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Editors

Editorial

Things would be much simpler if there existed a consistent means of evaluating art's capacity to provide a concrete value for people. It's a problem to which capital provides the most immediate solution—beyond the mundane routine of the art market, Brandeis University's (ongoing) attempt to close their Rose Art Museum and liquidate its entire collection stands as a particularly unfortunate example of how a priceless collection of art, given the right circumstances (total financial meltdown), still finds its price. One is also reminded of the tragic decision by Middlesex University to close its renowned philosophy department in order to cut costs—in spite of the fact that the department's meager staff of only six professors generate 5% of the large university's research revenue, as Peter Osborne, head of the Centre for Research in Modern European Philosophy at Middlesex, has noted.

Here, as a whole history of alternate forms of measurement—via social impact, sentimental resonance, or market value, each perhaps for a time successful at carving out a space outside the market—appears to fall short by setting the stage for a larger-scale recuperation of value, we may glimpse a limit to how effective opposition to the valuation of art can be. To attempt to evade the notion of value—or, we can say, of capital—without acknowledging its logic, seems to simply produce a parallel economy of symbolic gestures that only affirm it. After all, we know that capital is nothing if not flexible. So rather than follow the example of the early avant-gardes—and of many contemporaries—who attempted to imagine a kind of pure, utopian place *before* or *without* value, why not try to imagine art as a valuable commodity that comes *after* value—something that contains desire, but surpasses it utterly?

In this issue, **Diedrich Diederichsen** considers how an essential economic valuelessness in the act of playing music enters the culture and leaves through cycles of industrialized deployment and recuperation, on the part of both artists and the music industry alike. In spite of this, an inherent tendency in music towards "inwardness" seems to suggest a possibility for a kind of radical political value that precedes power, one that could be said to undermine instrumentalization simply by virtue of its scale—as a subject doing as he or she pleases, playing an instrument for no other reason than to make music.

Bilal Khbeiz looks at Michael Jackson's slow march towards death, how it began at the height of his fame and ended in rumors that the King of Pop's fall was linked to a common over-the-counter drug. As a superstar without any particularly good reason for dying, what was it that slowly killed him? The answer may be found in Jackson's transformation of his body into the image of an unstoppable performer, a shrine that would beckon visitors for eternity.

Liam Gillick asks whether the figure of the artist is really

so different from that of the freelance knowledge worker, perched before a laptop by day, stressing over deadlines by night. How is the work of producing art different than the work of work? While the two may use the same tools, and even produce similar forms, there are certain crucial, yet potentially phantasmic differences that distinguish them in places where unstable decision-making processes are welcomed and sustained, and where apparent complicity is directed by choice rather than program.

Hu Fang tells the story of Wu Yongfang, an artist who fasts publicly in order to test his own limits and demonstrate a form of raw reality using the power of his will and life. However, when a Hunger Art exhibition is mounted to promote a new luxury real estate development called "Fragrant Garden Villas," the public nature of his search for inner enlightenment is beset by many of the problems of spectacle and performance.

Paul Chan considers the importance of being part of a community today and makes a necessary distinction between a community—and what it offers—and the networks formed by "online communities." Whereas, according to Chan, the kind of communication fostered by online networks does not "merit the focus and care that genuine communication demands, and dies off as quickly as it materializes, which in turn calls out for even more communication to be generated to compensate for the loss," actual communities of people provide an opportunity for individuals to share their incompleteness, to complete each other mutually.

Anton Vidokle warns against the increasing tendency for curators to assume a kind of authorship over exhibitions that can usurp the role of the artist. While a pattern of privatization occurring in cultural institutions throughout the world has in many ways left curators less accountable to bureaucratic bodies and more free to experiment under an expanded framework of cultural practice, a dangerous situation emerges when curators, while still acting in their capacity as institutional agents, begin to assume a degree of sovereignty that encroaches upon the role of artists as actual free agents.

Nataša Petrešin-Bachelez continues her series "Innovative Forms of Archives" examining cases in which "it might seem that the role of the artist and that of the museum have changed places." This time she looks at the Slovene group IRWIN, who in the 1990s used their opportunity to gain access to the West to ascertain and catalogue that which particularly defined their own working conditions as artists in Eastern Europe, and the Hungarian artist Tamás St. Auby, founder of the International Parallel Union of Telecommunications (IPUT) and creator of the *Portable Intelligence Increase Museum* .

Dieter Roelstraete's point of departure is a footnote in his text in issue no. 11 lamenting the fact that contemporary art and the contemporary art *world* have become by and large indistinguishable from each other. Here he offers a series of ten distinguishing characteristics of the contemporary "mist," a murkiness that has not only obscured the purpose of asking crucial, ontological questions concerning the nature of "art," but has also managed to produce an entire aesthetics of its own, permanently casting a state of general confusion into relief—a floating, oceanic, drifting *world* as master institution.

The third and final installment in **Sven Lütticken**'s series "Art and Thingness" reflects on how thingness has been treated in recent works of art. Beyond specific contemporary interest in the collapse of subject-object dichotomies, Lütticken finds in the tension around objecthood an ongoing critical discussion within modernity itself. Just as Beuys' works are commonly seen as drawing on a private mythology, so too should they be taken as objects containing at least some part of Beuys' mythos in their thingness.

And finally, we visit Paris in an open letter to Clifford Irving . . .

—Julieta Aranda, Brian Kuan Wood, Anton Vidokle

X

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Paul Chan

The Unthinkable Community

In Samuel Beckett's *Waiting for Godot*, two men wait by the side of a country road for a man who never comes. If done right, that is to say, if done with humor, fortitude, and a whiff of desperation, the play is as contemporary, funny, precise, courageous, and unknowable as I imagine it was back in 1952, when the play premiered in Paris.

When I worked with others to stage *Godot* in New Orleans in 2007, we took many liberties to make it work at that place, for that moment in time. We set the entire play in the middle of a street intersection for one set of performances, and then in front of an abandoned house for another. The actors let the musical cadence of New Orleanian speech seep into the dialogue. We used trash that was left on the streets as props. But there was one thing I wanted to do, but didn't in the end: I wanted Vladimir and Estragon, the two main characters, to wait for Godot with people loitering nearby. So the country road that was supposed to be empty would teem with strangers walking by, sitting on the grass, or wandering aimlessly while talking on their phones, all ignoring the plight of these two homeless and luckless tramps. I think it would have worked. And this is because, in 1952, being alone literally meant not having anybody near. But today, one can be surrounded by, and in contact with, anyone and everyone, and still feel inexplicably abandoned.

[figure bc66f29aab6de689385b17e63431c089.jpg *Waiting for Godot in New Orleans*, Lower Ninth Ward performance, 2007.]

Communication ≠ Connection

One of the great mysteries of our time—besides the reason why the United States is still in Iraq after seven years, the magical thinking that enabled banks around the world to sell bad debts as good investments, and perhaps we can add here the enduring significance of Jeff Koons—is how the ever-expanding methods by which we communicate with one another—from cell phones to SMS, from e-mail to Twitter, from Facebook to Chatroulette—are alienating us from others and ourselves.

There is no doubt that advances in technology have fundamentally transformed the nature and reach of communication in social life. These advances have also generated new forms of economic empowerment, cultural exchange, and, ultimately, new modes of living. Making connections is a serious business. And this business is, in turn, transforming the way such connections shape our sense of self.

The desire to communicate, to conjure in speech or sound or image or movement an inner experience that expresses what we want or who we are (or who we want and what we are) is being repurposed to serve a need beyond that of conveying and understanding. The telecommunications and related technology industries have capitalized on the

demand for communication by producing ever more robust and specialized platforms for making connections. But this is not necessarily so we communicate and understand one another more, but rather so there is simply more speech-material to gather, transmit, quantify, and capitalize. In other words, communication is being industrialized. In the economic scheme of things, forms of expression are now a natural resource, to be tapped and exploited for profit, like oil. And a productive life is today inextricably linked to generating more and more speech for others to hear, see, and read. To live fully in the present means to be in constant communication: the self as network. *Ego sum communicatio*.

But having more social contacts has not made for stronger social bonds. All the texting and friending may expand the number of people in one's life, but the links do not enrich the quality of the arrangements. Common interests bring people together. But what keeps them together is neither common nor easy. It takes an evolving awareness of the differences that naturally develop between two individuals, and a commitment to allow those differences to take root, so that common connections grow into singular bonds. The open secret to this process is time, the only dimension capable of registering the moments and ruptures that define the growth of an individual abiding an unbridgeable difference to become one for the other.

[figure partialpage 1c0253ab7f61ec785dc0e04f146b2b88.jpg Chatroulette screenshot.
]

Time deepens connections, whereas technology economizes communication. This is why, despite the growing number of ways for people to be seen and heard, tele-technologies have ironically made it harder for people to comprehend one another. What matters in communication—understanding, relationality, interchange—has somehow gotten lost in the transmission. Cellphones, wireless devices, and the proliferation of social media online have revolutionized the ways in which we communicate, and at the same time, compressed what we say and type to such a degree that intelligibility is sacrificed for the sake of reach, ubiquity, and consumption.

Just as a language compels certain ways of describing the world that are naturally sympathetic to the worldview where that language originates, the kind of connections made over these ever newer and farther-reaching communicative forms possess an instrumentalized quality, as if all the different ways in which we make contact with one another only confirm that the only thing worth talking about is business. The messages transmitted and relayed begin to feel optimized solely to get things done, grab some attention, or build an audience. Communication becomes synonymous with advertising. It *is* advertising: expressions expressing nothing other than the desire to peddle influence, and promote _____.

In experiencing communication this way, something curious happens to time. Rather than strengthening connections, such communication over the course of time actually weakens them. Instead of being the essential element that potentiates more durable social bonds, time works as an entropic force. It is as if the longer a line of communication is left open, the more inauthentic and weak the connection becomes.

A voice that desires a reply sounds different than an echo that wants attention. If the connection between two people merely creates an echo chamber, each resounding with the other's need to be seen and heard, the quality of the connection would likely deteriorate over time, since there is no singular presence on either end to engage with or listen to. Perhaps some kind of law of social physics is at work here, the strength of the connection being proportional to the amount of friction and difference that connection can bear. Or it is simply that the kind of communication trafficking back and forth does not merit the focus and care that genuine communication demands, and dies off as quickly as it materializes, which in turn calls out for even more communication to be generated to compensate for the loss. Or maybe this is merely what it means to be contemporary: the inner experience of being relentlessly present for all, but accountable to none, and tethered to nothing except the industrial powers that network everything else.

A Short History of The Front

[figure partialpage 4fe4d9979644474d17e2a4a705cfb1e5.jpg The Front, New Orleans.
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As part of the *Waiting for Godot in New Orleans* project, I spent the fall of 2007 living in the city and teaching at two universities: the University of New Orleans (UNO) and Xavier. Both schools lost teachers to Hurricane Katrina. So I made a deal with them. I would teach whatever classes they wanted me to and forego pay as long as these classes were open to all artists in New Orleans. I also requested that the classes be cross-listed at other colleges and universities, so students from other schools could attend them as well. At Xavier, I taught a Thursday afternoon class called "Art Practicum," where I worked with students on their portfolios for graduate school applications, helped them write resumes, and lectured on how critiques work. At UNO, I taught a Tuesday evening contemporary art history seminar. Every week, I lectured on an artist and his or her work.

On the last day of the art history seminar, I skipped the planned lecture (on outsider artist Henry Darger) and

instead talked about art and organizing. The *Godot* performances (there were five in all on two consecutive weekends in early November 2007) had happened two weeks earlier. And while the experience was still fresh in their minds, I wanted to talk about the different processes and ideas that went into organizing the project. The lecture was freewheeling and associative. I talked about Beckett's history of working with prisoners to stage his work, my own experiences as an organizer, first in labor politics in Chicago in the 1990s, and then with the antiglobalization movement in the early 2000s. I discussed the art of negotiating and the politics of being obstinate. I offered a brief history of artist communities and collectives, and ended the seminar with a conversation with New Orleanian artist and visionary architect Robert Tannen.

After that last class, some of my students, a motley crew of MFA students from various schools, art teachers, and artists unaffiliated with any institution, decided to organize themselves into a kind of collective. Rather than wait for Godot or any other project to bring them back together, they wanted to create their own reasons for sharing and showing work, for themselves and others in the neighborhoods where *Godot* played. They wanted a community of their own.

[figure partialpage 9d0d5ca2dcdc3e07654b8579b5aed279.jpg Front page of the *New York Post*, September 3, 2005.
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Kyle and Jenny were among those who attended my seminars and decided to get together with others to create an artist collective that eventually became known as The Front. Starting in December 2007, and for the next eleven months, they gathered their resources and gut-renovated a building on the corner of St. Claude Avenue and Mazant Street. On November 1, 2008, The Front had their first group-show opening. They have gone on to mount a show every month since, with readings, screenings, and performances along the way.

[figure fullpage 39407cc6c0fbd2ad285dd3797726b5b7.jpg Etienne Cabet, *Voyage en Icarie*. Paris, Au bureau du Populaire, 1848.
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Community

To want something new is a way to remember what is worth renewing. The Front's presence not only renews the history of New Orleans visual arts for a new generation, it also connects them with the venerable tradition of artist collectives that have sought, and continue to seek, what philosopher Jean-Luc Nancy has called a "compearance": the public appearance of a group of individuals working together that makes visible for the first time their "co-appearance," or "compearance." In order to compear, all the members of the group play a part in building a composition that, over time and through mutual cooperation, becomes substantial enough to stand in for the members as a whole. The figure that compears is what one calls community.

In a sense, community can only be recognized against the background from which it differentiates itself: a figure needs a ground to stand against. In the case of The Front, that ground is post-Katrina New Orleans. The devastation the hurricane left behind and the subsequent negligence of local, state, and federal officials painted a bleak picture of a society abandoned and of people left to fend for themselves. The emergence of The Front and other groups in the city (artistic, political, religious, civil) is a testament to the will of the people to self-organize against the wake of a natural disaster slowly turning into a societal tragedy already precipitated by political inertia, poverty, and racism. What matters here is not how directly these groups confront or try to bring about an end to the wrongs, although this is a vital concern. Rather, it is significant enough that they choose to risk interrupting the seemingly entropic drift of things by organizing themselves against the current.

[figure partialpage ad974a44d349a34725df0e3a8f037064.jpg Edward Hopper, *Morning Sun*,1952.

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Like clockwork, epochs turn and return with the tumultuous cycles that produce economic bounty and human misery in equal measure. For the collective, the figure of community holds the potential for saying and doing it all differently. So what ultimately distinguishes community from society is the difference between imagining that reality can be transformed and realizing that it can only be managed. In this sense, politics becomes a form of groundskeeping. To rise above the ground, and stand with the strength of common purpose, gives the communal figure a definitive shape and enables the collective to remake existing politics so that it may serve a future life where substantive relations are the rule rather than the exception. The compearance of a real community expresses what actual society ought to be.

In self-organizing, members strive to create a living model of genuine social difference. This is the utopian aspect of any collective enterprise that is truly collective, rather than merely managerial or commercial. This is also how collectives like The Front echo, however distantly, utopian projects of the past. For in a sense, the golden age, in which communication is unfettered and relations are substantial, is never in the here and now, but always in the past. It is the past that provides the myths and models for how an originary and unbreakable bond between people

once existed in the world; from the natural family to the Athenian academy, from the Roman republic to the first Christian communities, from the Paris Commune to May '68. Every collective reimagines for itself (knowingly or not) the lost or unfinished work of the past as theirs to complete, in order to lay the groundwork for a community to come. And what matters most is a collective vision, or better yet, a consensual blindness, that allows the collective to recognize, perhaps for the first time, that nothing is settled, that everything can still be altered, that what was done—but turned out badly—can be done again.

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Still, the desire for substantive relations persists. The connections people make that grow into ties that bind remain the most meaningful way for individuals to partake in the tremendous waste that is the passing of time, and in the moments that emerge from simply being together—which, in turn, make the passing of time not so wasteful after all. But these bonds also enable something else to be shared: the strange sense of incompleteness at the core of one's self. For what makes an individual singular (as opposed to merely different) has nothing to do with personal qualities or styles. Singularity comes from the unique shape of what has yet to take place, lodged in the heart of the figure of one's self—making space for what is yet to come and what has yet to be done, in order to fully *be*.

This empty center, formed inside the cast of historical and existential experiences that has settled and hardened into the likeness of an identity, is neither seen nor heard, but felt, like cold wind against the skin. Within this void emanates the spectral presence of the unfinished, the half-formed, and the unimagined, as a reminder of just how far one is from being complete and wholly self-sufficient. And it is only through social bonds that this essential incompleteness becomes exposed as the secret all singular beings share, and must stubbornly hold onto, in order to remain uniquely and fully present in the world. The sentiment evoked in lines like "you complete me" or "I'm nothing without you," sung in curiously robotic R&B ballads by the likes of Keyshia Cole and R. Kelly, has ontological truth: they express the tremendous burden of one's singularity, of being utterly incomplete. By loving, struggling, or engaging intensely in some other way, one finds the chance to ease the burden by forging a bond deep enough to fill the void of singularity and feel a semblance of inner completeness.

Community, then, is what happens when we complete ourselves. Through purpose, members of the collective come together and merge with the work they have agreed to accomplish as one. And the more the collective realizes what it has set out to do, the more its members internalize the work as a greater living embodiment of themselves. It is this communal fusion that powers the collective. It is also what makes the experience so intense. It is in fact the intensity that makes it fulfilling. From the smallest collaborative project to the grandest nation-state, the concentrated pursuit of a common cause is what draws individuals into being members, and members into becoming a more perfect union, of and through themselves.

In essence, what is at stake is the notion that one is *only* an individual in this larger life. This does not mean that somehow the experiences of living outside the bounds of the collective are of a lesser quality or less authentic—only that they represent a life not wholly determined by one's own design. Where contingencies make a mockery of one's sense of control and shape the course of a life as much as volition, a collective offers shelter from the heteronomous forces that prevent us from actualizing our fuller selves. An individual, through membership and community, takes on a *determinate* individuality, shaped by a general will and motivated to act in harmony with a common purpose that, in being realized, becomes the external manifestation of one's own inner nature. A concretely realized community is tantamount to an individual life finally fulfilled.

But if this individuation relies on the figure of community in order to take shape, it becomes necessary for individual members and the collective as a whole to employ social, political, and psychic processes that serve the common purpose by preserving and defending the well-being of the whole over that of its parts. This emphasis, in turn, compels members to come together in such a way that commitment becomes a matter of surrender and surrender a radical form of commitment: the more common the bond, the greater the whole. And the essential incompleteness that differentiates one from the other in the first place, which holds no direct use or value for the coming community, becomes redefined as an inner contingency that must be fixed, a sin to be banished, a tendency to correct, a hole to fill.

