millions of workers refusing to work. But it also nourished advertising, the ceaseless flow of semiotic pollution in the infosphere. Aesthetic innovation and the market have played a game of reciprocal plundering, with the Museum and the Bank-Museum swallowing life and transforming it into abstraction.

Blu's act is a sort of self-deleting of a dynamic century, while the world sinks into dementia. It is not the museum but the grey wall that will reactivate the depressed imagination of our times. A grey wall, like a bonfire, is a sacrifice that leaves behind a suggestion: do not continue the game, start a new one. Do not build on the ruins of

past "modern" values. Abandon illusions, get prepared for the perfect storm. And in the storm—if I may conclude with Bob Marley—emancipate yourself from mental slavery, none but yourself can free your mind.

X

Franco Berardi, aka "Bifo," founder of the famous Radio Alice in Bologna and an important figure in the Italian Autonomia movement, is a writer, media theorist, and media activist. His most recent book is *And: Phenomenology of the End* (Semiotext(e), 2015).

Marco Magagnoli is president of the Cultural Association Menomale, which is dedicated to the theory and technology of immersive media. He is the coauthor of *System Error* (Feltrinelli, 2002) and the creator of The Look of Life, a video website for people who live in contexts of isolation.

Stefan Heidenreich

Freeportism as Style and Ideology: Post-Internet and Speculative Realism, Part II

Freeports are large, tax-free storage facilities that are uniquely suited to housing works of art adapted to the demands of contemporary financial markets. Because of the dominance of these markets, "freeportism" can be understood to signify the conditions of representation, production, and distribution that correspond to this dominance. The successful freeport artwork requires a strong artistic brand, ample liquidity in the form of tradable artworks, galleries operating as market makers, and photogenic material objects that produce likable images on platforms such as Instagram and Facebook.

In the first part of this essay, I argued that the kind of art known as "post-internet" adapted to these conditions within a relatively short period of time—about five years—mostly by leaving aside its initial focus on web-related practices and processes. This transformation has turned "post-internet" art into a style of freeportism as such, much in the same way that, once upon a time, it could have been argued that Dutch still-life painting, with its depiction of worldly goods, was the style of the early financial market that flourished around the Amsterdam stock exchange founded in 1602.

To make the transmission from financial markets to artistic practices complete, an ideological framework was needed that supported the turn from discursive to material practices, from rituals of communication to objects and commodities, and from web-oriented and process-based artworks to shiny items provided in ample liquidity. The new brand of philosophical thinking called "speculative realism" offered itself as the ideology of freeportism and its associated modes of artistic production and circulation. Whether its appearance was a lucky coincidence, or whether both post-internet art and speculative realism are symptoms of the very same economic and technological regime, is open to discussion. However, both serve each other exceedingly well.

Speculative Realism and the Reality of Speculation

In 2013, "Speculations on Anonymous Materials" was the first major institutional exhibition to link post-internet art with speculative realism. Curated by Susanne Pfeffer at the Fridericianum in Kassel, the show was accompanied by a conference featuring several philosophers associated with speculative realism, including Markus Gabriel, Maurizio Ferraris, Iain Hamilton Grant, Robin Mackay, and Reza Negarestani.

The show rendered post-internet art as a visually and

aesthetically coherent movement, through a materiality- and object-oriented selection of artists like Yngve Holen, Josh Kline, Katja Novitskova, Jon Rafman, and Timur Si-Qin, and by displaying the works in traditionally museal fashion. In so doing, the show contributed to canonizing post-internet art in a state that had already left behind its web-related roots.

At that point, post-internet art had shifted decidedly to the production of material objects. Galleries had come around to the new work, which was regularly shown at fairs and was already establishing its presence on the commercial side of the art world.

What was remarkable about the show was not so much the selection of works, or the individual contributions of the philosophers at the conference, who mostly struggled to find a relation to the context of the exhibition. Most remarkable was the mere fact that the exhibition was the first attempt on an institutional level to connect post-internet art with the broader theoretical framework of speculative realism as such.

Of course, at that early point, very few pieces of post-internet art would have been dumped in the darkness of storage facilities. However, freeportism as a style does not only affect art that actually enters the storage facilities, but also work that strives to do so. Post-internet art's marriage with philosophy was perhaps not straightforwardly meant to increase the former's freeport eligibility, but in the end it did so, whether deliberately or not.

Yngve Holen, Extended Operations, 2013. Installation view Fridericianum, Photo: Achim Hatzius. Courtesy Yngve Holen, Johan Breggren Gallery, Malmö and Neue Alte Brücke, Frankfurt am Main.

Philosophical Hedging

In trading, to hedge a position means to secure against future losses—like buying insurance against falling prices. Whenever a professional trader enters a speculative trade, she tries to mitigate the risks involved. Usually, this can be achieved in two ways. The first method is diversification,

or bundling multiple positions whose risks neutralize each other. Venture capitalists routinely follow this recipe. Contemporary venture collectors mimic the same strategy. They buy the works of not only one young artist but of many. This helps to diversify the risk. Taste, subjective judgment, and emotional affinity give way to more risk-averse strategies of art portfolio management.

The second strategy is hedging. In the market this usually involves buying derivatives like forward contracts, options, swaps, and futures that help to lock in a future price. A small expenditure now can serve to guarantee returns later. Similar derivatives for artworks do not exist. But there are discursive constructions that serve the same purpose. Attaching philosophy to art is like buying a derivative.

How does philosophy work as hedging?

Creating an awareness of time and history requires intellectual and institutional efforts. The big time machines of the art world used to be museums. Starting in the late eighteenth century, they established an order of historical time, following the new scientific models of art historian and archaeologist Johann Joachim Winckelmann, as applied by Christian von Mechel and Dominique Vivant Denon.[1]

Today's museums have a different focus. A national cultural identity and the maintenance of a historical heritage have been reduced to secondary goals. A lot of money is spent erecting new palaces of the arts. They look great. As architectural landmarks they serve all kinds of purposes, from tourist attractions to soft factors in competitiveness among cities and nations. But for the arts and for the construction of history and time, they don't work as they used to. Instead of amassing a big collection, these institutions devote their resources to organizing temporary shows. A cultural canon is no longer their main concern.

The absence of history becomes most visible in their focus on the "contemporary." Caught in the ever-changing presence of the now, museums have lost their function of developing a historical reserve. Throughout the museum's history, art markets have profited from its canon-building efforts. As the buyers and lenders of last resort, museums have acted like the central banks of the art market. Grounded in a stabilized history and a canon, they have provided safety—in other words, the basis for nearly risk-free investment. Curators don't do this. Biennials don't do this. And museums no longer do this either. Today's new repositories of art—freeports—operate entirely according to the laws of the market, and are therefore exposed to its fluctuations.

Here is where philosophy enters the picture. The traditional rhetoric of philosophy invokes an appeal to authority. A proper and well-grounded philosophy paper

derives its status from calling on authors from the rich 2,500-year history of written thinking. It is exactly this historical reach that renders philosophers so valuable to contemporary art discourse. The more art texts are decorated with quotes and references to this long history of thought, the better they serve the purpose of guaranteeing the durability of the artworks associated with them.

The one and only requirement for hedge-worthy philosophy is therefore a formal one. Like ghosts from the past, this philosophy needs to call in the old authorities, by citing them or referencing their theoretical concepts. The more ancient, the more solemn, the better.

By this metric, speculative realism scores pretty high. In contrast to the French post-structuralism that preceded it, speculative realism began by dusting off the eternal, core questions of philosophy. Its main points of reference are scattered throughout the long history of the discipline. For the purpose of philosophical hedging it does not matter whether you argue for or against Kant. It is the name "Kant" that matters.

Another property of speculative realism adds to its hedging capabilities: it is completely devoid of a political agenda, unlike continental philosophy. For the sake of the purity of philosophical reasoning, most proponents of speculative realism steer clear of crude issues like political and economic theory, let alone political activism. For this reason, the risk of critical disruption or an unfavorable discursive intervention is very low. And when it comes to hedging, avoiding risk is what matters.

Speculative realism has no direct interest in the arts. Few of its thinkers ever touch art as a subject. Only rudimentary traces of aesthetics can be found. Recently, however, after the art world became interested in speculative realism, some of its thinkers felt inclined to utter statements regarding artistic practices—not so much to serve the interests of artists, but to cover the full spectrum of philosophy. This has introduced a measure of risk into philosophers' involvement in the art world, albeit only a small one. Idiosyncratic aesthetic judgments by speculative realists have the potential to complicate their participation in the art world.[2]

A successful philosophical hedging requires a historically well-grounded theory that is connected via ample quotes and references to a long history of thinking, and that is wise enough to avoid adverse political and aesthetic judgments. In its approach to reactivating the classic question of philosophy and their main thinkers, speculative realism fulfills this purpose perfectly.

Rhetorical Appropriation

We should keep in mind that the artistic appropriation of philosophy does not entail an extensive discussion or rigorous critique of its theories and conclusions. That part is left to academic discourse. Artistic practices apply, transform, mirror, echo—and occasionally also precede—the findings of philosophers. One can of course criticize this appropriation as merely acting on the level of buzzwords. But the opposite suspicion can also be raised: perhaps the philosophical statements in question were written exactly for that purpose.

Apart from formal requirements and rhetoric relations, there are also more substantial ways in which speculative realism encourages and justifies an artistic production fit for freeports. These include its preoccupation with materialism, its object-oriented ontology, and its "anti-correlationist" stance. Before delving into these three subjects, however, I will pause to note that among the key terms that tie speculative realism to post-internet art, "speculative" and "realism" are not among them. This is because philosophy and art use these terms in significantly different ways. Philosophical speculation operates in a different domain than speculation in art markets. While the latter—related as it is to future prices, payments, and risk—concerns the domain of time, speculation in a philosophical sense usually concerns the domain of existence and abstraction. Speculation—at least in speculative realism—refers to a claim on the eternal existence of something otherwise inaccessible or not demonstrable.

There is a similar divergence in meaning when it comes to the term "realism." Suhail Malik is an art theorist teaching at Goldsmiths and one of the main proponents of the idea that speculative realism has strong implications for contemporary art production. Malik points out that the philosophical term "realism" does not have much affinity with the "realism" known from art history: "Such a realism here is not to be confused with realism as a style or genre of art committed to 'accurate' representations of pre-existing reality, such a genre already assuming representation as an interval from a real elsewhere."[3]

Materialism

The return of materialism in philosophical debates coincides nicely with a focus on materiality within the arts. The topic has been deemed so important that the magazine *October* dedicated a recent issue to materiality. The issue includes a questionnaire with responses from art theorists, art historians, and artists, who were asked to "think the reality of objects beyond human meanings and uses. This other reality is often rooted in 'thingness' or an animate materiality."[4]