But a life is more than the sum of its intentions and wants. The whole of our inner experience cannot be willed into existence or worked into a plan. The richness of one's continuously evolving subjectivity depends not only on the mental stuff that furnishes conscious life. It also relies on what is unreasoned, undreamed, or unrealized—in other words, all the latent memories, experiences, neuroses, and desires that silently haunt the consciousness of an active mind. The specter of unthinking shadows every thought. It is the force that embeds every act of expression with the imprint of a singular presence. It is the siren's song that draws us toward the empty center of our own unique and purposeless singularity. And it is this curious music, which one cannot help but play, that the community tries to silence, on behalf of our greater self, and in the guise of a

common will.

Lovers. Criminals. Artists?

For better and for worse, the notion of a common will shaping people's lives feels as contemporary as a rotary telephone. No one likes being told what to do. For the most part, the power of consumer sovereignty is what one exercises in order to become individualized and socialized today. And this is reflected by the explosive growth of online social networks, where communication and sharing blur with data collection and advertising to create and sustain connections that brook no distinction between telling someone something and selling something to someone. What appears to be simply a point of contact is in truth a channel of distribution for individuals to pick and choose goods, services, friends—all the parts that meet one's inner and outer needs. The network is a community as marketplace.

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Sam Pulitzer, *Untitled (from Hogg)*, 2009.

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As such, the contemporary community has an even, temperate quality, like a pleasant, air-conditioned showroom. Differences between members may spark friction, but rarely do they produce heat or, for that matter, the kind of social combustion that generates enough intensity to potentiate inner change, the kind collectives empowered by a common purpose demand of their members before any figure of community can emerge. The process of determining one's inner worth by establishing a greater social identity through collective striving no longer offers purchasing power for anyone invested in living in the present tense. The individual today is made off-the-shelf and over-the-counter. In the vernacular of contemporary community, change is a matter of exchange.

Perhaps to those for whom time is out of joint, this is the only way. "The past is never dead," William Faulkner wrote. "It's not even past." Against the backdrop of the contemporary, these movements want community as it was once envisioned: as a crucible through which a more purposeful and accountable individualism can be forged. But religious zealots, homophobic and racist anti-statist nationalists, and neo-Marxian activists are not the only ones who want this.

For George Bataille, erotic love was the key to creating a community intense enough to generate communal fusion without sacrificing the singularity of the members. Bataille, who experimented with establishing different kinds of communities and philosophized about them in the 1930s, believed that a substantive existence determined by touch and forms of communication concentrated on expressing the power of libidinous contact was the only authentic way of countering the modernist tendency of reducing living beings into "servile organs" for state and society. Bataille also thought the community of lovers was a kind of resistance—however small and ultimately hermetic—against two movements gaining political ground in Europe at the time: Stalinist communism and Fascism. For Bataille, the ecstasy of erotic love immunized the lovers against political madness.

The Marquis de Sade, on the other hand, infamously declared lawlessness the common purpose of his imagined community. In his novel *Juliette*, Sade described the Society of the Friends of Crime. Made up of libertines of various class and social distinctions, they conspire to become lords of debauchary against an already corrupt state ruled by religious and aristocratic powers. Crime, for Sade, was both a political expression and a philosophical embodiment. In crime, law is rendered ridiculous and shown for what it is: a capricious rule established by existing forms of authority to maintain power and control. By committing crime, members of the Society use the cunning of reason to make a mockery of authority. Sade, however, is not satisfied. If reason can be employed to destroy the laws of man, can crimes be committed to break the laws of nature? In *Juliette*, characters wonder aloud what it would take to snuff out the sun, in order, paradoxically, to fully reconcile themselves with Nature and her implacable spirit of destruction.

Lovers. Criminals. Artists? At its core, The Front is a communitarian experiment. Like erotic love for Bataille, and crime for Sade, The Front is trying to establish a community using an utterly precarious material. Living in the aftermath of a disaster that crippled the city, fourteen artists decided to try their hand at building some shelter for what they wanted to make and see. In an urban landscape that still lacks basic civil amenities to this day, they wanted art. This is the work. Simple enough. But what drives this work, and what forms the heart of a collective like The Front, is neither simple nor ever enough of anything to inform anyone in particular. For what makes art *art* is precisely how it embodies an uncommon purposelessness.

[figure 2af3c59e64164f9b1920594c3e994502.jpg
William Blake, *Whirlwind of Lovers*, 1826.

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Art bears the signature of something inescapably singular—something utterly and compellingly incomplete. Without this signature to authenticate its presence, it is merely an illustration, a luxury item, propaganda, a tax shelter, an investment, a spectacle, an event, a decoration, a weapon, a fetish, a mirror, a piece of property, a reflection, a tool, a critique, a prop, medicine, a campaign, an intervention, a celebration, a memorial, a discussion, a

school, an excuse, an engagement, therapy, sport, politics, activism, a remembrance, a traumatic return, a discourse, knowledge, an education, a connection, a ritual, a public service, a civic duty, a moral imperative, a gag, entertainment, a dream, a nightmare, a wish, an application, torture, a bore, policy, a status symbol, a barometer, balm, a scheme, furniture, design, a mission, a model, a study, an investigation, research, window-dressing, a social service, an analysis, a plan, a publicity stunt, a donation, an antidote, poison, a pet. With this signature, art is none of these. And more.

This is what binds art to being. The two share the burden of embodying a singularity born of the incompleteness at the center of their respective forms. To give space and time and money and effort and whatever else one can muster to build a community that protects and preserves that singularity—when the whole point of a community is for individuals to find a semblance of completeness by becoming fulfilled with an other as one, through the spirit of a general will—might give the impression that what is being created is not a community at all. Or at the least, an unthinkable one.

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A version of this essay appears in the forthcoming catalog self-published by The Front collective in New Orleans. For more information on The Front, please visit www.nolafront.org

Paul Chan is an artist who lives in New York.

Diedrich Diederichsen

Music—Immateriality—Value

I.

Music has no value. That is both the problem as well as the foundation for a broad stream of observations to follow here on the utopian character of music. The idea that music does not have—or has *ceased* to have—any value may be assessed in different ways; it may be regarded as good or bad. Of course, one may also legitimately object to the idea that music can even drop out of the economy at all, but this depends on whether the economic valuation of music is bound to an object—such as a score or recording—or whether it is not.

A central tenet of Marxist thought is built around the distinction between exchange value and use value, the most well known interpretation of which formulates it as a critique of exchange value's dominance over use value. However, it has been repeatedly pointed out—and with good reason—that such a glorification of pure use value has dreamed itself, ideologically, into a state in which the total immediacy of use assumes a unity that cannot exist in any society characterized by some degree of functional differentiation. Yet even such a romantic conception of use value remains a value nonetheless—a use that is not immediately realized. Value becomes an attribute of a thing that can be stored, reused, or realized sometime in the future, whether through use or exchange. For a thing to have value, it must possess a permanence or iterability with respect to how that value is realized in use or exchange. In the broadest sense, it must be a thing, an object.

There are things that die as they are used, and their description is usually couched in utopian metaphors. A famous example is the life of birds, which—as described in Matthew 6:26 and recalled to us by an old drunkard in the Hitchcock film *The Birds*—"neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns and yet are fed." The same is true of the land of milk and honey, where things appear on the table, as they are needed, without any labor of storage or preparation. Yet even in all these examples of ideal conditions, these free and effortless processes of consumption remain dependent on a providential nature and a natural form of production. It is not we ourselves who produce all these things for our immediate use and consumption in response to our slightest wishes and whims, but other instances and authorities of an enchanted world: the gods, a magic spell, or nature. Alongside this, music's basic situation becomes even more utopian.

I pick up a musical instrument and produce a sequence of tones. These tones enchant my surroundings and me as I produce them. At some point I grow tired, the tones cease, and the enchantment passes. My favorite quotation about this phenomenon can be heard on the Radio Hilversum recording of Eric Dolphy's last concert, which took place in 1964, just before he died because no one could treat his particular type of diabetes, one that occurs only in people

of African descent. Dolphy said: "When you hear music, after it's over, it's gone in the air; you can never recapture it again." What I produced has vanished without a trace; it created no value—nor, however, did it depend on a providential nature and the miracles of the land of milk and honey. It was me. I myself, using my talents and abilities—that which belongs to me as a human being and sets me apart from the animals—gave expression to something; that is, I lent inner states, which are also exclusively mine, and yet whose form is familiar to all other human beings from their own internal, subjective states, a form that was understandable to others and may thus have been beautiful. I realized myself as a human being in the dialectic between my nature as a unique individual and my nature as a social and collective being, and I did so entirely without economy, without reification, without the creation of value, without storage, costs, or profits, without the calculation of future time and hence without speculation, without interest or the creation of secondary value, and without valorization.

In considering this series of examples, one is struck by the fact that such a utopia of music possesses a radicalism that the other ideal functions of the arts do not. While the other arts formulate maximums or optimums, it is always in relation to emerging or established social rules, and not as the *suspension* of those rules—which would be genuinely utopian. One might, then, argue that a utopia of music formulated in this way—one that could really be derived from a rejection of commodity capitalism—would be a relatively modern description of an original state. And, for good reason, we tend to be a little bit skeptical where modern descriptions of original states are concerned; precisely such utopias, which derive a mission of the arts from an original state, are often thoroughly impractical and romantically idealized. Indeed, we know this to be a decidedly reactionary figure of thought: the attacking of a stage of social differentiation from the standpoint of an archaic notion of unity, an absence of differentiation.

Yet this critique of reactionary utopianism does not fully apply to the utopia of music, and for good reason: in recent times—that is, in the twentieth century and then once again in the opening years of the twenty-first—this utopia has come much closer to being realized than ever before, at least if one is willing to spell out its social character. This utopia also has another dimension: it is, so to speak, always real in cases where one makes music for oneself and the immediate environment, in which the sociable aspect of music can be temporarily established as noneconomic—if not in its forms and formats then at least in its social gestures. "I heard his refrain as the signal changed: he was playing real good for free," as Joni Mitchell sang of a street musician in 1969 in her song "For Free." The street was so loud that it was impossible to hear him, but when the light changed and the traffic briefly paused, she could hear his refrain. And it was real good. And it was free.

The social dimension of this seemingly private and hermetic style of musical production, which, in spite of being social, nonetheless seeks to preserve music's lack of value, can be found in the emergence of forms that help to realize music-making that is not defined by any previous instructions, objects, or protocols—as *ensemble* play, as collective and cooperative production. Thanks to free improvisation and aleatoric modes in a wide range of musical cultures, real practices of this kind were able to become experiential realities in the second half of the twentieth century, as were the barriers and limits of such practices—which sprang up everywhere, especially with attempts to professionalize them. Before this period, however, music that sought to escape reification—if such music even existed—neither had nor could have had any consciousness of itself and its social character, for that would have presupposed a means of storing and valorizing music that, it would seem, had not existed for rural cultures before the rise of the music industry and its technological foundations. It goes without saying that the fiddler at the fair had no conception of a liberated type of music that defied reification, but rather entered completely into the social function of his music—to impress the girls or to get free drinks.

At the same time, however, this fiddler did not produce a type of music that, in the sense described above, only existed insofar as it was actually performed. He lived in a universe where normative stipulations had even more gravity than they do in a world where conservatories judge what is correct and incorrect in the interpretation of scores. True, there was no existing material—a score or recording—that turned music into an object that could be traded and economically valorized, but another kind of force existed in this pre-economic musical state. For some time now, the American copyright activist Lawrence Lessig has traveled around the world with a lecture that opens on an image from around 1900, showing a father and his sons making music together and singing in front of a rustic dwelling. For Lessig, it depicts a golden age when music was still an activity and not pure consumption, an age he now sees returning in funny YouTube montages and other phenomena he describes as "remix culture" (presumably unaware of the term's widespread use in the context of musical remixes). Upon further inspection, however, one finds that it is less an image of free music-making than of the dominance of the patriarchal system.

The picture shows an authoritarian father explaining to his sons—perhaps even lovingly (it doesn't make *that* much difference)—what is correct and incorrect in terms of tradition. This embodied authority—the knowledge of a proper music and the proper means of producing it, imparted in unmarked gestures taken to be commonplace—represents (or at least *might* represent) a much more massive immobilization of music than any reification through a musical object. This reification at least contains its immobility in an external object, and thus

represents an advance over its embodiment—however natural the romanticizers of folklore may find that embodiment. To be sure, things become different—but only slightly—when such embodied knowledge belongs to a culture of resistance, an issue I return to below.

[figure partialpage
1a2fae152ef60fd911c1d56671142990.jpg
A cane fife, made by the late Othar Turner of Gravel Springs, Mississippi. Turner was (perhaps the last) a master of American fife and drum

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So while we see that the notion of an absolutely valueless music—a music free of all value, valorization, or fixation—has often been projected into the past, its actual place would have to be in the present and in the future, and not just because we are speaking about utopia. Except in Arcadia, such a music has never existed as a social practice. On the other hand, it may have existed innumerable times as a mode of communication detached from society, as the song one sings to oneself, the whimsy with which one rhythmically structures one's steps, the drone that one produces with one's own body as a resonating chamber. And out of those countless individual moments that never solidified into objects, when individuals or little groups had musical experiences that had nothing to do with musical objects or any social purpose, music and music-like behavior have gained the reputation of being able to touch one's most intimate subjectivity. This pure, often solipsistic musical experience that comes prior to aesthetic experience always involves objects and external things, but does not yet belong to the order of the arts (and I say this without judgment). However, it may be regarded as the precondition for the possibility of an aesthetic experience of music.

In this way, something else emerged that might also be described as a value: a profusion of individual and collective musical experiences nourished by moments of agreement between signifiers and signifieds, moments in which one feels that one understands oneself, or feels understood by others. This is valuable in an entirely different sense, not because it is exchangeable and/or available for future realization, but rather because it has some weight on a scale of values that are only partially economic and object-like—values such as health, love, and justice. In order to be valuable in the first sense, music must always refer to its own experiences of value in the second sense: it must simulate them, touch on them, perhaps even actually make them available. But this noneconomic value must be distinguished from music's utopian absence of value. Though the two can support each other, it would also be possible to experience music's noneconomic value without the category of a valueless music that I alluded to earlier. It can be experienced with musical objects and musical commodities; and indeed one can only have aesthetic experiences as such—in which, by definition, a public dimension merges with a subjectivity—with objects in the broadest sense.

The ideology of bourgeois society, however, insists that great value in the second sense must not have any economic value in the first. And yet this same society has developed a discourse for legitimating economic value through precisely this priceless and unpurchasable character: through objects that—despite having value in the first sense—command a special price for their value in the second, noneconomic sense. This problem has been described frequently. Pierre Bourdieu has pointed out that a specific form of uselessness is also produced within the aesthetic domain to distinguish these goods from every conceivable utility, from every value in the first sense.[1] And yet the bourgeoisie pays for this noneconomic value in every economic sense. The goods are afforded an exchange value, just no use value. It is here that the utopian goods with no value meet the exchange value of that which bourgeois ideology regards as priceless and invaluable: neither has any use value, though one can in fact be bought—for a very high price. And to the extent that it can be bought, it also ceases to have no value.

There is nothing that bourgeois culture values more highly than the break with its own economic principles, provided that it is capable of valuing this break economically. This has nonetheless led to great freedoms; in particular, it has given rise to the ethic of a freedom as devoid as possible of anything that can be valued economically. While this ethic has always been ideologically contaminated, it was still extremely productive—as the avant-gardes of the twentieth century witnessed. Nevertheless, the most massive conceivable shock to this ideology and its practice has come, as it were, from the other end of the world.

[figure a81a10eea4223fcaccf3c8bec9e654a2.jpg "I Wants A Ping Pong Man" Lyrics and Music by-Howard Whitney Copyright 1903 by M. Witmark & Sons
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Pop music as a form of industrially—as well as sub-industrially—produced music first emerged in the 1950s as something that could be described neither as folklore, nor as a purely cultural-industrial commodity, nor as art. It often finds its means through discrete, individual effects that are closer to the logo—the context-independent sign of advertising—than through classical notions of music. Its musical elements are simple, and they are for the most part borrowed from local or socially and politically segregated, excluded musical styles, but these styles are not performed with local, context-specific gestures—rather, they are most often torn from those contexts with a certain economic violence. To

break from contexts offering only local—and therefore very limited—validity and value and perform the music in a nonlocal manner is to risk sacrificing a loss of value in the noneconomic sense with only a modest increase in the economic sense; it is to make a gain—in global, universalist terms—that often cannot be realized economically, but ends up forming communities in a "deviation" (to borrow a concept from Heinz Klaus Metzger) from the original economic intention of the music. Pop music begins by employing the simplest possible means, which therefore tend to be inexpensive and empty—that is, hollowed out by frequent use—without concern for their traditional meanings and ritual values in an original context. While these inexpensive means are not *entirely* without economic value, they are, for all intents and purposes, completely without value from the standpoint of artistic judgment. Their economic promise concerns the modest profit that always materializes when one produces cheaply, and without the burden of lasting effects or historical evaluation.

Most of pop music is thus comprised of "worn-out" musical elements—harmonic and melodic effects that have been utilized so often that they have become completely empty. Musique concrète and noises from the outside world are included as sonic logos; a physical, rhythmic insistence and a performative emphasis on the physical aspects of playing, once again with an eye to recognizability and immediate effect, are characteristic. In addition, more than any technically recorded and reproduced music before it, this inexpensive music relies on effects associated with technical reproduction; indeed, it is inconceivable without the existence of sound recording and storage media; the "studio version" is its central musical object—unlike the recording in jazz that documents a session or the recording in classical music that reconstructs a concert (and whose central musical object remains the score), and unlike the ethnographic field recording that points to a distant or vanished world. Nevertheless, the central *act* of pop music remains the moment when a real performer becomes recognizable as the representative of a studio recording—the musical object—and "liquefies" it. This liquefaction marks a critical point in the production of musical value.