Contemporary materialism refers to the thread leading from Spinoza through Bergson to Deleuze and the Marxist
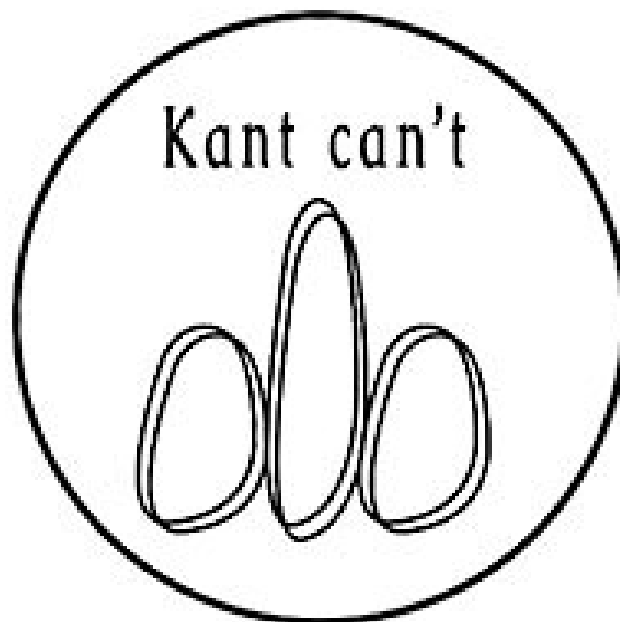
Henry the vacuum cleaner wears a smart sticker on sale in the spoof online store by Lulu Mendelova niceniceverynice.org. "Dear machines and objects, Graham H. is fighting for your right since the beginning of the millenium! Show your respect and buy the OOO stickers with integrated wishlist so you can share your desires yourselves on the internet of things!"

tradition.[5]   Referring back to the Spinozian notion of the "conatus," things are thought to be equipped with an agency of their own. A vitalist drive reigns over the material world. "One moral of the story is that we are also nonhuman and that things, too, are vital players in the world."[6]

If material carries its own energy, there is less need for a discursive layer of communication. This approach has major consequences for art production. Materiality can speak for itself. When it comes to post-internet art, this is one of the strongest arguments for leaving aside the early attachment to social media platforms, and to online communication in general. The trust in the vibrant energy of matter helps to promote the retreat to traditional material production.

The consequences of this ideology for the art world become even clearer when compared to the aesthetic relations attached to preceding philosophical approaches: "This position sharply contrasts with the philosophical and cultural view dominant over the last half century, a view that affirms the indispensability of interpretation, discourse, textuality, signification, ideology, and power."[7] Once the layer of communication is thrown overboard, we are left with merely material things, and we have to assume that they can stand for themselves, regardless of what happens to them.
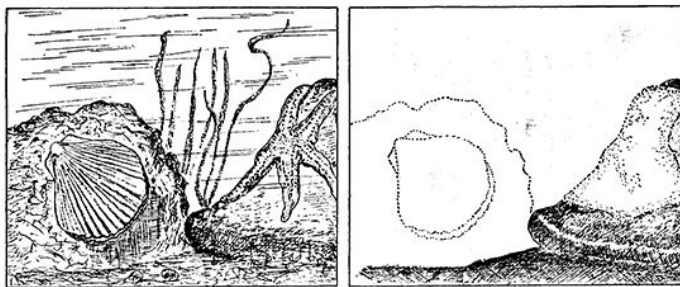

Fig. 19
Environment and *Umwelt* of the scallop

The above is an illustration of a scallop's umwelt from Jakob von Uexküll's book Stroll Through the Worlds of Animals and Men (1934). Uexküll defines the umwelt as the perceptual world in which an organism exists and acts as a subject.

Object Orientation

The concept of the "object," as it figures most prominently in Graham Harman's "object-oriented ontology," has little in common with vitalist materialism. Harman's objects are paradoxical beings: "By 'objects' I mean unified realities—physical or otherwise—that cannot fully be reduced either downwards to their pieces or upwards to their effects."[8] The only common trait is the assumption of a reality that both material things and Harman's objects

belong to. Navigating the philosophical quagmire of the old discipline of epistemology, Harman postulates the object as a being, not necessarily material, that is neither explainable from its components nor from its relations. If we regard the artwork as an object, Harman's theory offers a justification for a belief in the autonomous, inherent reality of the artwork. Its unique quality can neither be fully explained by the process of production, nor can it rely on its relation to the beholder: "At issue is the independence of artworks not only from their social and political surroundings, their physical settings or their commercial exchange value, but from any other object whatsoever."[9] In addition, the object takes the place formerly occupied by the genius—an individual possessed by an inherent talent or ability that is not subject to educational efforts but naturally inborn, and for this reason someone who is self-reliant and free of outward relations.

Harman's metaphysical conception of objecthood bears a striking resemblance to the requirements for things to be stored in a freeport. Whether intentional or not, his description of objects perfectly fits the artistic practices of freeportism: "The only way to do justice to objects is to consider that their reality is free of all relation, deeper than all reciprocity. The object is a dark crystal veiled in a private vacuum: irreducible to its own pieces, and equally irreducible to its outward relations with other things."[10] On other occasions he speaks of objects being "vacuum-sealed."[11] With well-packaged artworks coming so close to Harman's idea of the object, the freeport represents the ideal environment for object-oriented works of art.

Anti-Correlationism

In *After Finitude*, Quentin Meillassoux writes: "By 'correlation' we mean the idea according to which we only ever have access to the correlation between thinking and being, and never to either term considered apart from the other."[12] For our purposes we do not need to follow all of Meillassoux's intricate lines of argumentation as he defends his refutation of correlationism against basically all the major representatives of modern philosophy, from Kant—whom he deems his main opponent—onward. The consequences for the arts of the anti-correlationist approach are easy to draw out.

According to Suhail Malik, "that a reality such as art can only be apprehended by the thinking or consciousness of it and that it is necessarily accompanied by that thinking and consciousness is the dependency that Quentin Meillassoux has influentially called correlationism."[13]

Anti-correlationism, then, frees art from aesthetic considerations and the involvement of a beholder. Under these ideological premises the existence of an artwork

Josh Kline, Tastemaker's Choice, 2012 (detail). Installation view at Fridericianum. Photo: Achim Hatzius. Courtesy Josh Kline and 47 Canal, New York

requires neither human perception nor consciousness. Very much like the "arche-fossil" that Meillassoux constructs as a hypothetical 4.65-billion-year-old object, the artwork may live for an indefinite amount of time in eternal darkness without losing its real existence. Malik has drawn further and more far-reaching conclusions from Meillassoux's assumptions, translating them into requirements for anti-correlationist works of art: "The demand here upon contemporary art is strictly non-trivial: it removes subjective interpretation or experience as a condition or telos of the artwork, and therewith collapses the entire edifice of the contemporary art paradigm."[14]

Stripped of interpretation and experience, the purpose of exhibiting artworks becomes completely empty. Consequentially, artworks no longer need to be shown anywhere: "An art responsive to this theoretically-led imperative would be indifferent to the experience of it, an art that does not presume or return to aesthetics, however minimal or fecund such an aesthetics might be."[15] There can be no better justification for an artistic production that goes straight from the artist's studio to the storage facility, without ever being publicly displayed or shown to anybody.