The progress of musical development in the bourgeois era led to the continuous refinement of the musical object, which influenced the business of music well before the introduction of the phonograph record, but also violated notions of a musical Arcadia in a twofold sense—in addition to defining music, it also opened it up to valuation and made it possible to buy and sell copyrights. While compositions were initially commissioned works, that changed with the rise of Tin Pan Alley and the production of scores for a market. In the period following the Civil War, twenty-five thousand pianos were sold in the United States each year, and it is estimated that more than half a million young people learned to play the piano. This represented a move away from the traditional embodied authority of the father toward the authority of the musical object—in this case sheet music—which was booming on a mass scale, accompanied by the expansion of the music publishing industry. Beginning in about 1885, people began to talk about Tin Pan Alley, by which they meant 28th Street in Manhattan, where the most important music publishers had their offices. The result was not only higher print runs but also the invention of a standardized, Taylorized, Fordist method of composition based in a division of labor. Composers were essentially paid by the song: sitting in their publishers' buildings, they hammered out one danceable thirty-two-bar number after another, among them the masterpieces that are canonized today as the Great American Songbook. Already on a purely musical level, these songs were comprised of standard phrases and clichés—filled with immediate economic value and devoid of any contact whatsoever with inwardness, with the concept of a musicality that develops out of itself. They reflect an urban lifestyle, and they have a typical and interchangeable quality about them stemming from the fact that they were produced specifically in order to be exchanged.

Production standards sink even further when they cease to relate to the production of notes and begin to relate instead to the production of records, a shift that occurred after the Second World War at the latest. Records began to be marketed primarily on the radio, and then on television, and the jingles, logos, and sonic signatures that were the raw material of pop music became the sonic junk of advertising—the cheapest attention-getting noise that money can buy, the vocabulary of pop's environment, the language that it has no choice but to speak. The resulting functional music seems to have achieved the maximum possible degree of interchangeability; fleeting remnants of emotion, which come and go like leaves in the wind, seem to cling to it only temporarily.

Here, then, we would seem to have something like the nadir promised above. The economic value is small but not insignificant. The musical objects must simply be produced in sufficient quantity in order for their production to be profitable. They only have to mean a little bit to as many people as possible, but not too much to any one person. And their noneconomic value must be modest as well. Precisely this music, which is, in every sense, without value, now sparks the greatest enthusiasm, the most tremendous ecstasies that secular Western music has ever unleashed. How is this possible?

This extremely simple, yet physically compelling, effect-oriented music created its effects without any of the preconditions of traditional and ritual musical frameworks. It referred to everyday life and could easily be incorporated into it precisely because it contributed nothing to its own explanation, whether through meanings or traditional preconditions. With a crude and interchangeable set of effects, it was possible to do things with it, to use it

actively—doo-wop, early rock and roll, and R&B came out of street corner music and the nightlife and club scene, and they retained that connection even when they moved to television, where they began to mean something to masses of teenagers and others on the fringes—or the threshold—of social integration. This moment, this audience, this musical object, and these commodities represent a kind of zero point of art, a zero point of community-building and also of folklore, a zero point too in terms of noneconomic value. But this also forms a basis for the creation of a new kind of noneconomic value.

In his book *Performing Rites: On the Value of Popular Music,* Simon Frith points out that, like sports fans, users and fans of pop music have constantly produced evaluative discourses—a form of communication consisting entirely of value judgments.[2] This is liquefaction: value judgments, rankings, listings, and fetishes are instances in which musical objects are actively appropriated and dissolved, becoming musical "agglutinations" of the lowliest kind. Ever-newer masses of semi-integrated young people and minorities with money to spend discover endless opportunities to agglomerate bureaucratic lists and tables, existential and sexual applications, and risky lifestyles. At this point, there normally comes an affirmation of the more romantic forms of active reception, of existential forms of "liquefaction," of risky lives and what is often called liberation, and there is nothing wrong with that. But in 1960 and again in 1980, the bureaucratic energy of reception, which was generally unleashed by unromantic nerds, gave rise to a new knowledge. The fact that it looked bureaucratic was only a problem from the vantage point of a ritualized bourgeois aesthetic expectation: where the rich man stages edification, the poor one establishes a bureaucracy. And who would be so narrow-minded as to give one of these options precedence over the other?

In pop music after 1955, a new logic of attractiveness emerged that surpassed the attraction of the music itself on the basis of its having little economic and no artistic value (and being hence free and open to participation), functioning instead on two new bases: first, an interplay between image and sound that could never have been staged before the advent of television and the teen idol industry, and second, the interplay between indexical, phonographic recordings of actual human beings/stars' physical traces and the recognition of those stars on actual stages. These two logics of attraction explain a great deal, and the first self-descriptions and myths produced by pop music—in particular, the cult of authenticity—sought, albeit clumsily, to describe precisely these effects: the identity of sound and image, reproduced recording and live performance—the effectuation of identity and reality.

There are still other factors at work. I will not delve into them here, but one of them is particularly important and should be mentioned. In order to introduce it, I must make a slight correction to my concept of noneconomic valuelessness. Even in pop music, there is something that corresponds to inwardness, to the solipsistic pleasure in the pure experience of playing, and playing with, music—to doing as one wishes with sounds. Even in pop music, there are elements with no economic value, but which have a very high value of a different kind—a value that is, in the broadest sense, a political one. Unless it is further qualified, the noneconomic value I introduced above knows only one kind of subject: the subject who is still intact—at least reasonably intact—and authorized to do as he or she pleases. All others, all outsiders, all those who are excluded, but also those who are based in remote communities, know of something else: a dialectic between the feeling of being protected by a given music on the one hand, and, on the other, the feeling of being emboldened—of struggling to one's feet and beginning to take steps—by that very same music. These are accumulated, unstable social experiences stored within musical forms, and they include even those forms patched together by the uninitiated and the unauthorized, by music-industry people and other outsiders, to become pop music. And it is in this sense that we have something to learn from Lagos: not the economic practices of the ghetto, not its reality, and not the romantic notion that what is especially unstable is also especially advanced, but rather something concerning the proto-aesthetic content of music and its organization.

In America in 1955, musical elements of folk, blues, and African-American and immigrant music all shared a common feature, and it may be true that post–world music today shares the same feature of an inwardness marked by violent exclusion, as well as a sense of belonging that is often no less violent. It is this commonality—audible time and again in music such as the sorrowful American country song—that I call political, however vastly removed it may be from all that generally tends to be politically instrumentalized or romanticized, such as the kitschy talk of "rebel" culture and formats of "resistance." These forms of music are absolutely proto-political. Or they are, somewhat more paradoxically, *spiritually* political. And they can be drawn in every conceivable direction when they are politicized. What is important here is that music possesses another, less ahistorical, less ideal type of noneconomic value: political value. And that value remains present in pop music.

III.

Pop music never knows what it is doing. This is true of both its thoroughly economicized mainstream components as well as its niche cultures. And it is worth pointing out that an economy that consists of nothing but niche production would be an entropic horror—one in which there would be no public realm and no aesthetic experience. But pop music constantly rediscovers the conditions of its own emergence, not in well-defined,

large-scale historical movements, but in small steps and often cyclical acts of rebellion. Time and again, attempts are made to "inject" economic valuelessness—as a related phenomenon or shot of energy—into forms of pop music that have lost contact with those conditions. When there is no longer any contact with the spiritually political dimension of pop music, improvised rock music suddenly arises—and with something in mind that it tries to reconstruct. Other logics of attraction are reconstructed in this same way: where voices no longer sound as if they could possibly come from actual bodies, hip-hop emerges. That's just how it works.

But now we have a real mess on our hands. A form of valuelessness has arisen, very much in the ideal, romantic sense. But rather than allowing itself to be transferred into a higher value, it is moving on from *economic* valuelessness to infect the *noneconomic* kind as well, perhaps in order to demonstrate that no such transcendental value ever actually existed—at least not where music was made for money. Instead of dwelling on the obvious—as critical spoilsports have repeatedly done by asserting that pop music, in the long run, cannot sustain its implicit utopian and oppositional potential before proceeding to organize it industrially and bureaucratically—the logic of pop music itself (or the logic of precisely these latent political elements) has led to its own obsolescence as an economic model. It has served its purpose as a music of distancing, of niche creation, as the dance music of new temporary communities so elegantly states: that the musical object itself has become superfluous—not just technically, through file-sharing, but conceptually and economically as well.

The rave was already an event without an object: people did not go home and begin to collect the records they'd heard that night. One might argue that this was in itself a success. As indeed it was, but as tends to happen with utopian enclaves in a world that is otherwise unchanged, they invert to become their opposite. Freedom creates poverty. In a world in which the object has disappeared as a reference point, other logics take effect—logics of a vastly more liberated form of entrepreneurship: the exploitation of bodies, performance, and "liveness" replaces the exploitation of a labor that had previously produced objects, objects whose conditions of production could be negotiated. The realization of a world without musical objects has assimilated aesthetic experience in a utopian and dialectical sense, but because it has done so only partially and temporarily, it has also brought about a regression to a stage that precedes aesthetic experience altogether.

At the same time, however, the specific forms of active reception associated with pop music—and not its contents or noneconomic values—have become the new standard of its culture and industry. We no longer live in a society of spectacle but in one of participation. Active consumption—by so-called "prosumers"—are the bread and butter of contemporary sociability; the specific stubbornness of the fan, the permeability of the barrier between audience and stage—all essential components of the pop music culture of the last fifty years—are now standard staging formats. They are prescribed, they are hegemonic, they are stressful, and they drain energy from precisely those forces and forms of empowerment that pop music is normally thought to support. The musical utopia of economic valuelessness and the concept of a greater, noneconomic value then attach themselves to the logic of virtuosity—as Paolo Virno calls it—as a normative model of production, of labor without work.[3]

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What is to be done? Pop music cannot be rescued; something new must be invented to take its place, and music may or may not have a role to play in whatever that turns out to be. One cannot set out to invent such a thing, just as pop music itself simply emerged, as it were, in places far from the forward march of progress, in a development that was historically necessary, as we know today, but was unpredictable for its contemporaries. It did not arise where enlightened people tried something new, but where others acted quickly and from a sense of spiritual urgency. We must remain open to the possibility of something similar happening again. But pop music was only able to come into being by repeatedly coming into contact with radical artistic forces, as when John Cale and La Monte Young developed The Dream Syndicate from the spirit of the Everly Brothers, or Tony Conrad suspected that the solipsistic drone might be used as an anticapitalist weapon. So while one can no longer reconstruct pop music in a purposeful and systematic way, one can still move forward with the neo-neo-avant-garde work of utopian practices or their derivatives—perhaps in a more complex and radical manner, while touching on other arts that have similar problems—at the admittedly high price of creating niches, provided that one also remain in contact with the world of cheap and worn-out forms that have preserved something of people's actual lives, however unrecognizable they may have become. These do not necessarily have to be musical forms. What is needed, however—not for economic reasons, but for political and cultural ones—are reference points for everyone. The niche has become neither a utopia nor a permanent state of affairs, but rather the end.

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Detail of vinyl record incisions

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X

Translated from the German by James Gussen.

Diedrich Diederichsen was editor of two music magazines in the 1980s (*Sounds*, Hamburg; *Spex*, Cologne) and taught at several academies in the 1990s in Germany, Austria, and the U.S. in the fields of art history, musicology, theater studies, and cultural studies. He was Professor for Cultural Theory at Merz Academy, Stuttgart from 1998 to 2006, and is currently Professor of Theory, Practice, and Communication of Contemporary Art at the Academy of Fine Art in Vienna. Recent Publications include *Utopia of Sound*, Vienna 2010 (co-edited with Constanze Ruhm); *Rock, Paper, Scissor—Pop-Music/Fine Arts*, Graz 2009 (co-edited with Peter Pakesch); *On Surplus Value (of Art*, Rotterdam/New York 2008; *Eigenblutdoping*, Cologne 2008; *Kritik des Auges*, Hamburg 2008; *Argument Son*, Dijon 2007; *Personas en loop*, Buenos Aires 2006; *Musikzimmer*, Cologne 2005.

1
See Pierre Bourdieu, *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste* , trans. Richard Nice (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1987).

2
See Simon Frith, *Performing Rites: On the Value of Popular Music* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1998).

3
Paolo Virno, "Virtuosity and Revolution: The Political Theory of Exodus" in *Radical Thought in Italy: A Potential Politics* , ed. Paolo Virno and Michael Hardt (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2006), 189–212.

Liam Gillick

The Good of Work

Art is a history of doing nothing and a long tale of useful action. It is always a fetishization of decision and indecision—with each mark, structure, and engagement. What is the good of this work? The question contains a challenge to contemporary practitioners—or "current artists," a term I will use, as contemporary art no longer accounts for what is being made—that is connected more to what we have all become than to what we might propose, represent, or fail to achieve. The challenge is the supposition that artists today—whether they like it or not—have fallen into a trap that is predetermined by their existence within a regime that is centered on a rampant capitalization of the mind.

The accusation inherent in the question is that artists are at best the ultimate freelance knowledge workers and at worst barely capable of distinguishing themselves from the consuming desire to work at all times, neurotic people who deploy a series of practices that coincide quite neatly with the requirements of the neoliberal, predatory, continually mutating capitalism of the every moment. Artists are people who behave, communicate, and innovate in the same manner as those who spend their days trying to capitalize every moment and exchange of daily life. They offer no alternative to this.

The notion of artists as implicated figures has a long history, visible in varied historical attempts to resolve the desire to examine high culture as a philosophical marker, attempts beset by the unresolvable problem that the notional culture being examined and the function of high cultural reflection are always out of sync—meaning the accusation that we are functioning in a milieu dominated by predatory neoliberalism is based on a spurious projection of high cultural function in the first instance that cannot account for the tensions in art, which remain the struggle for collectivity within a context that requires a recognition of difference.

Theories of immaterial labor—an awareness of the informational aspect and cultural content of the commodity—have exerted a profound influence on the starting point of current artists, allowing them to perceive the accusation as framed by the doubts that form the base of art's work. As a result, the question "What is the good of work?" is at the heart of the work—it is not a symptom or product of accidental proximity. It accounts for the doubts and confusion that exist and explains why there seem to be moments of stress and collapse within any current art structure. These moments of critical crisis are an expression of resistance to the structure—a constant restructuring in response to the desire to avoid work within a realm of permanently unrewarding work.

The reason it is hard to determine observable differences between the daily routines and operations of a new knowledge-worker and those of an artist is precisely because art functions in close parallel to the structures that it critiques.

It requires precise and close observation of the production processes involved in order to differentiate between knowledge workers and current artists. If the question "Why work?" is the original question of current art, it is necessary, in order to counter the accusation that artists are in thrall to processes of capitalization beyond them, to look at a number of the key issues around control. And to address them in a fragmented way. What follows is a discussion of these issues—a negotiation of which is necessary in order to replace a critical mirror with a window.

works—more or less permanently—and always finds a way to account for him or herself within a context demanding more and more interpretation? It is not leisure, but is it really work? Within this subset we have to engage in a careful process of categorization, meaning that we have to look at the methodological groupings that emerge within the art context rather than what is produced. One answer on offer over the last years was the formation of communities of practice forming new leisure/work modes. For artists are often creating new life in opposition to lifestyles. This involves a complete reorganization of relationships, wherein relationships themselves may

So what happened to the promise of leisure? Maybe this is what art can offer us now—a thing to use or reflect upon in a zone of permanent future leisure, as the "arts" as instrumentalized deployment becomes a more refined and defined capitalized zone. This zone is never geared towards artists alone but instead directed towards the general population as a way of rationalizing and explaining away innovations within the workplace as being part of a matrix of doubt and difference. Modes of leisure have been adopted by artists as a way to openly counter notions of labor as sites of dignity and innovation and in order to critique, mock, or parody the notion of an artistic life as role-play within the leisure zone. Yet the promise of leisure is not synchronized with artistic production. The withdrawal of labor and the establishment of structures in which intentions and results are uneven are markers that go beyond the promise of post-labor, which was always just the projection of a neurotic non-state.

So are we left with only the possibility of the good artist who fulfills the critical criteria? The artist who

become the subject of the work and discursive models of practice become the founding principle rather than a result or product.

At the opposite extreme there is deliberate self-enforced isolation and a concurrent lack of accountability, amounting to a structural game within a context where notional support structures are mutable and dynamic. The two main trajectories of current art both attempt to clear us of the accusation: restructuring life (ways to work) and withdrawing from life (ways to free work). Categorizations of art in this case can superficially appear to mirror attitudes to work. It is quite appropriate for artists to co-opt working models and turn them to their own ends, from the factory to the bar and even to the notion of the artist's studio, as specific sites of production that used to either mimic established daily structures or deliberately avoid and deny them. Categorizations of art

are not limited to what is produced but are connected more deeply to how things might be produced. It is necessary to focus on production rather than consumption (including the new formalism of responsible didactic criticism) if one is to unlock art's potential and permit a recasting of the accusation.

The notion of withdrawing or limiting production is the key to decoding the anxiety about work. One of the enduring powers of art, and one of the devices used by contemporary artists to consolidate specificity once they have attained a degree of recognition, is a withdrawal of labor or a limiting of supply. Doing the opposite—operating freely, openly, and on demand—is viewed as a problem within the gallery structure and resists the simple commodification of art. This shift to production consciousness by current artists, away from reception consciousness by contemporary artists, is a form of active withdrawal.

This notion of withdrawal can be understood in relation to the following: are there answers or questions in the work? This is central to the defense against the accusation. A postmodern understanding is that the current artist asks questions of the viewer while standing beside them. It is this sense of art as something that asks questions of the viewer that is misunderstood in the knowledge-worker accusation. The shift of position from confrontation to proximity is in practice a shift in category. Within the realm of the knowledge worker, the new consumer is always activated and treated as a discriminating individual who can be marketed to directly—spoken to face to face. Documentary practice places the user and the producer alongside each other. The exhaustion created by the continual capitalization of the recent past and the near future has its source in the knowledge worker's attempt to account for every differentiation, whereas the artist is producing every differentiation alongside the recipient of the work.

This dynamic is linked to a game the artist plays with control over the moment of completion. For current art, the moment of judgment is not exclusive to an exterior field. The sense of control or denial exercised over that moment marks a zone of autonomy within a regime of excessive differences.

A response to the accusation is the creation of one's own deadlines, as opposed to the apparent creation of imposed deadlines. The notion of the deadline is a crucial applied structure that links the accused with the flexible knowledge worker. The number of deadlines increases exponentially, and they are created by the producer as much as they are introduced by others. An awareness of the constructed nature of deadlines allows one to electively engage and disengage and thus to create a zone of semi-autonomy.

Working for a long period with limited deadlines is a prerogative of not just the artist, but also of the occasional worker, whose job description is one of unbearable tedium but includes hard-won rights over steady employment. This prerogative marks the tension between the notion of applied flexibility and a critique of flexibility that permits a projection of potential.

Relationships with others are crucial. Roles are recast daily—alone together, together alone. For artists do not operate in isolation. And artists can only function in complete isolation. The acquisition or rejection of relationships is a crucial marker in art production, defining an artistic practice over and above a super specific knowledge-producing activity peppered with deadlines. This means that the entry of the artist into the apparently undifferentiated territory of infinite flexibility is made critical by a recognition of a series of encounters, borders, humps, and diversions.