Conclusion

Speculative realism, with its emphasis on material and objects and its repudiation of the beholder, provides an almost perfect ideology for an artistic production catering to freeports as sites of material storage and non-exhibition.

This contradicts Suhail Malik's claim that speculative realism opens the way for an entirely different contemporary art. He writes: "From yet another angle, realism's provocation to art is the undoing of aesthetic experience as a condition or term of art, even in the avowal of art's ineluctable materiality. Which is to say that realism speculatively indicates the conditions for another art than contemporary art."[16] On the contrary, considering the practice of post-internet art, the theoretical framework of speculative realism does precisely the opposite of what Malik claims it does. It offers an ideological framework for today's dominant art practice and is uniquely adapted to the current state of markets and financial feudalism, satisfying a demand for speculative assets hidden in the treasure chambers of freeports.

X

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1
See Stefan Heidenreich, "Make Time: Temporalities and Contemporary Art," *Manifesta Journal* 9 (September 2009): 69–79.

2
Cf. Graham Harman, "Art Without Relations," *ArtReview*, September 2014: "As for the dead, I will take an even bigger risk, and suggest that we give a second look to none other than the Dutchman M.C. Escher—the favourite artist of countless children and few respectable adults—for reasons similar to those given in Bruskin's case. If nothing else, a counterfactual art history in which Escher looms large is a delightful thought experiment" http://artreview.com/features/september_2014_graham_harman_relations/ .

3
Suhail Malik, "Reason to Destroy Contemporary Art: 21st Century Theory," *Spike Art* 37 (Autumn 2013) https://spikeartmagazine.com/?q=articles/reason-destroy-contemporary-art .

4
David Joselit, C. Lambert-Beatty, and Hal Foster, "A Questionnaire on Materialisms," *October*, Winter 2016: 3.

5
See Jane Bennett, *Vibrant Matter: A Political Ecology of Things* (Durham: Duke University Press 2010), xiii.

6
Ibid., 4.

7
Realism Materialism Art , eds. Christoph Cox, Jenny Jaskey, and Suhail Malik (Berlin: Sternberg Press, 2015), 15.

8
Harman, "Art Without Relations."

9
Ibid.

10
Graham Harman, *The Quadruple Object* , (Alresford: *John Hunt, 2011)* , 47.

11
Graham Harman, *Tool Being. Heidegger and the Metaphysics of Objects* (Chicago: Open Court, 2002), 283.

12
Quentin Meillassoux, *After Finitude. An Essay on the Necessity of Contingency* (London: Continuum 2008), 5.

13
Malik, "Reason to Destroy Contemporary Art"

14
Ibid.

15
Ibid.

16
Ibid.

María Iñigo Clavo

Modernity vs. Epistemodiversity

1. Facing History: Modernity as Prefix

It is a hallmark of postcolonial theory to question selective, self-flattering accounts of European modernity. Postcolonial theorists from both Europe and the rest of the world have illustrated how ideals of emancipation, equality, freedom, and scientific and industrial development were only possible through their opposites: colonial exploitation, inequality, slavery, torture, and suffering in the Global South.[1] That's why, during the 1990s, theorists felt it was necessary to insist that coloniality was the other face of modernity, the "dark side of the renaissance," as Walter Mignolo famously put it.[2]

While European theorists such as Habermas have claimed that modernity began in Northern Europe with the Enlightenment in the late seventeenth century, Latin American theorists such as Enrique Dussel see this as a sign of contempt for Spain and Portugal's historic contribution to modern thought, and as yet another indicator of Europe's colonial mentality with regard to Latin American intellectual production.[3] Latin American postcolonial theorists have thus situated the birth of Western modernity in 1492 with the "discovery of America," which marks the beginning of the history of international capitalism, globalization, and its intellectual production.

Given that the ultimate goal is to question modernity, does it not seem contradictory to dispute which side holds the patent to it? If Euro-American and Latin American postcolonial thinkers agree that modernity was the origin of all colonial evils, why should we insist on being acknowledged as part of it?

For many theorists, regardless of how postcolonial their work may be, rejecting the genealogy of the modern would involve denying any merit at all to what is still considered by many to be the West's most precious and enduring legacy. The key question then becomes: Must modernity remain a mark of the West? Why do we still feel the need to define ourselves in terms of all those prefixes that locate modernity (anti-, pre-, post-, anti-, counter-) in order to remain in the orbit of Western history, the planetary system that shapes our understanding of the world and generates our frameworks of knowledge?

What are the prefixes retained by modernity used for? In the following I will chart the use over time of the different prefixes attached to modernity in the Latin American context, with a special focus on Brazil. In this way, I hope to demonstrate the contemporary persistence of epistemological symptoms associated with the imperialist conception of the South as a faulty version of the North. These prefixes are the result of a need on the part of the South to contest, resist, and free itself from the idea of an "Imperial South."

This insistence on attaching prefixes to modernity seems to show the inability of the West to let go of the notion of modernity as a reference point in historical accounts. But why this inability? Boaventura de Sousa Santos believes we still live amidst modern values—freedom, equality, solidarity, development, empowerment, etc.—and therefore he proposes reconceptualizing these values from a Southern perspective. In this text I will follow Santos's use of "the South," signifying not a geographical location but the place of utterance of the oppressed.[4] Similarly, the term "North" will represent here the economic and intellectual hegemony of Euro-America.

2. Without Modernity There Is No History (of Emancipation): A-Modern, Antimodern

In her classic book *Hegel and Haiti*, Susan Buck-Morss argues that Hegel's interest in the Haitian Revolution inspired his early masterpiece *The Phenomenology of Spirit* (1807).[5] However, although Hegel was a contemporary of the Haitian declaration of independence from France, there is little evidence that the master-slave dialectic was understood in colonial terms. Like the French Revolution, the Haitian Revolution was based on the tenets of equality, liberty, and fraternity—only it extended these rights to slaves.

In the years following Haiti's independence in 1804, European governments began to undermine the political agency of former slaves by refusing to recognize the sovereignty of the new nation. Before long, Hegel had discarded his admiration for the Haitian general Toussaint Louverture, and by 1820 the philosopher considered Haiti to be in a state that Kant termed "guilty immaturity."[6] Hegel advocated the recolonization of former colonies: "Against the absolute right of that dominant people who are the present carriers of the degree of development of the world Spirit … the spirit of other peoples has no right."[7]

This was consistent with Hegel's affection for Napoleon, whom he understood to be a "world-historical" personage. It was Napoleon who turned against Louverture, forcing the latter's resignation, deportation, and the imprisonment which led to his death. Hegel's version of modernity bears, in this respect, the scars of its German origins, a heritage marked, in the words of Rebecca Comay, by a kind of "mourning sickness" regarding the legacy of the French Revolution. Which is more "modern," the French Revolution or the reaction that brought Napoleon to power? In the conflict between Napoleon and Louverture—contrary to Hegel's understanding—it is Napoleon, and the Europe that empowered him, that would seem to be the representatives of the "antimodern," insofar as we allow "modern" to signify what the revolutionaries of France and Haiti thought it did.

But of course this is not how the French empire saw

things. The newly created Haitian Republic became the most delegitimized state in Latin America, and Napoleon presented Haiti with a bill for its own freedom, in the amount of 150 million francs. Haiti only finished paying it in 1947. Such was the price for Haiti daring to self-abolish slavery and declare itself an agent of its own history.

Also contributing to Europe's denial of Latin American historical agency was Karl Marx, who saw in Simón Bolivar just another example of "Bonapartism," or military-led, aristocratic reaction. Lacking a theory of imperialism, Marx was unable to distinguish between counterrevolution and national liberation. Although Marx and Hegel disagreed about the details of the "correct" historical sequence, for both "Latin America was still 'outside history' for not having developed political institutions and philosophical thought that would allow it to insert itself in the progressive movement towards freedom characteristic of 'Universal History.'"[8] In both cases, the South appears in the narrative of modernity as it's opposite, the antimodern. This soon gave way to seeing the South less as opposed to modernity than simply behind it.

But perhaps the question can be phrased differently: Was there really no modernity in Latin America? Or is it that modernity has to be explained in different terms?

3. Southern Modernity behind and under Western History: Copycat Modernity or a Different Modernity?

In the 1990s, Néstor García Canclini spearheaded a debate on Latin American modernity from a cultural studies perspective. Although many countries in Latin America produced their own forms of intellectual modernism in the 1920s—and in many places this was a very splendid moment—even protagonists of Brazilian modernism such as Oswald de Andrade and Mário de Andrade (no relation) admitted that these movements constituted only tiny minorities within illiterate populations living outside any process of modernization. Canclini's question was, can there be modernism without modernization?[9]

In his "Anthropophagy Manifesto" of 1928, Oswald de Andrade explains how the Latin American "swallowing" of intellectual theories from Europe is an example of anthropophagy, the ritual that frightened Europeans the most. De Andrade argues that the ability to merge multiple cultures and histories is a peculiarly Brazilian intellectual strength. The manifesto also satirized Latin American thinkers who owe too much to nineteenth-century European writers; de Andrade confronts these thinkers with Western myths concerning "the savage," and cultural misunderstandings of colonization and anthropophagy. As is well known, from the 1920s onwards the concept of the anthropophagus become one of the richest categories associated with Brazilian identity.

After years of neglect, this category was revived in the 1960s and '70s under the pressure of military dictatorships and debates around "dependency theory," which sought to understand Latin America's economic underdevelopment and its dependency on the United States. In the arts, debates raged across the continent: If our economy and culture has been imported from Europe, how can the South overcome this position of being a bastard copy of the North? How can we know what is or is not properly ours? What can be considered a truly Latin American art and philosophy?[10] Or as Marta Traba would ask: Can Pop art occur in Latin America without the existence of a truly accessible mass culture? In the midst of this debate, the category of the anthropophagus reemerged as a way to reclaim the mestizo and anthropophagous nature of the South's intellectual production, and offered a means for reworking Euro-America concepts without any need to "be authentic," and without being predestined to represent "cactus, parrots, and palm trees."[11]

In his classic text "Nacional por subtração"(1987), Roberto Schwarz seeks to understand the origins, in Brazil, of the neurosis surrounding the category of the imported copy, which he traces back to the previous century. For Schwarz, imported copies presented a false problem that began with the coexistence of contradictory economic systems and values during the early-nineteenth-century era of independence. The "new" values contrasted in every way with old formulas, engendering the feeling of inhabiting a backward country that would never catch up with "true" modernity:

> For a few, the colonial heritage seemed a waste that would be overcome with progress. Others saw in it a real country, which should be preserved against absurd imitations. Some even wanted to bring progress and slave labor together, so as not to let either escape, and some others felt that such harmonization already existed and was demoralizing.[12]

This vision of a late-arriving modernity, or a modernity that contradicts itself in its supposed purity, is very similar to the critique, internal to the West, that led to postmodernism in Euro-America. The difference might be that in postcolonial contexts these contradictions were more visible, or even—and this was the demoralizing part—impossible to hide.