The identification of ethical barriers emerges in the course of making art under the stressful circumstances of the accusation. Circumstances and subjects in this case appear as moral zombies—undead and relentless victims—that artists reject or accept in tension with the creation or rejection of ethical barriers. Ethics are not stable, easy to reach, feed, or kill off.

Under these stressful circumstances there is an assumption that art extends memory forwards and backwards. In other words, art is not necessarily synchronized to the present. What appears to be a methodology linked to present works is an illusion. Art deploys flexibility in order to account for the moral zombie—to navigate the terrain of ethical mutability. Art extends and reduces memory using tools that were instead developed to shorten memory—that is, capitalize the near future and recent past.

As there are no limits to work there are also no limits to not working. The idea that artists find a way to work is a defining characteristic of current art, emerging in the context of post-labor anxieties and the creation and dismantling of ethical barriers.

Research and reading as activities are not accounted for in the accusatory model. Artists whose modes of production are primarily informed by research are assumed to be the "good" workers. To research in a directed way and then present the results as a final work is not a leisure pursuit. But accounting for things and relationships in the world leads to displaced work, the creation of structural subjects. There is a sense in which all new art accounts for all other work previously made. This awareness is not necessarily accompanied by full knowledge of all the other work, but a sense that all the other works exist somewhere.

Even in documentary work, in addition to the creation of didactic structures or the replacement of a super-self-conscious and worn-out fourth estate, there is a sense that the nature of art is being questioned. The pursuit of documentary strategies is also a critique of the flow and capitalist logic that is applied to the commodification of art. The documentary is permanently working off of other fields. It also offers the possibility of being arrested while thinking about art. This is not possible while working as a knowledge worker.

This leads us to the equation: "just another citizen in the room versus everything I do involves a special perspective on the specificity of others." At the heart of the latter

artistic persona is the assertion of citizenship combined with an invitation to view the extraordinary ordinary. It makes the biographical a locus of meaning. As art became more specific the biographical became both more generic and more special, a way to present the specific in a form that would encourage more specificities and more difference. Art now is an assertion of difference, not an assertion of flexibility.

How to find a better life in all of this? Current work undermines a sense or possibility of infinite leisure. Infinite leisure is only one form of utopia based in religion—a nightmare full of virgins and mansions. Will there be dogs? Oh, I hope there will be dogs. To be a clerk would be heaven for some people. A breakdown of the barriers between work, life, and art via direct action is a rather more rewarding potential outcome. Art appears to be result-based but is generally action-based and occupation-based. It is towards something. It reaches out. It only has meaning within a context and that context will always determine what activities might be necessary to improve the context.

This leaves us explaining everything in total communication anxiety about differentiation. Art viewed as a generalized terrain of collectivity and difference operates within a *real* of anxiety that is merely a reflection of multiple apparently contradictory moments of differentiations chiming simultaneously. Anxieties about too many artists, overproduction, and lack of ability to determine quality are all ideologically motivated and defer to a defeated series of authorities who would prefer the attainment of a neo-utopian consensus, a market consensus, or at least the regime of a big other consensus. All of these things are attacked and are permanently defeated within current art. Otherwise things will default towards authority and control. The entropic quality of art's structural and critical trajectory is its resistance.

For the relation between art production and the development of creative tools for decentralized production is also a historical coincidence. It is only necessary to look at what is produced though the primary defensive mesh arrayed against predatory capitalization—its structural approaches to tools that may well have been developed for other purposes.

Art is not a zone of autonomy. It does not create structures that are exceptional or perceivable outside their own context. Therefore current art will always create a sequence of problems for the generally known context. For example, with regard to the undifferentiated flexible knowledge-worker who operates in permanent anxiety in the midst of a muddling of work and leisure, art both points at this figure and operates alongside him or her as an experiential phantom.

Art is a place where the rules of engagement are open to question. The knowledge worker also appears to challenge rules of engagement but can only do so in the production of software or a set of new fragmented relationships. The artist can create alienated relationships without all these intricacies.

A different sense of "super-self-conscious" commodity awareness is at the core of current artists' desire to come close to the context within which they work. Projection and speculation are the tools they reclaim in order to power this super-self-conscious commodity awareness. Artists project into the near future and the recent past in order to expose and render transparent new commodity relations. The surplus value that is art is not limited to its supposed novelty value but is embedded in its function as a system of awareness.

Art is a series of scenarios/presentations that creates new spaces for thought and critical speculation. The creation of new time values and shifted time structures actually creates new critical zones where we might find spaces of differentiation from the knowledge community. For it is not that art is merely a mirror of a series of new subjective worlds. It is an ethical equation where assumptions about function and value in society can be acted upon. There is no art of any significance made in the last forty years that does not include this as a base-level notion of differentiation.

The idea of the "first work" or the development of ideas is no longer directed towards the total production of all work in the future. This fact creates anxiety within the culture in general and leads to a search for analogous structures that also appear to temporarily function with a contingent potential for projection.

A sense of constantly returning to ideas or structures by choice rather than by intuition is an aspect of contemporary art that defies the logic of capital. The notion that an artist is obsessed by a structure or by an idea-context is sometimes self-perpetuated. The apparent work is no more than a foil to mask a longer deferral of decision-making. The art becomes a semi-autonomous aspect of lived experience, for the artist as much as for the viewer.

Not thinking about art while making art is different to not thinking while preparing a PowerPoint presentation on the plane. Of course I am working even when it looks as if I am not working. And even if I am not working and it looks as if I am not working I still might claim to be working and wait for you to work out what objective signifiers actually point towards any moment of value or work. This is the game of current art. Art production and work methods are not temporally linked or balanced because the idea of managing time is not a key component of making art, nor is it a personal or objective profit motive for artists. Unless they decide that such behavior is actually part of the work itself.

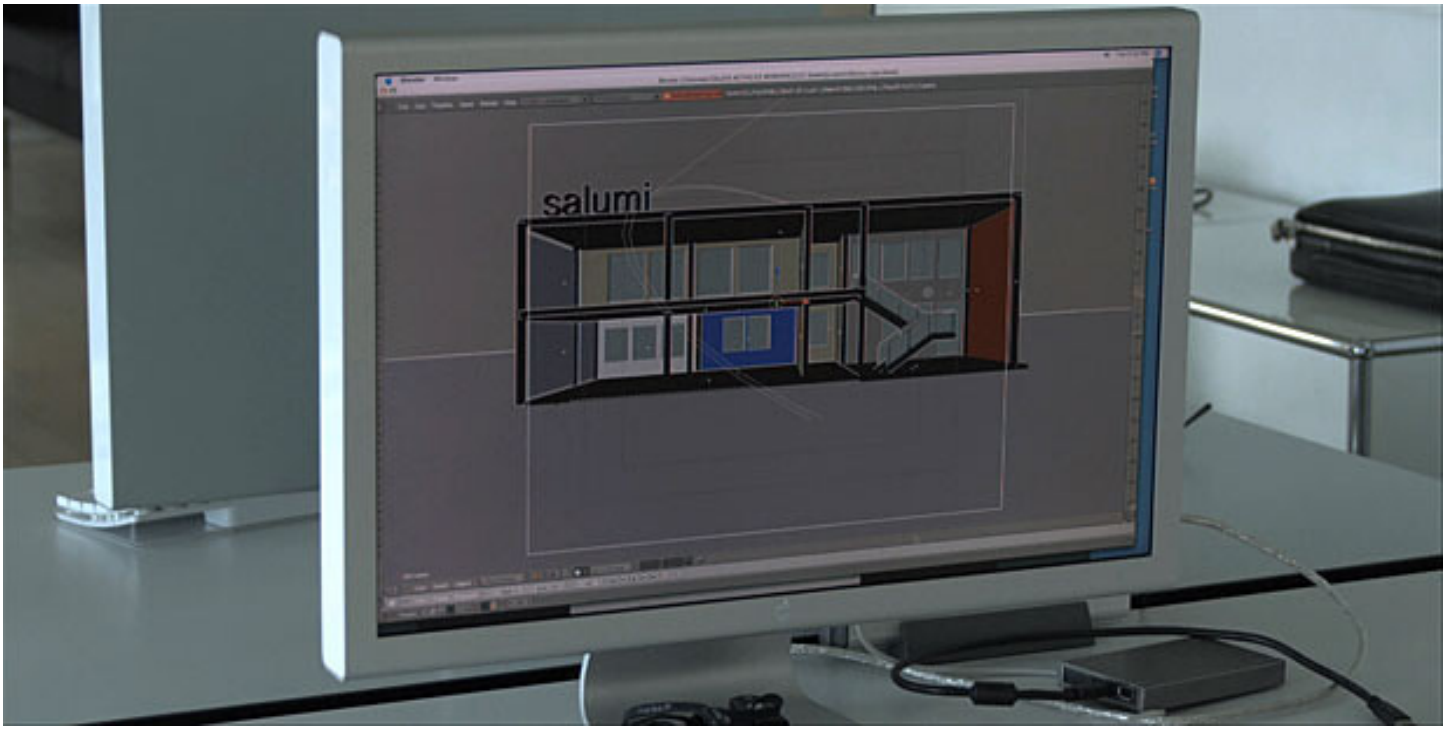
Working alone but in a group is a contradiction at the heart of current art practice. It is always an active decision to give up the individual autonomy of the artistic persona with the goal of working together. Within the flexible knowledge community the assertion of individual practice always has to be subsumed within the team-worked moments of idea-sharing. Art as a life-changing statement is always the product of a specific decision that involves moments of judgment that cannot be controlled exclusively by the artist but are also operated on by all other artists. The them and us is me and us and us and us and them and them.

The assumption that there is a "they" or "them" is part of the problem involved in understanding how artists function within society. Artists are also "they" or "them" who have made a specific decision to operate within an exceptional zone that does not necessarily produce anything exceptional. For adherence to a high-cultural life is a negotiated concept within the current art context. This critical community is simultaneously subject and audience. Therefore we have a situation in which an artist will propose a problem and then position it just out of reach precisely in order to test the potential for an autonomy of practice.

Reporting the strange in the daily—that which cannot be accounted for is at the heart of artistic practices, yet not for purposes that can be described outside the work itself. And still, working less can result in producing more. The rate of idea-production within art is inconsistent, which is a deliberate result of the way art is produced and how it can become precise and *other* even while it flounders and then proudly reports back to us within the self-patrolled compound masquerading as a progressive think tank.

Artists function in micro-communities of discourse that are logical and contingent within their own contexts, as well as (often) generationally related. Current artists are caught within generational boundaries. The notion that artists are a perfect analogue of the flexible entrepreneurial class is a generational concept that merely masks a lack of differentiation in observation of practice and the devastating fact that art is in a permanent battle with what came just before. That is the good of work. Replacing the models of the recent past with better ones.

At the beginning of his film *Dear Diary*, Nanni Moretti says: "Why all? Why this fixation with us 'all' being sold out and co-opted!" "You shouted awful, violent slogans. Now you've gotten ugly," the characters say in the film he is watching, full of depressed sell-out nostalgia from the perspective of success and authority. "I shouted the right slogans and I'm a splendid forty-year-old." "Even in a society more decent than this one, I will only feel in tune with a minority of people. I believe in people but I just don't believe in the majority of people. I will always be in tune with a minority of people." This is easy for an artist to say and hard for a knowledge worker to understand. Maybe here we can find a space where there is real antagonism and difference rather than just questions of taste or manners.



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Images in this essay are stills from Liam Gillick, *Everything Good Goes*, 2008, video loop.

This essay was first presented as a response to the question "What is the Good of Work?" posed by Maria Lind and Simon Critchley within the framework of a series of talks by the same name hosted by the Goethe Institut New York. The essay will be available as an artist book published by Artspace, Auckland, New Zealand as part of the exhibition "post-Office," in May 2010. For more information: **www.artspace.org.nz**.

Liam Gillick is an artist based in London and New York. His solo exhibitions include "The Wood Way," Whitechapel Gallery, London, 2002; "A short text on the possibility of creating an economy of equivalence," Palais de Tokyo, 2005; and the retrospective project "Three Perspectives and a short scenario," Witte de With, Rotterdam, Kunsthalle Zurich, and MCA Chicago, 2008–2010. In 2006 he was part of the free art school project unitednationsplaza in Berlin.

Gillick has published a number of texts that function in parallel to his artwork. Proxemics: Selected Writing, 1988–2006 (JRP|Ringier, 2007) was published in 2007, and the monograph *Factories in the Snow*, by Lilian Haberer (JRP|Ringier, 2007), will soon be joined by an extensive retrospective publication and critical reader. He has in addition contributed to many art magazines and journals including *Parkett*, *Frieze*, *Art Monthly*, *October*, and *Artforum*. Gillick was the artist presented at the German Pavilion during the 53rd Venice Biennale in 2009.

Hu Fang

Wu Yongfang, the Hunger Artist

The Hunger Artist reappeared on our radar several years after his original performance, when some old photographs of the event were posted on the *Tianya* virtual community website, causing an unexpected storm of controversy. Staring directly into the camera, the severely emaciated Wu Yongfang sits upright, naked except for a white loincloth wrapped around his waist like Gandhi, leaving almost nothing to the imagination. As we look in through the iron bars that separate him from the audience, we find that the room in which he sits is as austere as a prisoner's cell, furnished only with a mat and a cot. An exterior view reveals this "prison cell" to be a temporary bamboo hut perched on the roof of a geometrical three-story modern building. The bamboo adds a fashionable flavor of environmental awareness to the modern structure. From the captions that accompany the photos, we learn that the building houses the real estate offices of Company X, which organized and sponsored the event. The temporary hut, designated the "Fasting Room," was designed and constructed especially for the Hunger Artist using recyclable materials. Now, years after the event, Company X has launched a new marketing campaign for its "Free Spirit Leisure Villas," a huge, 5,000-acre luxury waterfront development, which makes use of the Hunger Artist's performance.

The crux of the debate raging online is the following: the Hunger Artist's detractors maintain that although hunger remains a chronic social problem that must be eliminated, the economy of Country Y has been growing steadily and the lives of the people have improved significantly; but if the Hunger Artist persists in displaying images of poverty and backwardness to domestic audiences and to the entire world, is he not building his artistic success on the backs of the disadvantaged? His supporters, on the other hand, maintain that the Hunger Artist's actions demonstrate his immense courage, as he risks his life to shock us into confronting reality.

After several thousand related posts appear on the Internet, people on both sides of the debate begin to suspect something: could this controversy be just a new marketing ploy on the part of the real estate company?

Wu Yongfang responds to questions from the crowd:

> I've been planning this event with my curator for a long time. My curator is old friends with Mr. Liang, from Company X's real estate sales department. Mr. Liang has always had strong opinions about culture, and he wanted to support our creative endeavor by providing us with this venue. I think we're going to attract even more attention and debate by holding the event at a busy commercial center like this.

"Is the purpose of the event to raise awareness about

poverty?"

> Of course; that goes without saying. But we also want to focus attention on cutting-edge trends in art.

"Ah, so you want to educate the public about performance art!" A light bulb seems to go off in the questioner's head—in Country Y, any work of art that people don't understand or don't like is usually referred to as "performance art."

> I know what you mean by performance art, but I prefer to call what I do "Life Art." I use my life force as a medium for creative expression—we still don't know what the final result will be.

"Do you know what your physical limitations are? Are you worried about that? Do the limits of the body define the limits of creativity?"

> I'm not worried. You could say that I'm using the creative process to explore the limits of my own willpower.

An endless stream of people surges towards the "prison cell" perched on the roof of Company X's real estate office. Wu Yongfang gazes out at them, silent and content. The crowds for the last three days have been huge, much bigger than for any of his previous exhibitions.

[figure fullpage fe8d20e7e5dd897049c32dc91806102d.jpg Fasting Buddha at Lahore Museum. Image by **Yasuo Osakabe.**

]

Wu Yongfang's favorite time of day is the moment when it gives way to night. The crowds thin out, and dusk overtakes his small cell. It is a time when limitless possibilities emerge. He silently stands up, suddenly unsure of where his body is located in space. A hallucinatory mixture of exhaustion and extreme hunger overtakes him. In the waning light, he seems to see his own seated figure floating before him, like the Zen master Bodhidharma deep in meditation.

He recalls the moment deep into his fast, after starvation had set in, when a rush of warmth suddenly rose up from his *hara*, the seat of his life force. Surging to the top of his head, it assured him that his willpower had been fully roused. His eyes pulse with energy. The audience gazes at him reverently, intensifying the warmth he feels.

The audience's reverence for the artist is reciprocated by the artist's desire to illuminate the audience. He first tells them about the difference between therapeutic fasting and Hunger Art. He then stresses the importance of distinguishing between traditional hunger strikers and contemporary hunger artists. Hunger strikers make their living from fasting in public, he explains; they traditionally appear in social and political venues, carrying out a form of passive resistance. Many hunger strike manifestos that have been passed down through the ages bear witness to this. Hunger artists, on the other hand, do not intend to express resistance of any kind through their public fasting. Rather, they employ the traditional methods of the hunger strike to undertake a contemporary creative process. By reawakening the taste of hunger—something that most people have forgotten, and that arouses a sense of nostalgia, so to speak—hunger artists stimulate and heighten self-awareness, and provoke intense contemplation of the relationship between self and society.

He explains the historical basis of Hunger Art to the crowd:

> When I was little, we lived through three years of natural disaster. We ate anything we could find, even weeds and tree roots, until there was nothing left.

A young spectator responds, "Yeah, but at least it was organic food." It is hard to tell whether he is joking or simply clueless about history.

A teacher leads a group of chattering students forward. They regard the Hunger Artist fearfully. He immediately has a vision of what the curriculum regarding hunger will be like in the future: hunger will no longer be a physical experience; rather, it will have become a memory, used only to evoke the performances of hunger artists. *I realize that in order to reach the pinnacle of my art, I must become completely genuine.*

> I hate the idea of performing. That's why I call myself an Artist of Life.

Despite his explanations, the media insists on using provocative headlines, such as "Hunger Strike at Luxury Development" and "Therapeutic Fasting at Free Spirit Leisure Villas," when reporting on the event. Of course, the Hunger Artist has no real interest in the relationship

between his art and how many units of luxury housing are sold. He only wants to see his audience. He only hopes that as countless spectators fix him with the reverential gaze, he may leave imprinted on their consciousness the image of a true modern day Bodhidharma.

Interestingly, many people are not satisfied with just looking at his body. They also want to stick their noses through the iron bars to try to catch a whiff of his scent. They have concluded that the reason the Hunger Artist smells so healthy is that *fasting prevents the consumption of contaminated food.*

After the crowd is done viewing the Hunger Artist, they head downstairs to the real estate office, where they are once more immersed in breathless sales pitches for luxury waterfront housing and the endless headaches of the real estate market.