4. Postcolonial Modernity on top of Western History: Precocious Postmodernity or Dehistoricization?

Homi Bhabha, who spoke of a colonial "countermodernity"

when discussing India, used to say that the postcolonial contexts that shaped the "enlightened subject" in the colonies posed a threat to Western postmodern theory. This is because these contexts were *already* multicultural, mestizo, and chronologically fragmented, and involved subjects in crisis.[13] Postcolonial encounters prompted continuous negotiations with insurrections of "subjugated knowledges," as Foucault termed it. All the conditions that Latin America had historically tried to rationalize, escape from, and overcome as the aporia of the continent were now being celebrated in the late-capitalist West.

One of the main banners of Latin American postmodernism was the defense of magical realism, a movement in literature and art influenced by the "irrational" magical beliefs of postcolonial archaic societies. At the same time, several Latin America critics and authors characterized Latin American art and culture as "baroque": Alejo Carpentier, José Lezama Lima, Nicolás Guillén, Carlos Fuentes, and Octavio Paz, among others, identified the baroque as nothing less than Latin America's ontological style. But Jorge Luis Marzo suggests that the baroque has been used as a pretext to point out the postmodern—as well as premodern or antimodern—character of Latin America in accordance with the political interests of a particular moment:

> To what extent has the baroque responded as an allegory of helplessness, and yet at the same time of the liberation from the modern? How much about this celebration of rhetoric veils an attempt at glorifying an alleged failure and how much about it has been used to generate a powerful political resource?[14]

5. History through the Modern World-System: (Colonial) Modern World-System and Transmodernity

Inmanuel Wallerstein coined the term "modern world-system," which reconceptualized modernity in economic terms to defend the idea that it is not a project whose authorship belongs to Europe, but rather a phenomenon that would have been impossible to carry out without the colonies and a global system of commercial networks. Aníbal Quijano has added that the Latin American contribution was not restricted to the economic, but was ideological as well:

> I suggest, then, that the discovery of Latin America generates a profound revolution in the European imaginary and from there in the imaginary of the Europeanized world through domination: there is a shift from the past, as a center of a forever lost golden

Clara Ianni, Abaporu, 2016. Image courtesy of the artist.

age, towards the future as the golden age to be conquered or built.[15]

To Wallerstein's coinage, Walter Mignolo adds the word "colonial": talking about the "colonial modern world-system" is a way of unearthing the darkest part of the Western-led project. Another formulation comes from Enrique Dussel's essay "Transmodernity and Interculturality." Like Wallerstein and Mignolo, Dussel denies the existence of a unidirectional project that extends from Northern Europe towards the Southern Hemisphere. He explains modernity as a shared project that goes beyond dualist models and can be described as an *incorporative solidarity*: between the first and third worlds, women and men, races and classes. This amounts to saying that the story of modernity has not yet been fully told.[16]

Dussel would agree with Boaventura de Sousa Santos that this reconstruction/reparation can only be done on the basis of the experiences of the victims. As W. J. T. Mitchell points out, when Marx wondered about what would happen if commodities could speak, he might as well have asked slaves, or the Haitian revolutionaries.[17] Although speculating about speaking commodities might appear to be an animist notion or a poetic exercise, as we shall see this actually carries a real political import in that it assumes an object to have a soul. When this thinking is applied to slaves, it transforms them into persons with agency, and by extension, transforms how Western subjects understood their relationship with slaves.

6. Modernity and History versus Animism, or the Dissolution of Boundaries: Countermodern

Jürgen Habermas, Bruno Latour, and de Sousa Santos have all focused their efforts on understanding one of the major features of colonial modernity: the separation between the natural and human sciences. Habermas claims that modernity is an unfinished project because the separation and specialization of scientific knowledge has failed to fulfill one of modernity's major promises, namely, the introduction of scientific knowledge into everyday practices. From an anthropological perspective, Latour proclaims that "we have never been modern"; this is because, although the definitive condition of modernity was the constant mixing of genres, the intellectual basis of modernity was nonetheless constituted on the separation of humans and nonhumans. Without dwelling on this matter, I would like to draw attention to the fact that Latour bases this compelling observation on the theories of anthropologist Philippe Descola, who studied animism and Amerindian cosmologies, in which the separation of nature and society does not exist. These indigenous epistemologies provide us with a platform for questioning the disciplinary boundaries imposed by modern

sciences—boundaries that still order our thinking today.

In this regard one can understand why many Western thinkers have in recent years turned to the work ofBrazilian anthropologist Eduardo Viveiros de Castro, who has suggested that animism and perspectivism can be decolonizing forces. In his studies of Amerindian perspectivism, Viveiros de Castro explores the social aspect of relationships between humans and nonhumans. According to his perspectivist theory, many Amerindian cosmologies endow objects with a soul because what constitutes them is the relationships that exist among them. Nothing can be left out of relational processes, since these influence what we are and shape subjectivity. In Amerindian perspectivism, if something has a soul—and Amerindians believe that not only nature, but also inanimate objects have a soul—then that something must also be seen as a person.

If we accept the animist notion that everything is at the same time a person and a part of nature, we can do away with the division between the natural and social sciences. We can also do away with the notion of human nature, according to de Sousa Santos: "There will be no human nature because all nature is human."[18] From the standpoint of Amazonian perspectivism, and contrary to our sciences, to know is not to objectivize but rather the opposite: it consists of embodying, i.e. subjectivizing, because it implies taking on the point of view of that thing which is it necessary to know. Consequently, the object of study becomes an enunciating subject, which implies granting it the status of interlocutor and therefore giving it agency. Amerindian perspectivism has been seen as a way to destabilize Western frameworks of thought, eliminate the disciplinary boundaries that separate us from "our objects of study," and open up new frameworks.