This mingling of the scents of asceticism and consumerism creates a unique artistic experience.

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After completing the first phase of his event, the Hunger Artist announced his intention to continue, and to test his limits to the utmost.

The organizers were somewhat hesitant. They were very happy with the public response so far, but they were also worried that the Hunger Artist might not be physically prepared for the challenge, and that unforeseen problems might arise. The Hunger Artist was steadfast in his demand, however, even as there was also a great deal of public opposition to his continuing his fast. After he underwent a thorough physical examination and signed a renewed waiver of liability in the event of his death, it was finally decided to continue the event.

Within several days, the Hunger Artist felt that he had achieved an unprecedented level of purification. *Maybe in the beginning there was no difference between Hunger Art and hunger strikes. Maybe it was only the process of cultural development that caused them to become two different things. But now, they are being reunited in the crucible of my body to create a new School of Hunger Art.*

In the future, artists of the Hunger School will measure themselves not only by the duration of their hunger, but also by the extent of their social relevance. In this way, the artists will determine whose work is the most powerful.

And few were surprised when a strange new phenomenon emerged: a Hunger Art exhibition was mounted to publicize a real estate development called "Fragrant Garden Villas," but in this case, the promotional materials sensationalized the fact that the Hunger Artist was a beautiful woman. Members of the public began to question the organizers' increasingly bold exploitation of human life for commercial gain, and a number of people began to hold protests in front of the building.

As for Wu Yongfang, after prolonged disputes and negotiations, the organizers of his event forcefully requested that he vacate the Fasting Room, and he was transported directly to a local hospital to recuperate. Upon his release from the hospital, he immediately took the organizers to court.

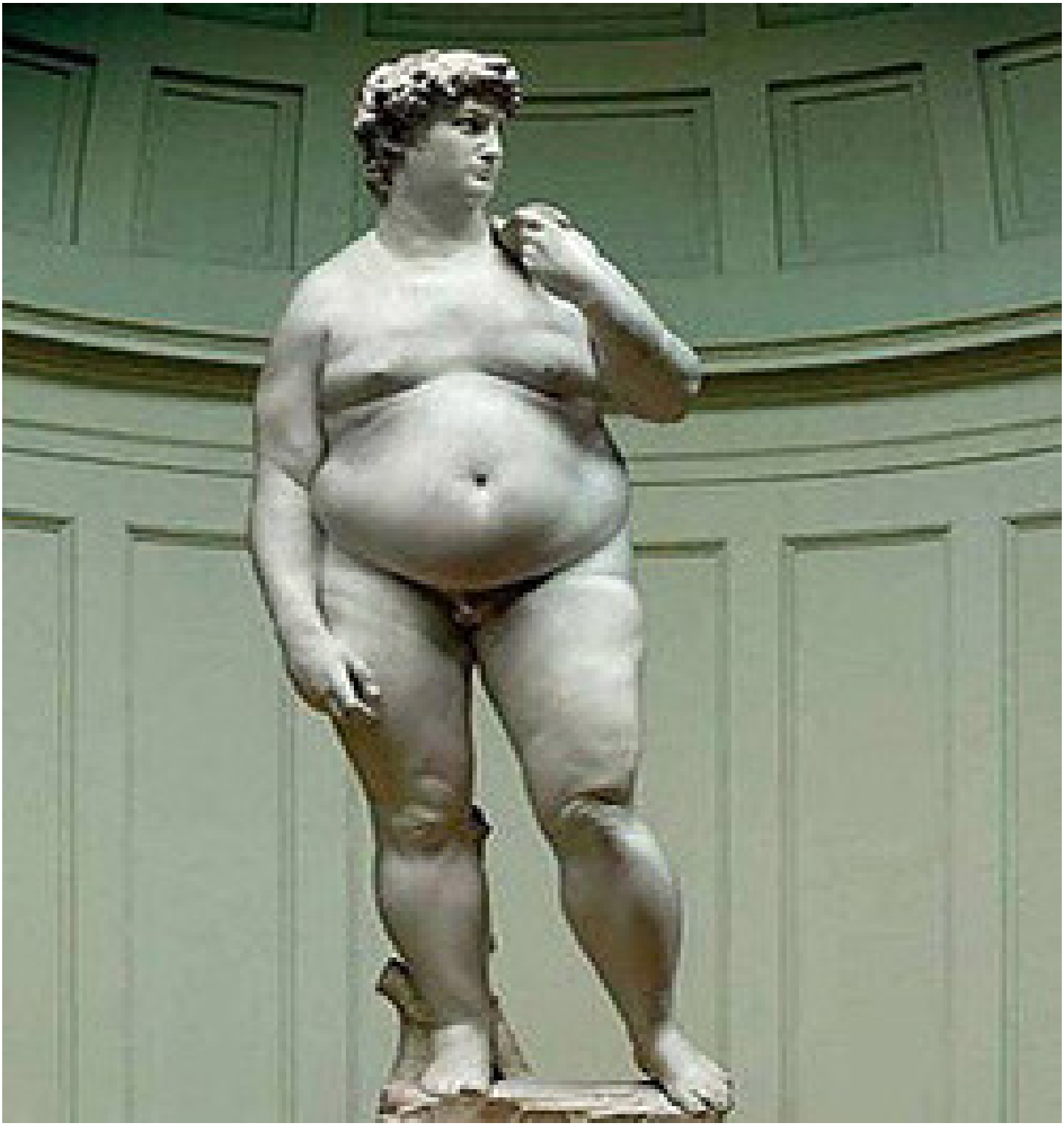
After emerging from the courthouse, the Hunger Artist responds to questions from the media:

> I spent two decades of my life preparing for this work of art. Unfortunately, I was deliberately prevented from completing my creative process. How many decades does a person have in one lifetime? We are living on the cusp between old and new eras. My situation highlights the fact that even now, our freedom of expression remains severely limited.
>
> There is something else I want to say. In this new age that lies before us, every single person is going to enjoy full freedom of expression. When I hold my next Hunger Art performance, I hope that this prediction will serve as my final words.

As he speaks, he places a special emphasis on the phrase "my final words," as if his prediction has already come to pass.

The last time I saw Wu Yongfang was at an entertainment industry event held in memory of Michael Jackson. The theme was "Eternal Life." Even though it was a memorial, the atmosphere was not at all gloomy; in fact, it was a joyous celebration. When Wu Yongfang made an appearance, he was immediately surrounded by hordes of fans. By this time, he had been acclaimed the godfather of Country Y's School of Hunger Art. As he stood under the spotlights addressing the crowd, the profound import of what he said affected me deeply:

> Michael Jackson had been preparing for his death for a very long time. Why do I say this? He had already experienced the death of his physical body once, twice, countless times. His physical body faded away long ago. It was transfigured into an image. He had been living inside his image for a long time. This final death was merely the realization of his eternal life. It is inevitable that the body will eventually disappear, but the image lives on forever. When his body finally died, I had a sudden realization.



Michelangelo's David becomes distorted for a German Olympic Sport Committee's ad campaign: "If you don't move, you get fat."

He pauses for a moment under the spotlights, a strange smile appearing on his face.

I realized that he and I have always been comrades in art. We are all comrades . . . in Hunger Art!

Passionately he raises his glass in a toast:

Come on, everybody! Let's drink to the brilliance of our comrades in art!

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Translated from the Chinese by R. B. Baron.

This fiction will also be published by Taipei Fine Arts Museum in association with the exhibition "Whose Exhibition Is This?," curated by Fang-Wei Chang.

Hu Fang is the artistic director and co-founder of **Vitamin Creative Space**, a project and gallery space dedicated to contemporary art exchange and to analyzing and combining different forms of contemporary cultures. As a novelist and writer, Hu has published a series of novels including *Shopping Utopia*, *Sense Training: Theory and Practise*, and *A Spectator.* His recent publication is a collection of fictional essays called *New Arcades (Survival Club, Sensation Fair, and Shansui*.) His writing has appeared in Chinese and international art/culture magazines since 1996. His curatorial projects include "Through Popular Expression" (2006); "Xu Tan: Loose" (1996); "Zheng Guogu: My Home is Your Museum" (2005); and "Object System: Doing Nothing" (2004). He has been a coordinating editor of *documenta 12 magazines* since 2006. Hu graduated from the Chinese Literature Department of Wuhan University in 1992. He lives and works in Beijing and Guangzhou.

Bilal Khbeiz

Michael Jackson Died for No Reason (and the Vampire that is His Life)

July 2009

Many American media outlets considered the possibility that the King of Pop's death could have been a media stunt designed to promote the "comeback" concert scheduled for this summer in London. But what could have been a media stunt later became a possible homicide. In order to prevent further speculation, the media went to work correlating and double-checking the putative cause of death. Few went so far as to accuse Michael Jackson's personal doctor of causing his patient's untimely death by administering the wrong medicine; most decided to investigate the side effects associated with common drugs. Tylenol, the most widely used drug worldwide, was at the center of these media investigations (the stronger varieties of Tylenol contain Codeine, and have a long list of serious side effects). Other news networks followed developments surrounding the death of a forty-year-old woman, reportedly due to a Tylenol overdose. Michael Jackson's sudden death needed a culprit in order for it to be justified in peoples' minds, and Tylenol provided the perfect suspect due to its reach and ubiquity.

Meanwhile, the same media outlets that looked upon Jackson's death with suspicion treated Neda Agha-Soltan's death by the hands of the Basij in Iran as a fact. The Basij are known to be first-rate killers, and Neda is but one of their many victims, yet the Basij do not roam the streets of Los Angeles and New York City in search of their next kill. Who, then, is responsible for the death of Michael Jackson? It could only have been Tylenol: a lawless murderer, out of control.

Why is it so difficult to believe that Michael is dead? This question is intimately tied to his career. As is always the case with the death of a legendary figure in art or politics, the difficulty people have in accepting such death contributes to the immortality of the person in question. There are countless reasons for someone who has made it to the top to not take his own life, and Michael was at the top. Doctors were at his disposal the whole time, and he had unlimited access to medication. If there is no good reason for Michael to have died, then what could have killed him? The ultra-realists have a quick answer: he knew his grip on fame was slipping, and his creditors simply helped him off the cliff. He lived a life of abundance and spent more than he earned, even though he produced so much.

This view certainly has merit; celebrities die this way, their falls from grace haunt them at their greatest moments, and they begin to take sudden steps into the growing darkness around them. And when they retrace their steps back into the limelight, they are willing to expend whatever they have left in their possession to stay there.

Michael Jackson was one of these celebrities. He spent the last two decades of his life in freefall. During those

years, he tried to invite attention to his private life and to his body. Many saw objectionable things in him despite the fact that he achieved unequalled fame as a black man in racism-plagued America. He even skinned himself, literally, to a point where he was more white than white. The boy who sang for the loss of his loved one seemed in his later years asexual. The consummate performer, a firecracker on stage, spent his last days in a pile of shaved skin and bone and the muscular remains of memories. Michael Jackson died with half a body, half a gender, and half a color. Who was he in his last days? Indeed.

It's a tragic race to the top. Michael was, without a doubt, the greatest entertainer of his time. However, he was locked in a struggle with his own image: how could he transcend his own creation and conquer the summit he created for himself, with full knowledge of its perils? Can a sick horse outrun its younger, healthier self? Michael was more aware of his own obsolescence than anybody else in the business, and with that knowledge he was left with no choice but to transcend his body by pushing his act to its limit. He started his career as a musician, singer, and dancer, and ended up fragmenting his body into severed limbs, rendering himself unrecognizable to his audience. What is left of young Michael in this pile of humanity? Only he himself could have answered such a question. Piece by piece, he offered his body to the stage until he reached the point of no return. That was when he began to eradicate the remains of his former self, his memory: the idealized image of a beautiful black man, the innovative dancer (it's rumored that he wore himself out during the rehearsals just before his death). Anything else that emerged from the mediasphere after his long sabbatical became, in the eyes of viewers, images of a dying man.

Did Michael Jackson die, or did his image? Let's assume for a moment that his downward spiral was not preordained. He might not have foreseen the outcomes of his actions, but he was most certainly conscious of the alterations he was making to his body. It started with local surgeries, and ended up leaving him without evidence of a former self. Yet under extremely complicated medical, nutritional, and environmental conditions, this image could still breathe and move. This painted, surrogate self was whiter and skinnier than the body it represented. In a way, it managed to sustain a life that speaks and moves and shakes hands with world leaders and celebrities—a life that comes back to sing and dance.

He killed his body for his image, performing a true work of art. Had he not been captured by death and successfully ascended the stage, he would have assumed yet another image that was not his. We will not reference the many installation artists who have used their bodies as canvasses because none of them reached Michael's Deleuzian relation with art. He succeeded in sealing off all his orifices, becoming an image that cannot nourish itself or breathe, or has perhaps discovered an alternative to life, one so far unknown to humans. There is more "art" in his image than flesh and bone.

Michael forced this rubble of image and human remains to survive on very little for years. It is those years that are at the center of the way images are studied from a Barthesian perspective, in the way they encapsulate eternity in a single frame. Who could have imagined, prior to Michael's expensive experiment, that a dead man's image could stay alive? Who could have imagined that a man might replace his body with an image that would then become a shrine, beckoning visitors for eternity?

Michael was the object of envy and admiration when he was on the rise. However, those sentiments dissipated as he began to perform his alienating physical transformations; people rejected the idea of him and the desire to emulate him in any way. And it remains likely that many will be similarly crowned the greatest artists of their time, but it is less likely that they will approach what he attained as an eternal image of the artist's obsolescence.

People couldn't believe that Michael was dead because there was no longer anything left of him upon which nature could take its course. This kind of death is so alien and rare that the only way of dealing with it is to imagine the impossibility of its occurrence. And if it did indeed take place, then it is not so different from destroying a Van Gogh at the Louvre.

Neda Agha-Soltan is dead because she lived her life with her body. Michael, on the other hand, was nothing but an image whose death could have been prevented by injecting it with some human blood.

[figure partialpage
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]

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Translated from the Arabic by Alaa Diab.

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

Sven Lütticken

Art and Thingness, Part III: The Heart of the Thing is the Thing We Don't Know

→ *Continued from "Art and Thingness, Part Two: Thingification" in issue 15.*

In Hans Haacke's pieces *Broken R.M...* and *Baudrichard's Ecstasy* from the late 1980s, Duchamp's readymades are subjected to transformations that highlight the problematic use of the readymade in the commodity art of the era: in the latter piece, a gilded urinal sits atop an ironing board; water is pumped through it from a bucket in a closed, self-referential loop. After Warhol's canny exacerbation of the emerging image of the commodity, and the focus on the "picture" in late-1970s Appropriation Art, the commodity art of the 1980s focused on objects once more, but this time on objects devoid of the Duchampian tension between sign and thing, between a utilitarian object and the meanings projected onto it; these objects were programmed from the beginning to signify, to create value through the theological whims of their designed interplay. While Haim Steinbach's shelves demonstrate this mechanism with considerable elegance, they remain in its thrall. Haacke's objectified comments on 1980s commodity art are fitting epitaphs for such an art of the instrumentalized readymade, and his body of work as a whole can be seen as a sustained attempt to think through the readymade's limitations as well as its consequences.

[figure a08288a3ed83d7c8196de1d371488f94.jpg
Hans Haacke, *Broken R.M.*, 1986

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In the 1920s, both Lukács in *History and Class Consciousness* and, slightly later, Heidegger in *Being and Time,* critiqued the subject-object dichotomy in modern philosophy.[1] Both authors attempted to develop an analysis of the complex situatedness of praxis in the world, but in Heidegger's case this praxis was a depoliticized and dehistoricized *Sorge*, a taking-care of being along the lines of the earth-bound farmer taking care of the *Scholle* (the earth shoal, a favorite term in reactionary and Nazi philosophy during the 1920s and 1930s). Heidegger recalled that the term *Ding* originally referred to a form of archaic assembly, and in recent years Bruno Latour has latched onto this genealogy to redefine things in terms of "matters of concern" rather than "matters of fact," as quasi-objects and quasi-subjects that fall between the two poles of the dichotomy.[2] As I have argued— *contra* Latour—this needs to be seen as a critical project *within* modernity that brings together thinkers and artists (and not only them, obviously) that would be *bien étonnés de se trouver ensemble.*

[figure 5ea553d12f96f6ccfd7c2eae9e900f88.jpg
Haim Steinbach, *Ultra Red No.1*, 1986.

]

Last year, in an exhibition that was part of a series of events on "social design," curator Claudia Banz combined

elements from the publications of Victor Papanek with a selection of multiples by Joseph Beuys.[3] Bringing together Papanek's designs for cheap and low-tech radios and televisions for use in third-world countries with works such as Beuys's *Capri Batterie* (1985) and *Das Wirtschaftswert-PRINZIP* (1981), the exhibition subtly shifted the perception of Beuys's works in particular. The works were displayed in the usual way, in display cases that tend to turn them into relics; yet the proximity of the radio and TV designs brought out aspects of these things that often remain dormant. Yes, the appropriated East German package of beans with its non-design has become a meta- and mega-fetish like so many other readymades, yet the constellation in which it has been placed opens up new connections, a new network of meaning. The *Capri Batterie*, like the 1974 *Telephon S-E* made from tin cans and wires, may be tied up with mystifying anthroposophical conceptions of energy and communication, but this combination emphasizes that it would be a mistake to see such Beuysian things purely as expressions of a private mythology. In a different field and in a different register from Papanek's work, they too are counter-commodities—and while it would be a mistake to lose sight of their compromised status, it would be an even bigger one to be content with that observation.

[figure 05b4a1323647be11c7c2e35b7defe142.jpg
From left: illustration in Victor Papanek, *Design for the Real World*. 2nd edition, p. 225; Joseph Beuys, *Telephon S-E, 1974*, Courtesy Edition Schellmann, München-New York © VG Bild-Kunst, Bonn 2008.