This may be why curator Anselm Franke said that his traveling exhibition *Animism: Modernity Through the Looking Glass* was not really about animism. It was instead a reflection on the making of borders. If animism is a limit of the rational imaginary,

> what this project suggests is that the limit where the "merely" imaginary begins (which is a border of some significance to art, too) is also operating the political distinction constitutive of any societal order, namely between what has and what hasn't rightful claims to make on reality—the border of political recognition.[19]

7. Beyond Modernity and its Others: Epistemodiversity

With this tour through the prefixes of modernity in Latin America, I hope to have shown how the concept of modernity varies according to time and political need.

Another longstanding Western tendency is to treat alterity as a political field.One of the figures that inspired the French Revolution was Rousseau's noble savage, which itself drew inspiration from a three-volume travelogue written by Baron de Lahontan and published in 1703, after de Lahontan's travels throughout Latin America.[20] Oswald de Andrade's "Anthropophagy Manifesto"—which he wrote shortly before joining the Communist Party—suggested that Pindorama (the original Tupi name for Brazil in precolonial, matriarchal times) was a model for how community could be built in the modern world. The counterculture of the 1970s, with its proposals for alternative lifestyles outside of capital, also placed great importance on indigenous cosmologies. Current theories of the commons likewise invoke indigenous experiences.

As Hal Foster showed in his classic "The Artist as Ethnographer," there have always been recurring political claims on spaces of alterity, first by proletarians, then by cultural others. But while these other epistemologies have been a source of inspiration for new forms of self-definition and identification, such movements have engaged in very little historical and political dialogue with indigenous people.

That is why a fear haunts us when we realize that Viveiros de Castro's Amerindian perspectivism comes from anthropology: historically, anthropology in Brazil hasn't facilitated the "incorporation" of indigenous and African texts into the country's heritage, as they have been seen as objects of study rather than producers of knowledge.[21] Instead, these indigenous and Afro-Brazilian texts have mainly been used for poetic inspiration by artists and intellectuals looking for reference points of national identity. In "Anthropophagy Manifesto," de Andrade makes use of European ethnographic literature to explore fantasies of Pindorama's matriarchal society and its lack of a concept of ownership. Ultimately, de Andrade's aim is (national) self-definition; he was uninterested in the indigenous political processes taking place in close proximity to him. That's why the manifesto employs the strategy of "incorporating the Other": this Other is replaced by its representations, thus negating its real political presence and agency.[22] This is what Fernando Coronil calls the "destabilization of the self by the Other," in which the latter is used as a source of inspiration for projects of change. Coronil argues that this strategy only reinforces polarization, obliterates historical ties, and homogenizes differences.[23]

And this strategy has reappeared: in 2015, the exhibition "Variações do Corpo Selvagem" at SESC Ipiranga in São Paulo showed the life and customs of indigenous peoples through photographs taken by Viveiros de Castro. The exhibition focused on Viveiros de Castro himself, comparing his anthropological photographic perspective to his participation in the Brazilian underground scene of the 1970s. It also compared indigenous shamans depicted in the photographs to the *Parangolé s* made by Hélio

Oiticica for Carnival. The idea of transforming the object of study into an interlocutor, a subject of knowledge and utterance, was not mentioned or used as a curatorial strategy. This was an exhibition about Viveiros de Castro rather than indigenous cosmologies.

It is unclear whether getting an answer about modernity would require a better definition of the concept, or if having such a definition would help us overcome the Western obsession with instrumentalizing, inventing, and dominating the Other. I agree with Frederick Cooper that the concept of modernity is not clear enough to allow for a definition.[24] This is why John D. Kelly "hope[s] not for alternative modernities but alternatives to 'modernity' as a chronotope necessary for social theory."[25]

In his "A Discourse About Science" written in 1988, de Sousa Santos showed how the sciences have been in crisis since the 1970s, when it was accepted that the intentions of scientists influence the results of their experiments.[26] This called into question the foundation of empiricism—which assumes that the event being studied is isolated from its context—and in turn undermined science's universalist aspirations. De Sousa Santos insists that distinctions between subject/object and human/nature perpetuate colonialism, since these divisions separate those who have rights from those who do not. This includes indigenous peoples who live in a "natural state," but also rivers, mountains, and forms of memory that can't be found in human rights discourse. Throughout modernity, Nature (with a capital N) was turned into an object of study so that it could be exploited.

Our aim, then, should be to find things that will help us break the duality of the human and natural sciences (subject/object). This in turn will enable us to rethink the way we organize disciplinary boundaries. If it has been acknowledged that the organization of scientific objectivity and reason depends on capitalist exploitation, why do we continue to uncritically uphold the modern ways in which knowledge is organized?

To advance this aim, it is essential to search through forms of knowledge that were ignored by modernity. This is one of the beliefs underlying the work being undertaken at the Federal University of Southern Bahia, which has abolished the distinctions between disciplines for first-year undergraduate students. The university also includes local knowledge in its curricula by employing local and traditional *mestres* to work with students, and by teaching indigenous cosmologies in class. This is a crucial step towards wider recognition of these traditions, which are often undervalued in the region, and whose practitioners generally lead marginal and precarious lives. Rather than preserving these traditions in an academic encyclopedia of knowledge, the Federal University of Southern Bahia is attempting to preserve their modes of production, which now coexist with a globalized economy. This is a first step in promoting the epistemodiversity that

modernity—regardless of the prefix used—was unable to construct.

What is the role of art in this process of transformation? Art, which is also a subalternized form of knowledge, has long made room for the nomadic way of thinking in which different disciplines dialogue with each other, heedless of borders. That's why art often precedes theory. It is startling how much de Sousa Santos's "A Discourse About Science" echoes artistic rhetoric and practice:

> It will not be long before particle physics shall speak of particles playing, or biology of the molecular theatre, or astrophysics of the heavenly text, or chemistry of the biography of chemical reactions. Each of these analogies unveils a corner of the world … We might wonder whether it is possible, for example, to do a philological analysis of an urban project, to interview a bird, or to perform participant observation among computers.[27]

Art has always been able to gather critical tools of action from different contexts of knowledge in order to intervene in institutions, politics, and social problems. This makes it a privileged place to find new strategies for empistemodiversity. At the same time, art has always maintained a strict border between itself and popular culture, to ensure that art is on the same level as the Western sciences. What if this border disappeared? How do we construct a new language that uses popular knowledge not as a theme for contemporary art, but as a spark for creating new regimes of representation and new structures of thought? How can contemporary art contribute to the learning of epistemodiversity?

X

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1
Likewise, subaltern insurgencies, whether indigenous or African American, were crucial to our history, even though national narratives still don't recognize them in their scope. See Aníbal Quijano, "Colonialidad del poder, cultura y conocimiento en América Latina," *Anuario Mariateguiano* 9, no. 9 (1997).

2
Walter Mignolo, *Local Histories/Global Designs: Coloniality, Subaltern Knowledges, and Border Thinking* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000).

3
Enrique Dussel, "Eurocentrism and Modernity," *boundary 2* 20, no. 3(Autumn 1993): 65–76.

4
Boaventura de Sousa Santos, *Epistemologies of the South: Justice Against Epistemicide* (New York: Rouledge, 2014).

5
Susan Buck-Morss, *Hegel, Haiti, and University History* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2009).

6
Kant used the term "*verschuldeten*," which Erique Dussel interprets as "guilty immaturity." See Dussel "Eurocentrism and Modernity."

7
G. W. F. Hegel, *Philosophy of Right*, sections 246 and 247 (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1957). Translation from Dussel,"Eurocentrism and Modernity."

8
Santiago Castro-Gómez, *La poscolonialidad explicada a los niños* (Bogotá: Editorial Universidad del Cauca, Instituto Pensar, Universidad Javeriana, 2005), 15. Translation mine.

9
Canclini concluded that it was precisely the constant questioning of Latin American identities and contradictions that was the very condition of Latin American modernism, and which defined the relationship between writers and their audiences. Ernesto Canclini, *Hybrid Cultures: Strategies for Entering and Leaving Modernity* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2005).

10
See Leopoldo Zea, *The Latin-American Mind*, trans. James H. Abbott and Lowell Dunham (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1963); and Zea, *Latin America and the World*, trans. Beatrice Berler and Frances Kellam Hendricks (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1969).

11
Jorge Luis Marzo, *La memoria administrada. El barroco y lo hispano* (Buenos Aires: Katz, 2010).

12
Roberto Schwarz, "Nacional por substraçao," in *Que horas São?* (São Paulo: Companhia das Letras, 1987), 43. Translation mine.

13
"If acknowledged, (this countermodernity) would question the historicism that analogically links, in a linear narrative, late capitalism and the fragmentary, simulacral, pastiche symptoms of postmodernity. This linking does not account for the historical traditions of cultural contingency and textual indeterminacy (as forces of social discourse) generated in the attempt to produce an 'enlightened' colonial or postcolonial subject, and it transforms, in the process, our understanding of the narrative of modernity and the 'values' of progress." Homi Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (London: Routledge, 1994), 248.

14
Marzo, *La memoria administrada*, 202.

15
Quijano, "Colonialidad del poder," 12.

16
Enrique Dussel, "Transmodernity and Interculturality: An Interpretation from the Perspective of Philosophy of Liberation," *Transmodernity* 1, no. 3 (2012).

17
W. J. T. Mitchell, *Picture Theory: Essays of Verbal and Visual Representation* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995), 196.

18
De Sousa Santos, *Epistemologies of the South*, 46.

19
In Maurizio Lazzarato, Sabine Folie, Anselm Franke, and Jimmie Durham, *Animism: Modernity throughth the Looking Glass* (Cologne: Walther König, 2012).

20
"Contemporaries have the need for a country and people upon whom they are able to project their dreams of golden age." The three volumes of de Lahontan's travelogue are *Nouveaux voyages*, *Mémoires de l´Amérique septentrionale*,and *Dialogues curieux entre l´anteur et un sauvage*. See Tzvetan Todorov, *Nosotros y los otros* (Madrid: Siglo XXI Editores, 1991).

21
See Antonio Riserio, *Testos e Tribos: Poeticas Extraocidentais nos tropicos brasileiros* (Rio de Janeiro: Imago, 1993).

22
Barthes also describes two ways of incorporating the Other: "Inoculation, in which the other is absorbed only to the extent necessary to make it innocuous; and incorporation, where the other becomes incorporeal by means of its representation." In the latter case, "representation works as a substitute for the active presence—naming it is equivalent to not knowing it." Hal Foster, *Recodings: Art, Spectacle, Cultural Politics* (New York: The New Press 1998).

23
Fernando Coronil, "Más allá del occidentalismo: hacia categorías geohistoricas no-imperiales," in *Teorías sin disciplinas: Latinoamericanismo, Poscolonialidad y Globalización en Debate*, eds. Santiago Castro-Gómez and Eduardo Mendieta (México: Miguel Angel Porrúa, 1998), 139.

24
"Scholars should not try for a slightly better definition so that they can talk about modernity more clearly. They should instead listen to what us being said in the world. If modernity is what they hear, they should ask how it is being used and why." Frederick Cooper, *Colonialism in Question: Theory, Knowledge, History* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005), 115.

25
John D. Kelly, "Alternative Modernities or an Alternative to 'Modernity': Getting out of the Modernity Sublime," in *Critically Modern: Alternatives, Alterities, Anthropologies*, ed. Bruce M. Knauft (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2002), 261.

26
Boaventura de Sousa Santos, "A Discourse on the Sciences," *Review* 15, no. 1 (Winter 1992): 39.

27
Ibid.