]

Even if we were to disregard Beuys as regressive and unmodern, many of the 1960s and 1970s practices that are most steeped in the tradition of critical theory that Latour seeks to toss into the dustbin of history show that a critique of commodification is something rather different from a "ceaseless, even maniacal purification." Martha Rosler's various versions of her *Garage Sale* piece involve her mimicking this American suburban version of the Surrealists's flea market; having been advertised in art and non-art media, it is a more or less normal garage sale to some, and a performance to others. However, Rosler noted that the setting transformed even the art crowd into a posse of bargain hunters, who did not pay that much attention to the structure of the space, with odd and personal objects tucked away in the outer corners, or to the slide show and sound elements. For a 1977 version, Rosler assumed the persona of a Southern Californian mother with "roots in the counterculture," who on an audiotape that played in the place mused on the value and function of things: "What is the value of a thing? What makes me want it? . . . I paid money for these things—is there a chance to recuperate some of my investment by selling them to you? . . . Why not give it all away?" The woman goes on to quote Marx on commodity fetishism and to wonder if "you [will] judge me by the things I'm selling."[4]

In such a work, the object is placed in a network that is social and political, not merely one of signs. Semiosis is always a social and political process. There is a diagrammatic dimension to such a piece, as there is, in different ways, to many works of Allan Sekula or Hans Haacke. If the diagram in Rosler's piece is one that primarily concerns the circulation of objects in suburban family life, a number of Haacke's works contrast the use of corporations's logos in the context of art spaces, where they become disembodied signs, with those corporations's exploitation of labor or involvement in authoritarian or racist regimes; Sekula's *Fish Story* and related projects chart the largely unseen trajectories of commodities and workers on and near the oceans. Things and people. These practices, in particular those of Haacke and Rosler, spring from a critical reading of both the Duchampian heritage and the Constructivist project, which was being excavated in the same period by art historians, critics, activists, and artists. In their reading of these two genealogies, these artists recover some of the impetus behind the Constructivist/Productivist attempt to redefine the thing.

[figure c5d8a40523549e54cf9a5c5973dab5b4.jpg
Sean Snyder, *Index*, 2009, installation view at ICA, London. Photo: Marcus J. Leith.

]

A diagrammatic impulse, an attempt to trace the trajectories of people and things, can also be seen in recent work such as Sean Snyder's *Untitled (Archive Iraq)* (2003–2005) and related pieces, tracking the circulation of various types of commodity in the contested terrains of Iraq, Afghanistan, and elsewhere. When Snyder, in his photo pieces and films, zooms in on Fanta cans or Mars bars, on Casio watches or Sony cameras, the "social relations" between these commodities are not limited to the fetishistic coded differences celebrated by commodity art.

Filmic montage can be one tool for keeping track of things, of comparing different modes of production and distribution. In this respect, Allan Sekula's films and Harun Farocki's installation *Vergleich über ein Drittes (Comparison via a Third)* (2007) are strong demonstrations of the possibilities of filmic means—and in Farocki's case, of their use in multi-channel video installations. A diagrammatic impulse can also be discerned in such filmic pieces; but here, as in the case of Snyder's *Untitled (Archive Iraq)*, the aim is not to strive for some suggestion of complete transparency that would reduce objects to geometric points for a sovereign subject to grasp at a glance. Rather, the objects and subjects are placed in a jumbled constellation in which they become problematic, questionable things and people. Of course, the artificial limitations on the availability of film and video pieces in the

contemporary art economy make such pieces highly questionable things in their own right, and crucial projects such as Snyder's *Index,* which involves the digitization and uploading of the artist's archive, address the limitations of the dominant form of media objecthood.

[figure 76930c858921745897c79b7e619877ef.jpg
Harun Farocki, *Comparison Via a Third [Vergleich über ein Drittes],* 2007, 16 mm film, color, sound, 24min.

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The limitations imposed on the circulation of commodities by intellectual property law are also scrutinized in a number of projects by Superflex—commodities that include, in their current project at the Van Abbemuseum, a wall piece by Sol LeWitt. In a less interventionist and (in the military sense of the term) offensive way than Superflex **,** Agency/Kobe Matthys charts the legal battles waged over the use of objects, images, and programs by collecting, investigating, and exhibiting specific things. A recent installation in Anselm Franke's "Animism" exhibition at Extra City in Antwerp contained a number of things that have been subject to litigation, as instances in which human authorship is thrown into question because of the role played by the non-human (technological, animal), with items ranging from bingo cards to a video game and a German TV broadcast of a circus act with elephants. Exhibited in a space lined with crates containing many more items, the space seemed to channel Surrealism via Mark Dion. Some of the things on display had an anachronistic quaintness to them, yet Matthys' classified readymades go beyond the conventional exacerbation of the commodity's theological (or animist) whims.

There are, of course, other important examples of practices that seek to push the work of art to a point where it reveals itself to be a special category of thing that reflects (on) the state of things. Here one may think of Michael Cataloi and Nils Norman's "University of Trash" project, with its investigation into various alternative economies and social structures proposed in the 1960s and 1970s, and of Ashley Hunt and Taisha Paggett's project about the garment industry and its workers, with its charting of the movements of contemporary products across the globe. Some of these projects and practices may be more successful than others, but an important characteristic that they share is that their embrace of the work of art's "thingified" status is not a capitulation, an assimilation of the work of art to the dreaded world of hat racks and other arbitrary objects. Rather, such projects are interventions into our society's production of (in)visibility. If anything, they can more properly lay claim to continuing the project of modern aesthetics than those intent on erecting a wall around the work of art; after all, from Schiller and the Jena Romantics onwards, the modern aesthetic project was expansive, aimed at intervening in the "art of living."[5]

[figure 134d288c290765685872c1cf85a25ecb.jpg
Agency, Assembly (Animism), 1992, various media. Photo: Bram Goots.
]

However, avant-garde attempts to abandon autonomous art in favor of a complete integration of art and life were as misjudged by critics as modernist *rappels à l'ordre* that limited art to reflecting on the unique properties of its mediums, or later attempts to limit Conceptual art to a series of proposals about its own status as art and nothing else.[6] Even Constructivist forays into production in the early 1920s depended on a specialist sphere of practice and discourse whose confines they sought to escape—a sphere that would soon be destroyed by Stalin. On the other hand, a properly reflexive work of art *can never be only* about its status as art, about "art itself." Since art's apparent autonomy is socially conditioned, the obverse of its heteronomous inscription in a global capitalist economy that penetrates into ever more realms of life and parts of the planet, the work of art's self-reflection is a sham it if is not potentially about everything, and every thing.

X

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

1
Georg Lukács, preface to *History and Class Consciousness: Studies in Marxist Dialectics* (1923), trans. Rodney Livingstone (London: Merlin Press, 1971), xxii. Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time* , trans. Joan Stambaugh (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1996), 59.

2
Bruno Latour, "From Realpolitik to Dingpolitik or How to Make Things Public," in *Making Things Public: Atmospheres of Democracy* , eds. Bruno Latour and Peter Weibel (Karlsruhe/Cambridge, MA/London: ZKM/MIT Press, 2005), 23.

3
"Design for The Real World," Centraal Museum Utrecht, October 4, 2009 – February 7, 2010 (part of Utrecht Manifest 2009, Biennial for Social Design). The designs in question are illustrated in Victor Papanek, *Design for the Real World* , 2nd ed. (London: Thames & Hudson, 1985), 81–83, 225–226.

4
Martha Rosler, "Traveling Garage Sale" (1977), in *Martha Rosler: Positions in the Life World* , ed. Ca therine de Zegher (Cambridge MA/London: MIT Press, 1998, unpaginated section.

5
See Jacques Rancière, "The Aesthetic Revolution and Its Outcomes," in *New Left Review* 14 (March–April 2002), http://www.newleftreview.org/?view=2383 . Rancière's writings on the modern "aesthetic regime of art" have become almost suspiciously popular in the art world; when Rancière writes that "Aesthetic art promises a political accomplishment that it cannot satisfy, and thrives on that ambiguity," this seems to generate a pleasant vagueness, legitimizing anything and everything. However, one could and should in fact see it as an incentive to examine possible correspondences and points of connection, however fraught with difficulty, between art and different (especially political) interventions in the sensible realm.

6
Writing about the conceptual essay-as-a-work-of-art, Jeff Wall argues that it can only be about its own status as an artistic *kropsla* ; it can't be about any other subject. Jeff Wall, "Introduction: Partially Reflective Mirror Writing," in *Two-Way Mirror Power: Selected Writings by Dan Graham on His Art* , ed. Al exander Alberro (Cambridge, MA/London: MIT Press, 1999), xv.

→ *Continued from "Innovative Forms of Archives, Part One: Exhibitions, Events, Books, Museums, and Lia Perjovschi's Contemporary Art Archive" in issue 13.*

Historiography, as Igor Zabel wrote, never was and never is a neutral and objective activity:

> It is always a construction of an image of an historical period or development . . . This construction plays a specific role in the symbolic and ideological systems, throughout which various systems of power manifest themselves on the level of public consciousness. The fields of culture and art, thus art and cultural history, are those spheres where it becomes evident how the systems of power function symbolically. They namely construct stories and development systems and, simultaneously, present them as "objective" facts. Those viewpoints, that are incompatible with such constructions, are, on the other hand, marginalised, hidden or excluded."[1]

Nataša Petrešin-Bachelez

Innovative Forms of Archives, Part Two: IRWIN's East Art Map and Tamás St. Auby's Portable Intelligence Increase Museum

An awareness of the conditions and manipulations involved in the emergence of documents or works of art, which are then officially presented as "objective facts," offers a means of contextualizing the ideas and knowledge that we inherit through education and society at large. Following Lia Perjovschi's mapping of what a subjective art history can accomplish, two other projects offer some perspective on expanding archives and contest the hardening of grand (art) historical narratives imposed by either "colonizers" from Western Europe and the U.S. (in the case of the group IRWIN) or "colonized" local art historians (in the case of Tamás St. Auby). For the past decade, in the context of an encounter between postcolonial and postcommunist studies, the terms of colonization—its forking historical paths, official and unofficial documents, events, and stories—have been widely discussed within Eastern European theoretical discourse. In a recent text about the post-bipolar condition of the former Eastern Bloc, Vit Havránek explains how there existed a double colonization in the Eastern European states outside the Soviet Union:

> Soviet executive colonial power manifested itself across the Eastern Bloc unevenly, because it colonized countries not through direct governance, but by establishing, controlling and overseeing national governments which were subordinated to the centre in differing degrees. The "paternal nation," along with the state apparatuses of each country, administered and adapted the colonial ideology locally according to its own needs and local conditions, translating its local languages into local laws and norms . . . In the satellite states, people were colonized twice—first, as historical victims of the post-war world

> which fell to their liberators, divested of their existing state administrations and forcibly oriented toward the historically higher-ranking ideology of communism (horizontally) and, second, by means of their own communist agitators and governments in whose hands they were subjected to a differentiated national self-colonisation (vertically).[2]

In opposition to the most common symptom of the colonized—the belatedness with which one's own culture projects itself as an echo of the grand narratives—these particular artistic engagements are witnesses furthermore to the importance of documenting and disseminating the neglected chapters of art history. It might seem that the role of the artist and that of the museum have changed places. The objective of this (self-)historicizing artistic strategy is to record the parallel histories that are subjectively preserved and exist as the fragments of memories and semi-forgotten oral traditions. In her seminal essay on "interrupted histories," Zdenka Badovinac explains that the artists thus act as ethnologists or archivists of their own and other artists' projects that were marginalized by local politics and remained invisible in the context of international art.[3] This informal historicization is, in Badovinac's view, the point at which the Other resists its former status as an object of observation, classification, and subordination to the modernizing process, transforming instead into an "active Other."

[figure partialpage
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IRWIN, *NSK Embassy Moscow*, 1992; Photo: Jože Suhadolnik, 2005.]

IRWIN and East Art Map

Never pretending that theirs was the ultimate story, the group IRWIN however felt itself to be at the right place at the right time to provide a research tool in the form of the ongoing project *East Art Map*, on which a multiplicity of subjective views and voices of different generations and opposing aesthetic views could be expanded into an art historical alternative. Already in the late 1980s the newly established IRWIN group defined its program, whose governing principles were "retro-principle," emphatic eclecticism, and assertion of nationality and national culture. Retro-principle is defined not as a style or trend, but rather a conceptual principle, a particular way to behave and act. In a diagram created in 2003 IRWIN claimed the retro-principle to be the ultimate method of working, by way of constructing context. The principle involves three fields of interest in which IRWIN performs its artistic activities: "geopolitics" (projects like *NSK Embassy Moscow*, *Transnacionala*, *East Art Map*), "politics of the artificial person" (transformation of the collective Neue Slowenische Kunst, which IRWIN co-founded, *State-in-time*, *Retroavantgarde—Ready-made avant-garde* and other projects), and "instrumental politics" (IRWIN's advisory work on several international collections, *East Art Map*).

When the transitional period began in the 1990s and the doors to the Western art establishment (meaning the prospect of international acclaim) were opened, IRWIN, in opposition to most, did not attempt to melt into the Western art system, but decided to continue working within their own cultural context. The basic premise was that the conditions under which artists in the East worked represented the only real capital available to them after the changes in the early 1990s. Therefore IRWIN turned to the East in order to compare their experiences with those of other artists working in the West. Based on this fundamental distinction, IRWIN labeled the artistic production of the latter "Eastern Modernism." The term embodied a paradoxical stance towards the internationalizing and globalizing institution of (Western) modernism and represented IRWIN's attempt to actively intervene in the grand narratives of a Western-dominated art history; it is in this spirit that they construed a fictive art movement for the geographic space of Yugoslavia, called "retroavantgarde" or "retrogarde." Vit Havránek writes about a certain

> compensatory effect which manifested itself promptly after 1989 in the satellite countries [which] was an immediate rejection of a common ideological (non)time as a colonial instrument of governance along with the need for the "return" of national temporalities to that of Western history. This process has run a very paradoxical course; the West demanded the integration of "Eastern art" as a homogenous temporality into the universal time of the First World—and continues to do so to this day, one might say.[4]

[figure fullpage
31ef764932841a475ab8778a18dac241.jpg
Irwin, *Retroavantgarda*, 325 x 600 cm, mixed media, 2000; Theoretician: Marina Gržinić; Including the works: Irwin, *Was ist Kunst*, (1984 - 1998); Dimitrij Bašićević Mangelos, *Tabula rasa, m. 5*, 1951-1956; Avgust Cernigoj, *Construction*, 1924; Braco Dimitrijević, *Triptychos Post Historicus*, 1985 (reproduction); Laibach, *Ausstellung Laibach Kunst*, 1983 (exhibition poster); Kasimir Malevich *(Belgrade)*, Paintings, 1985; Gledališče Sester Scipion Nasice, *Krst pod Triglavom (Baptism under the Triglav)*, 1985; Jossip Seissel, *Balkanite Stand at Attention*, 1922 (reproduction); Mladen Stilinović, *Exploitation of the Dead*, 1980.

]

With the aim of unmasking the subjective construction of that very art history that was imposing its canons and colonizing other parts of the (Second and Third) World, IRWIN, together with their long-term collaborator and writer Eda Cufer, wrote a manifesto, *The Ear Behind the Painting* (1990):

> During the Cold War, numerous artists emigrated to the West, and the false conviction that modern art, no matter whether coming from the East or from the West, is so universal as to be classified under a common name: the current –ism, appeared to be very common . . . The different contexts in which the Western and the Eastern experiments were carried out deprived modern art of its international character . . . With Eastern time preserved in the past and Western time stopped in the present, modern art lost its driving element—the future . . . The name of Eastern art is Eastern Modernism. The name of its method is retrogardism.[5]

IRWIN, in collaboration with the philosopher Marina Gržinić, refers to the master narrative of modernism, Alfred H. Barr's *Diagram of Stylistic Evolution from 1890 until 1935*, which Barr, founding director of New York's MoMA, developed in 1936 as a genealogical family tree of the European avant-garde movements as precursors of the abstract art of modernism; in so doing, IRWIN

> with a similarly arrogant attitude . . . transfers this scheme onto Yugoslavia, here in the form of a reversed genealogy of the "retroavantgarde," which extends from the neo-avantgarde of the present back to the period of the historical avant-garde. The installation Retroavantgarde . . . is both an independent work of art and a pragmatic, cartographic instrument . . . By postulating the existence of a fictive Yugoslavian retro-avant-garde, IRWIN (re)constructs and posits a modernism intrinsic to Eastern Europe. This "Eastern Modernism" however, turns out to be just as construed, fictive, and artificial as its Western counterpart.[6]

In a painting—and later in an installation that included original works by, among others, Mangelos, Mladen Stilinović, Braco Dimitrijević, Kasimir Malevich, and IRWIN—the artists incorporated their heroes and influences into an organized system. Moreover, as mentioned above, to Western art historians Eastern Europe has usually been considered a region where belated influences from the West were at the foundation of its own art history, and where reproductions or copies of masterpieces were seen more often than originals.[7]

[figure splitpage
26435315f1e8e1400e5019f2b2e022d0.jpg
IRWIN in collaboration with Michael Benson, Alexander Brener, Eda Cufer, Vadim Fishkin and Yuri Leiderman, *Transnacionala, A Journey from the East to the West*, 1994.

]

The *East Art Map*, an ongoing project started in 2002, gave rise to several exhibitions and a book published in 2006 by Afterall Press in London. In 2002 IRWIN invited twenty-three curators, critics, and art historians from Central and Eastern Europe (among them Iara Boubnova, Ekaterina Degot, Marina Gržinić, Elona Lubyte, Suzana Milevska, Viktor Misiano, Edi Muka, Ana Peraica, Piotr Piotrowski, and Igor Zabel) to each select ten artists from their respective local contexts that they considered the most crucial for the development of contemporary art in Eastern Europe. "The history of art is a history of friendship," claims IRWIN in the first part of the *East Art Map* project, based on the axiom that "history is not given," that one has to actively intervene in history's construction. The aim of this ongoing project is to show the art of geographical Eastern Europe as a unified whole, outside any national frameworks. IRWIN writes that:

> In Eastern Europe there exists as a rule no transparent structures in which those events, artifacts, and artists that are significant to the history of art have been organized into a referential system accepted and respected outside the borders of a particular country. Instead, we encounter systems that are closed within national borders, whole series of stories and legends about art and artists who were opposed to this official art world. But written records about the latter are few and fragmented. Comparisons with contemporary Western art and artists are extremely rare. A system fragmented to such an extent . . . prevents any serious possibility of comprehending the art created during socialist times as a whole. Secondly, it represents a huge problem for artists who, apart from lacking any solid support . . . are compelled for the same reason to steer between the local and international art systems. And thirdly, this blocks communication among artists, critics, and theoreticians from these countries.

Understanding history as the ultimate context, IRWIN decided to "democratize" its construction. Thus, following the official selection of the invited professionals, IRWIN established an online portal, where anyone who is interested could add proposals or suggest substitutions within the established *East Art Map*.[8] The invitation to do so sounds even pathetic: "History is not given, please help construct it!" However, sharing the responsibility by proposing a co-authored historiography is a democratic

gesture in itself. This portal is now an archive-in-progress for the forthcoming proposals and discussions about the compiled documentation. Another level of the project is represented by its installations in the gallery contexts that offer a possibility to browse through an archive of links, digitalized images, and a transparent system of selections compiled by the invited professionals. These installations are IRWIN's artworks, as is, in its potential reading, the publication itself.

Tamás St. Auby and Portable Intelligence Increase Museum

The efforts of Tamás St. Auby (born in 1944, and also known as Tamás Szentjóby, Stjauby, Emmy Grant, St. Aubsky, and T. Taub) to correct and insert his own knowledge of works of art and art movements into the official local art history can be observed analogously to Lia Perjovschi's appraisal of subjectivity as the axiomatic viewpoint. This major conceptual and political artist, who represents one of the most radical art positions within the Hungarian neo-avant-garde, has translated numerous Fluxus texts and was a co-organizer of the first happening in Hungary. In 1968 St. Auby founded the International Parallel Union of Telecommunications (IPUT), through which he, as the organization's superintendent, has since performed part of his activities under the motto "All prohibited is art. Be prohibited!" In the early 1970s he developed the notion of the artist's strike (which we encounter in 1979 in Eastern Europe with the Serbian artist Goran Djordjević and his attempt to organize an art strike on an international level) as a creative decision, which was St. Auby's response to being strictly censored by the Hungarian authorities and arrested in 1974 due to his participation in the samizdat literature movement; a year later he was forced to leave his country. Only in the early 1990s was he able to return to Budapest.

Criticizing the official Hungarian "art historical falsification," in 2003 St. Auby created in the Dorottya Gallery in Budapest the interactive installation *Portable Intelligence Increase Museum*: his own database of artists working in Hungary outside and against the oppressive government system that, together with his colleagues belonging to the Neo-Socialist Realist International Parallel Union of Telecommunications' Global Contra-Art-History-Falsifiers Front, he compiled as the true record of the "Pop Art, Conceptual Art and Actionism in Hungary during the '60s," as the project's subtitle has it. According to its authors, it spans a period between 1956 and 1976. This continuously expanding multimedia archive is made up of a walk-through wooden construction of tables and walls, and contains about seventy multiples by roughly seventy artists as well as the digitalized, projected reproductions of more than 1,100 works in all kinds of formats (paintings, photos, sculptures, objects, films, videos, poems, texts, documents). With Marcel Duchamp's archival and autonomous *Boîte-en-valise* in mind, we can observe the derivation of the *Portable Museum*'s easily mountable structure. This counter-art-historical project was conceived with the intention of exposing the flaws in official accounts of Hungarian art of the 1960s and '70s by noting that the important subversive practices of the neo-avant-garde were left out of the influential publication *The Primary Documents* and exhibitions like "Aspects/Positions."[9] In an openly confrontational tone, St. Auby states that the art produced after the 1950s in Hungary that developed in synchrony with international trends and other suppressed experiments within Eastern Europe was not properly revealed to the public. He writes that:

> It might have been covered had Hungarian art historians and curators taken upon themselves the task of informing the unaware public about domestic and foreign developments before and after the 1989 coup. The era's Hungarian artistic developments aren't worked up, appreciated, archived or popularized. As a consequence, the artistic common knowledge is truncated and mutilated.[10]

In a similar fashion to IRWIN, St. Auby makes an artistic intervention into the constitutive history of contemporary art, a constructive proposal that is no less an ambitious effort at self-institutionalization.

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Tamás St. Auby, *Retrospective exhibition, Club of Young Artists*, 1975; Photos and copyright: Tamás St. Auby.

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Tamas St. Auby, Expulsion Exercise Punishment preventive Autotherapy.

X

→ *"Innovative Forms of Archives" will continue in "Part Three, Vyacheslav Akhunov's "1 m2," and Walid Raad's "A History of Modern and Contemporary Arab Art: Part I_Chapter 1: Beirut (1992–2005)."*

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1
Igor Zabel, "Strategija zgodovinopisja," in Boris Groys, *Celostna umetnina Stalin* (Ljubljana: Založba/*cf, 1999), 147.

2
Havránek refers to "self-colonization," which is known from texts by Alexander Kiossev, but uses it in a different sense—people do not colonize unconsciously; instead, they consciously adapt the colonizer's ideology to local circumstances. See Vit Havránek, "The Post-Bipolar Order and the Status of Public and Private under Communism," in *ThePromises of the Past* , ed. Christine Macel and Nataša Petrešin-Bachelez (Paris: Centre Pompidou; Zürich: JRP – Ringier, 2010), 26.

3
Zdenka Badovinac, "Interrupted Histories," in *Prekinjene zgodovine / Interrupted Histories* , ed. Zdenka Badovinac et al. (Ljubljana: Museum of Modern Art, 2006), unpaginated.

4
Havránek, "The Post-Bipolar Order," 27.

5
Inke Arns, ed., *Irwin: Retroprincip, 1983–2003* (Frankfurt am Main: Revolver / Archiv für aktuelle Kunst, 2003), 233.

6
Inke Arns, "Irwin Navigator: Retroprincip 1983–2003," in Inke Arns, *Irwin*, 14.

7
The Belgrade Kasimir Malevich is among those behind belongs to a series of authorless projects originating fromin the Southe-Eastern Europe, active fromstarting in the early 1980s until and continuing today. Among these These projects are include *Salon de Fleurus*, New York, a performance by Walter Benjamin in Ljubljana in 1986,Museum of American Art in Berlin, etc. As Marina Gržinić writes: "Inthe projects of copying from the 1980s in ex-Yugoslavia the real artist'ssignature is missing and even some of the "historical" facts are distorted(dates, places). From my point of view, the production of copies and the reconstructionof projects from the avant-garde art period in post-Socialism had a directeffect on art perceived as "Institution" and against "History," which was (andis still?) completely totalised in post-Socialism." Marina Gržinić. "The Retro-Avant Garde Movement In The Ex-Yugoslav Territory Or *Mapping Post-Socialism* ,"in: Inke Arns, *Iop.cit., p.rwin,* 220. More about these projects in the following part of this very article.

8
See *East Art Map*.

9
Primary Documents. A Sourcebook for Eastern and Central European Art since the 1950s , ed. Laura Hoptman and Tomáš Pospiszyl (New York: The Museum of Modern Art, 2002). The exhibition " *Aspects/ Positions: 50 Years* of Art in Central Europe, 1949–1999" was chief-curated by Lorand Hegyi with many co-curators from the respective countries. The exhibition was on view at the Museum Moderner Kunst Stiftung *Ludwig* in Vienna in 1999 and at the Fundació Joan Miró in Barcelona in 2000.

10
Tamás St. Auby, "Portable I2 Museum – Pop Art, Conceptual Art and Actionism in Hungary during the '60s (1956–1976)," document sent to the author by the artist in 2008.

Dieter Roelstraete

(Jena Revisited) Ten Tentative Tenets

> Why does almost everything seem to me like its own parody?
>
> —Adrian Leverkühn in Thomas Mann's *Doctor Faustus*

1. The Evanescent

The "Floating World" or "Ukiyo" is the name commonly given to the demimonde of nocturnal pleasures that flourished in Edo-period Japan (1603–1868), specifically in Tokyo's historic red-light district of Yoshiwara; this era is best remembered today for the flowering of the art of woodblock prints ("ukiyo-e") that depict various aspects of the Floating World's daily life, such as kabuki theatre, sumo wrestling, and the secretive world of geishas and courtesans. The Floating World derives it name from its fascination with all things fleeting and evanescent: outward beauty, "singing songs and drinking wine," superficial entertainments, sexual pleasure. Some ukiyo-e artists' concentration on the latter category in particular (erotic woodblock prints or "shunga") has led some commentators to characterize this dimension of Edo culture as an early exercise in creating a "pornotopia"—an idealized, eroticized world of sexual fantasy that exists parallel to the world of mundane contemporary concerns.[1]

For this reason alone—the relentless pornofication of all aspects of everyday life—it is tempting to call our contemporary world a "floating" one, much like that of Hiroshige's or Hokusai's Japan. Indeed, if today we find it increasingly difficult to define or describe both the era and the world we live in, if a sense of unmooring, drift, directionlessness, and general confusion seems to have grabbed a stifling hold of our imagination in all its attempts to map the contemporary life-world, this is probably a side effect of our living in a twenty-first-century "floating world"—one that is not only ruled by the tyranny of superficial entertainments (to which most art now is happy to belong), but one that is also radically—and no longer just hopefully—afloat.

[figure partialpage
a7785ccaf677752279f563dfa3dee151.jpg
Hiroshi Sugimoto, *Ligurian Sea, Saviore*, 1993. Gelatin silver print, 47 x 58 3/4"]

2. The Oceanic

In a recent conversation with a writing and curating colleague, we both agreed that a strange, and strangely immobilizing, *mist* had descended upon our little pocket of this world—a fog seemed to have enveloped the hearts and minds of those customarily expected to both shape

the present (if only in theory) and imagine the future (if only in practice). The resulting experience of disorientation is nothing new, of course, but perhaps the thickness of this particular miasma is such that *we really have no idea where we're going anymore*. Although this can probably be proven to have good (or at least aesthetically pleasing) effects in some fucked-up way or other, for now we must admit that it is mostly a *bad thing*.

This foggy state of affairs made us think of the work of Japanese artist Hiroshi Sugimoto, the still-active photographer of (mostly mist-shrouded) seascapes. We were both surprised to discover how Sugimoto suddenly emerged as being so truly contemporary, a deft chronicler of a mental state in and of the Now—a new "oceanic" feeling.[2]

[figure partialpage
d5a4f4f2ddfbcf3e73471877268f762d.jpg
From left: poster for *The Fog*, 1980, Directed by John Carpenter; poster for *The Fog*, 2005, Directed by Rupert Wainwright.]

3. The Vertiginous

Indeed, one would be hard-pressed to call the aforementioned experience of "drift" or "unmooredness" truly novel. Leo Charney, a film theorist at the University of New Mexico, has authored a study titled *Empty Moments* in which he calls drift *the* defining quality of modernity—the experience of being unable to locate a stable sense of the present:

If the philosophy and criticism of modernity were preoccupied with the loss of presence, where can we go conceptually after acknowledging that presence irrevocably becomes absence? Once we have recognized that presence cannot coincide with itself, that sensation and cognition are always already alienated, that the body lives in self-segregation, are we left with no epistemological alternatives other than to repeat these premises again and again like a mantra? Is this all there is to say about the absence of presence as an experiential condition of modernity? As each present moment is remorselessly evacuated and deferred into the future, it opens up an empty space, an interval, that takes the place of a stable present. This potentially wasted space provides an opening to drift, to put the empty present to work not as a self-present identity or a self-present body but as a drift, an ungovernable, mercurial activity that takes empty presence for granted while maneuvering within and around it.[3]

Thus far Charney's *modern* view of drift as a site of great potential appears akin to Adorno's claim for vertiginousness, but the former's emphasis on movement in this brief characterization will already have signaled its massive difference from today's drifting into the thickening fog of the here and now: no one would use the words "mercurial," "activity," or "maneuvering" to describe the total paralysis felt in the face of the present; today's drift, the feeling of being trapped in one of Sugimoto's horizonless seascapes, is anything but an ungovernable activity—it is itself the governing force, the rule rather than a riot of exceptions that challenge it. Drifting clouds no longer figure as the fleeting ciphers of a utopian weightlessness; they now weigh down upon us in turn, immobilizing us with the sheer volume of what was once casually called a swarm of "floating signifiers," rendering everything around us opaque rather than transparent, invisible rather than visible: a quagmire rather than a "floating world."

[figure splitpage
635340acb25bb80f6d0800dfb3cdecad.jpg
From left: Poster for the 2007 film *The Mist*; cover of Stephen King's *The Mist*.]

4. The Olympian

The Wanderer Above the Mists is undoubtedly Caspar David Friedrich's most famous painting, and probably also the one painting that comes closest to defining or embodying the (original) Romantic spirit in European culture. It graces countless book covers on or related to the subject of Romanticism, from Paul Johnson's *Birth of the Modern* (on the Right) to Terry Eagleton's *Ideology of the Aesthetic* (on the Left) and all the Nietzsches and Schopenhauers in between, and it also appears on many a classical music album cover (Beethoven, Schubert, Schumann). The identity of the wanderer imperiously looking down upon a sea of clouds—a singular mark of his individuality—is shrouded in historical mystery, as is the exact location of this primal scene of man's showdown with the sublime. But a view from or towards Jena it is not—that would have been an unobstructed one, showing the Thuringian town basking in the soft late-afternoon light of unclouded reason.[4]

Today, we are all wanderers *in* the mist: Friedrich's Olympian viewpoint appears to have been irretrievably lost. And this experience (of loss, of submersion) has, of course, much aesthetic potential of its own—its allure is all too well known.

[figure partialpage
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]

5. The Reticular

To be in the midst of things, or to be engulfed by them: for some twenty years now (that is to say, since art became truly "contemporary"), "immersion" has been the object of a singularly powerful directive in art production. White

cubes have become black boxes, environments interactive, institutions self-critical, and aesthetics relational: art, in all these instances, has become that which surrounds us, a world unto itself as much as, if not more than, some-thing in this world alongside ourselves. (We rarely stand opposite things anymore, and when we do, the thing is mostly considered retrograde, if not a remnant of reaction, or else our position is thought of as such: the promotion of clear-cut subject-object relations in art is best left to historical museums.) This emergent rhetoric of emancipation through immersion is of course deeply linked to the rise of the *network* as the defining paradigm of a new economy rooted in information, immaterial labor, and the speedy transport of ideas.[5] "Connectivity" and "mobility" are the reticular paradigm's greatest assets, or at the very least constitute its grandest claims—but anyone who logs onto the internet, the paradigm's most successful and thorough incarnation, intuitively grasps the true meaning of the medium's steady transformation from a utopia of mobility to a dystopia of absolute immobility (though this last qualification seems to suggest that all immobility is innately evil, which it evidently isn't): in "entering" the network, he or she has just stepped into the same thickening fog that art does so well to sell back to us as the height of contemporary (syn)esthetic experience.

6. The Inflationary

In a previous essay for *e-flux journal*, I suggested that contemporary art and the contemporary art world may essentially be the same, and that that is not a good thing—not for art anyway (it is, conversely, a good thing for the art world—without a doubt).[6] Today, this confusion does not merely manifest itself in the profusion of writing that talks about the art *world* while deluding itself that it talks instead about *art* (mine could be called a case in point, but that is up to the reader to decide), it is also plainly manifest in the vast quantities of art made "about" the art world—an inflationary category that also includes most art-about-art (compare this with the hypertrophy of "referentiality" in contemporary art, as well as with the tiresome historical overestimation of "institutional critique")—and in the ubiquity of "immersion" as a theatrical (and not merely curatorial) strategy. To a certain extent, art's gradual obscuration by the art *world* is the natural consequence of the world's equally natural desire to be close to art, to become one with it (for it is most certainly a desirable *topos*): just like we can own art objects (even the most immaterial ones, even if they are only "ideas") but not art, so we can also inhabit the art world rather than art—but the distinction, no matter how crucial, obviously loses much of its significance when the *idea of the art world* starts to eclipse the *idea of art*, and all we are left with is the *system* rather than the *concept*. This is not a good idea: the concept must be saved from, and either protected or defended against, the system.

[figure splitpage
3f405435a1e9534d185cc83c40a5eb97.jpg
From left: Ann Veronica Janssens, MUHKA, 1997; Robert Morris *Steam*, 1967/2009.]

7. The Atmospheric

In that previous essay, I suggested that "art is the word, or, better still, the *name* of a great theme, of mankind's greatest idea, its single lasting sentence"—and who would disagree? In a lecture I attended in London a couple of months ago, Susan Buck-Morss noted how "horrors have been committed in the name of 'culture,' but never in the name of 'art.'" (Of course, Buck-Morss failed to acknowledge the horror of much art as such—perhaps the occasion was too solemn for such witticisms: she had been invited to talk about her new book *Hegel, Haiti, and Universal History*, published just months before the catastrophic earthquake hit the Caribbean nation.) For that reason alone, it is perhaps worth protecting art from the world that wants to encroach upon it and remake it in its own depressing image—from the pressure exerted by the myriad institutions that, as so many emblems of "culture," have sprung up around the *idea of art* to coalesce in the master institution that is the *art world*.

In 1964, Arthur C. Danto published an influential essay titled "The Art World," the first text to more or less theorize the phenomenon, in direct response to his epiphany-like experience of seeing Andy Warhol's Brillo boxes for the first time. In this essay, Danto famously coined the formula "an atmosphere of artistic theory, a knowledge of the history of art: an artworld" as an answer to the question as to what was needed to be able to see Warhol's installation of Brillo boxes as a work of art (as opposed to the original Brillo boxes, which were designed, ironically, by a middling Abstract Expressionist named James Harvey). That he should have used the term "atmosphere" to describe this system now seems uncannily prescient—a prophecy of enveloping mists, fogs, fuzzinesses, and other dematerializations to come, many of which were meant to assure his audience that the idea of *art* would not only collapse into an *art world*, but that this art world would in turn shrink further still to become equated—in a properly post-Warholian, post-Factory manner (the "factory" is Warhol's well-chosen name for his diminished view of the possibilities of the idea of the art world)—with an *art market*.

8. The Nebulous

One day, the epistemology of confusion and disorientation—along with its corollary theorizations of access and accessibility; complicity and connectivity; enfolding and implication; participation, porosity, and proximity; telephony and transience—will be remembered, less for its (worthwhile) contribution to the history of both

critical practice and theory than for the sophistication with which it helped to dismantle the grand *étatiste* apparatus of the dialectic. To no longer see anything clearly anymore means precisely this: to no longer perceive things as discrete entities and oppositional realities. And what has disappeared in the haze that fills today's art world (or that *is* today's art world), is both the work of art as such a discrete entity—it has long been eclipsed by a nebula named "practice"—and the idea of art as such an oppositional reality: sadly, neither are wholly "other" any longer.[7]

[figure partialpage
204b2a9763adef1af0ee29897521e510.jpg
Mina Totino, *Vancouver Clouds*, 2000-2003. Polaroid photographs, installation view.]

9. The Faustian

Some hundred and seven years ago, Thomas Mann published a novella titled *Tonio Kröger*, a lazily concealed exercise in fictionalized autobiography, as was so much of Mann's earlier (*Buddenbrooks*) and later (*Death in Venice*) work. It was in regard to this story that Georg Lukács, Mann's most formidable (but ultimately sympathetic) critic, identified the so-called "Tonio Kröger problem" as a motif recurring in much of the writer's literary output, from *Tonio Kröger* itself to *Doctor Faustus*. This problem concerns the artist's dilemma in facing the art/life dichotomy, which Tonio Kröger articulates most directly in his dialogue with his bohemian Russian artist friend Lisaveta Ivanovna (the same name, incidentally, that was given by Dostoyevsky to one of Raskolnikov's two victims in *Crime and Punishment*):

> There is no problem, indeed nothing in the world, that is more tormenting than the issue of art and its effect on humanity. . . . Life is the eternal antithesis to intellect and art . . . What would be a more lamentable sight than life trying its hand at art? . . . You have to be some kind of nonhuman and inhuman thing, you have to have a strangely distant and neutral relationship to the human, in order to be able, to be even tempted, to play it, to play with it, to depict it effectively and tastefully. . . . An artist stops being an artist the instant he becomes human and starts feeling.[8]

Mann would go on to develop this complex with chilling comprehensiveness in his *Doctor Faustus*, the definitive portrait of genius (that is to say, art) succumbing to the madness of an anti-humanist fascism—yet even then and there, the great writer acknowledged that he was essentially composing a self-portrait. Like Adrian Leverkühn, the central figure of Mann's awesome contribution to Germany's national myth of the Faustian bargain and "merely a younger brother of Tonio Kröger and [*Death in Venice*'s] Gustav von Aschenbach," Mann wonders aloud: "How then is it possible to create music of a really high artistic order without breaking free of one's time, without firmly and actively renouncing it?"[9] Leverkühn's answer is a resounding No ("It is not possible . . ."), and so he sets off, in splendid isolation,[10] to scale the dizzying heights of Caspar David Friedrich's ancient mountain range, where the air is rarefied and icily pure, and the view unimpeded. Yet once the wanderer has reached his final destination "above the mists," he finds that almost everything seems to him like its own parody—everything, that is, except his own remoteness: that which affords him a crystal-clear view of art *as opposed to the world*.

10. The Meteorological, The Ironic, and the Abysmal

"The atmospheric pressures of artistic theory," to paraphrase Danto, is an apt description, in its meteorological flair, of the rise of "theory" proper, and of the conditions that led to the demise of theory's symbolic obverse, the dialectic—the "grasping of opposites in their unity or of the positive in the negative."[11] The bracketed notion of "theory," of the kind so eagerly consumed in today's art world, is the discursive equivalent of the pervasive condition (itself oft-rendered in quasi-meteorological terms[12]) of immersion and relational implication; the theorist is, by the very definition of theory's resistance to definitions, always already embedded. For reasons that are in many ways too obvious to expound on here—suffice it to say that they are mainly connected to issues of power and the natural longing for what Adrian Leverkühn called the "cow warmth of music," as well as for the aforementioned "pornotopia"—this makes "theory" a lot more attractive than the dialectician's impossible insistence on the so-called illusion of critical distance, which, as an ideological fabrication of sorts, has indeed been the subject of much (equally ideological, yet no less deserved) bad press of late. (And for reasons that relate to the oppressive economic reality of the network—and of its governing logic, named globalization—it is clear why *distance* as such should be deemed both impossible and outdated, or why we would be discouraged to dream of Friedrich's detached Olympian viewpoint: there are no opportunities for shopping "there.") It is precisely along these journalistic lines that Fredric Jameson, in his bewildering *Valences of the Dialectic*, notes that "it is certain that today self-consciousness . . . has bad press; and that if we are tired enough of philosophies of consciousness, we are even more fatigued by their logical completion in reflexivities, self-knowing and self-aware lucidities, and ironies of all kinds."[13] And so we arrive at our final destination, namely Grand Hotel Irony, just down the road from Grand Hotel Abyss—and how very unsurprising that it should be bathing in the late-afternoon glow of "self-aware lucidities," which perhaps begs one question

above all: whence our fear of the light?

X

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1
See Timon Screech, *Sex and the Floating World: Erotic Images in Japan 1700–1820* (London: Reaktion Books, 2009).

2
I would like to thank Charles Esche for sharing his thoughts on mist (and Hiroshi Sugimoto) with me.

3
Leo Charney, *Empty Moments: Cinema, Modernity, and Drift* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 1998), 6–7.

4
See my "What is Not Contemporary Art? The View from Jena," *e-flux journal*, no. 11 (December 2009), http://pdf.e-flux-systems.com/journal/view/106 .

5
I am aware that I am talking, in part, about e-flux itself.

6
See note no. 4.

7
With the "work of art" I mean both the artwork that is the product or outcome of the production process, as well as this production process as such—work as *labor*.

8
Thomas Mann, *Tonio Kröger*, in *Death and Venice and Other Tales* , trans. Joachim Neugroschel (Harmondsworth, UK: Penguin Books, 1998), 187, 190, 193, 194.

9
Georg Lukács, "The Tragedy of Modern Art," in *Essays on Thomas Mann* (New York: The Universal Library, 1965), 65.

10
It is worth remembering here that none other than Theodor Adorno was Mann's primary source of musicological intelligence while composing *Doctor Faustus* during his Californian exile.

11
This is probably the most concise definition of a notoriously elusive, properly "dialectical" term—as found in Hegel's *Logik*. See *Hegel's Science of Logic* , trans. A. V. Miller (Amherst, NY: Prometheus Books, 1989), 56.

12
The single most powerful example of this condition remains for me Olafur Eliasson's *Weather Project* , "on view" at Tate Modern in the fall of 2003.

13
Fredric Jameson, *Valences of the Dialectic* (London and New York: Verso, 2009), 281.

Anton Vidokle

Art Without Artists?

It is clear that curatorial practice today goes well beyond mounting art exhibitions and caring for works of art. Curators do a lot more: they administer the experience of art by selecting what is made visible, contextualize and frame the production of artists, and oversee the distribution of production funds, fees, and prizes that artists compete for. Curators also court collectors, sponsors, and museum trustees, entertain corporate executives, and collaborate with the press, politicians, and government bureaucrats; in other words, they act as intermediaries between producers of art and the power structure of our society.

A press release for a recent conference on curatorial practice (at which I originally presented this paper) portrayed the figure of the curator as a knowledgeable and transparent agent moving between cultures and disciplines—a cultural producer par excellence. Furthermore, it seemed to suggest that art has become a subgenre of "the Curatorial":

> The conference "Cultures of the Curatorial" aims at positioning the Curatorial—a practice which goes decisively beyond the making of exhibitions—within a transdisciplinary and transcultural context and exploring it as a genuine method of generating, mediating and reflecting experience and knowledge. . . . Between art and science forms of practice, techniques, formats and aesthetics have emerged which can be subsumed under the notion of the "Curatorial"—not dissimilar to the functions of the concepts of the filmic or the literary.[1]

The necessity of going "beyond the making of exhibitions" should not become a justification for the work of curators to supersede the work of artists, nor a reinforcement of authorial claims that render artists and artworks merely actors and props for illustrating curatorial concepts. Movement in such a direction runs a serious risk of diminishing the space of art by undermining the agency of its producers: artists.[2]

[figure partialpage 0e54e70f7e6afe673582da03f99aa9c8.jpg Ferran Adrià, head chef at El Bulli restaurant.
]

1. Overreaching

Curatorial practice is predicated upon the existence of artistic production and has a supporting role in its activity. While artists may well produce art in the absence of curators, if no art is being produced, curators of contemporary art, at least, are out of a job. For this reason, attempts to curatorially "produce" art and artists by the

simple expedient of including them in a show often result in little more than a curatorial embarrassment, as in the famous case of Roger Buergel's inclusion of celebrity chef Ferran Adrià in the last Documenta.[3] While Adrià may indeed be a genius as a chef, his talent does not automatically turn his cooking into a new form of art, and neither did Buergel's framing of it. As Buergel said shortly before the opening of the show:

> I have invited Ferran Adrià because he has succeeded in generating his own aesthetic which has become something very influential within the international scene. This is what I am interested in and not whether people consider it to be art or not. It is important to say that artistic intelligence doesn't manifest itself in a particular medium, that art doesn't have to be identified simply with photography, sculpture and painting etc., or with cooking in general; however, under certain conditions, it can become art.[4]

All true up to a point, but what is that point? What are these "certain circumstances" that Buergel alludes to, under which cooking can come to be considered art? Part of the reason why the transformation of cooking into art did not take place at Documenta is that Adrià's cooking was not already anchored in the stream of commodities and careers constituted by the art system; in this regard it is interesting to note in comparison that Rirkrit Tiravanija cooks and is still recognized as an artist, though in reality he is only an average cook.[5] The extraordinary aspect of his cooking is not its quality as cooking, but rather its presentation by Tiravanija himself as *an artist who cooks*. It is important to distinguish between the artistic decision to include an activity within an artwork and the curatorial power to designate something as art or like art through its inclusion in an exhibition.

[figure fullpage e3e76e3484a87cb6caf8974fb31dd964.jpg

Graffiti on walls, pillars and railings of the São Paulo Biennial pavilion; Photo CHOQUE.
]

Another example of how curatorial power can be distinguished from artistic authorship by its legislative authority over what takes place within the space of art could be seen in the last São Paulo Biennial. Whereas, in a kind of grand authorial gesture meant as a comment on the crisis of biennials, the curators first announced that the entire biennial would be devoid of art, the concept later changed, presumably when this gesture was found to discourage professional visitors from attending. The void became merely partial: only the second floor of Oscar Niemeyer's biennial building was to remain empty, while the ground floor became a "public square," "opening itself up as the *ágora* in the tradition of the Greek polis, a space for meetings, confrontations, frictions."[6] However, when a group of local graffiti artists decided to intervene and tag the second floor, the curators reacted in a punitive, institutional fashion by having one of them arrested and then testifying against her in court, leading to her being jailed with common criminals for nearly two months and eventually sentenced to four years' probation.

This incident again brings to mind the work of Tiravanija, who also encouraged indeterminate, open spaces. At an opening of one of his early exhibitions in New York in the early 1990s, a belligerent visitor picked up some of the raw eggs Tiravanija was intending to cook with, and proceeded to smash them against the gallery's walls. But in this situation, no one was punished, or even asked to stop and leave. This negative action was allowed to run its course, just as any other activity in the space of Tiravanija's artwork, and this person eventually stopped and left the gallery.

Yet another example of such a tendency is the "Curating Degree Zero Archive," a traveling exhibition of "curatorial research" designed as a kind of artistic installation. Conceived by curators, the exhibition circulates through a network of public art institutions largely run by curators. The issue is not whether curators should have archives or open them to others, or to what degree this is interesting or not; rather, the question concerns whether the people in charge of administering exhibitions of art should be using the spaces and funding available for art to exhibit their own reading lists, references, and sources as a kind of artwork. Even more ludicrous is the fact that the dissolution of the self-contained (autonomous) artwork is cited as a justification for supplanting the work of artists in the museum altogether, as shown on the website of this curatorial project:

> Archives have become an increasingly common practice in the art world since the 1960s. On the one hand, there are archives founded by artists or collectors; on the other, a more recent development, there are those founded by curators, who sought to make their collections of materials accessible and make their selection criteria public. That desire may have arisen from the dissolution of the notion of the self-contained artwork, which has been eclipsed by a contingent art object that makes a new form of cultural memory necessary and always contains a note of protest and a critique of museum practices.[7]

[figure 2fca6f71f69ceb7f809120b131b910b0.jpg
Rirkit Tiravanija, *Untitled (Free)*, 1992, 303 Gallery, NY.]

2. The Job

Curatorial work is a profession, and people working in the field are not free agents but are rather employed to perform a task on behalf of an institution or a client. It's a job, both for those affiliated with institutions and for so-called independent curators. With the job come institutional power, a degree of security, and a mandate for a certain range of activity, which may involve a certain sense of institutional authorship, but emphatically, to my mind, does not include artistic claim to the artwork on which this activity is predicated.

While some artists occasionally do work as curators, it's important to acknowledge that the relationship between artists and curators is structurally somewhat like the relationship between workforce and management: like the workers, most artists suspect that their "supervisors," the curators, do not really understand the art, that they are controlling, egocentric, and ignorant, and are mismanaging the (art) factory and mistreating the producers (something like the scene from Godard's sausage factory in *Tout va bien*). Yet there is real resentment out there, not very different from the feelings artists harbored towards art critics in the 1960s and '70s. Many artists—from extremely established artists to younger practitioners new to the field of art—feel that curatorial power and arrogance are out of control.

[figure c3c9adf666521a312ee56dda77805842.jpg
Filmstill from *Tout va bien*, directed by Jean-Luc Godard and Jean-Pierre Gorin, 1972.

]

For artists, precarious working conditions have been a reality for most of the history of modern and contemporary art. Artists have never benefitted from the kind of organization that many Fordist factory workers or other unionized laborers managed to achieve, and whose improved wages, hours, and working conditions improved the situation even in many non-unionized fields. Artists, in their capacity *as* artists, have always worked as independent producers, mostly without stipends, salaries, pensions, unemployment protection, or contracts.

Naturally there have been exceptions, such as the artists' union in the USSR. However, it's enough to read the letters of Rodchenko to realize that the union was more of a problem than a solution: it was an instrument of a totalitarian state, the ideology of which by that time excluded Rodchenko's type of production.[8] Consequently, he was unable to receive a pension and died in poverty. Meanwhile, at the center of the so-called "free world," Mondrian also died in poverty in New York. Neither ideological structure provided much security for even the most accomplished artists.

[figure splitpage
fc6274129bb3374bde4499236ab45ba4.jpg
Kenworth W. Moffett with Ken Noland and Clement Greenberg.

]

Before we attribute the rise in popularity or social relevance of curators since the 1990s to larger ideological, geopolitical, or economic shifts such as that from Fordism to Post-Fordism, let's again consider the institution of art: it seems to me that this increase in social significance came partly from the declining power of art criticism, with curators assuming the agency of the critic in addition to their executive power in the museum. It may be argued that art critics did deserve to be marginalized for having vastly overreached at a certain point in the 1960s, when it seemed more culturally significant for a certain art critic such as Clement Greenberg to write about a work of art than for that work to have been made in the first place. But imagine the frustration of the artist who believes herself to be liberated from the tyranny of the critic only to discover that the situation has changed: rather than two competing powers—the critic and the curator, who could be played against each other—there is now only a single totalizing figure that she cannot bypass!

Furthermore, are we sure that this curatorial gain does not bring a correspondingly diminished status for the artist? The nightmare scenario for artists is that the supervisors bypass the workers altogether and begin producing art themselves, or automate the process of art production to render artists redundant. For owners of the culture factory—whether state or privately owned—it would be rather convenient if artists, who are a historically disobedient group, could be replaced with a disciplined contingent trained to obey authority, and production costs slashed through the elimination of a large part of the labor force. In such a scenario the economic gain would be enormous, entailing the replacement of a group that holds the rights to their own production with one comprised of salaried employees.

3. Curator as Producer

Last year I was invited to speak at a conference in Philadelphia on "curatorial activism." One of the participants spoke about her salaried directorship of a New York art institution as an activist practice. When I pointed out that people who are paid to go to a demonstration are not activists, but essentially hired bodies, the audience became visibly uncomfortable. But my point was less about money than why it is not enough these days to take on a challenging job, do it well, with real dedication and engagement, and take pride in that, without trying to upgrade its status by presenting it as activism, cultural production, or the production of art.

In fact, the debate with regard to the boundary between curatorial practice and artistic production is one that

curators are engaging in among themselves, as Michelle White makes clear in a recent conversation with fellow curator Nato Thompson:

> I also think that the term cultural producer, aside from the particular conditions of our moment, is a healthier or more honest way to articulate the contemporary role of the curator. It acknowledges the complexity of the collaboration that has to happen when something like an exhibition is organized or a project is carried out, which involves, as you said, a much more complex institutional web of financial as well as physical logistics from the relationship of collectors, patrons, boards of trustees to the possibilities of display space. It is certainly beyond the simple curator/artist dichotomy. But at the same time, in working on site-specific projects or exhibitions with living artists where collaboration is essential to produce meaning, I have found myself questioning the boundaries of my involvement in the aesthetic and conceptual production. So, I wonder, are there risks in assuming this more egalitarian position as producer?[9]

To respond to this question: yes, there are big risks for artists. As an artist, how do you exactly say no to the curator who invited you to participate in a show, but seems to want to credit herself as a collaborator or co-author, when you risk not being invited the next time? While perhaps politically and socially well-meaning, this type of approach runs the risk of making an unsolicited claim of co-authoring artists' works commissioned by the curator. I really do not think that many artists feel that collaboration with a curator is essential to produce meaning. To my mind, this type of claim would be an extremely unwelcome and unwarranted intrusion, particularly if one keeps in mind that the figure claiming this share of authorship is not some underpaid art installer or intern researcher, but someone with the power to include, commission, or exclude artworks.

Similarly, it seems to me that we should also be very careful to avoid assigning any kind of meta-artistic capacity to curatorial practice. While steps taken in this direction have often been made with good intentions, invoking the expansion of a more general category of "cultural practice," they nevertheless carry with them the danger of lending credibility to something like a potential colonization of artistic practice by academia and a new class of cultural managers. If the artist is already expected to question the social, the economic, the cultural, and so forth, then it goes without saying that when a curator supersedes the artist's capacity as a social critic, we abandon the critical function embodied by the role of the artist and reduce the agency of art.

If there is to be critical art, the role of the artist as a sovereign agent must be maintained. By sovereignty, I mean simply certain conditions of production in which artists are able to determine the direction of their work, its subject matter and form, and the methodologies they use—rather than having them dictated by institutions, critics, curators, academics, collectors, dealers, the public, and so forth. While this may be taken for granted now, historically the possibility of artistic self-determination has been literally fought for and hard won from the Church, the aristocracy, public taste, and so on. In my view, this sovereignty is at the very center of what we actually understand as art these days: an irreducible element considered to be the "freedom of art."

I suspect that it's not coincidental that the rise of the "independent curator" has taken place alongside a pattern of increasing privatization over the past couple of decades in the cultural field. Curators and institutions of art, whose authority is in part derived from representing public interests and being responsible to the public, are increasingly becoming private agents guided largely by self-interest. For this reason they have begun to assume the appearance of something with authorial characteristics, while still retaining a certain claim to objectivity in their evaluation of art and in their obligation to public address.

It has recently been pointed out to me that as artistic production becomes increasingly deskilled—and, by extension, less identifiable by publics as art when placed outside the exhibition environment—exhibitions themselves become the singular context through which art can be made visible *as* art. This alone makes it easy to understand why so many now think that inclusion in an exhibition produces art, rather than artists themselves. But this is a completely wrong approach in my opinion: what most urgently needs to be done is to further expand the space of art by developing new circulation networks through which art can encounter its publics—through education, publication, dissemination, and so forth—rather than perpetuate existing institutions of art and their agents at the expense of the agency of artists by immortalizing the exhibition as art's only possible, ultimate destination.

4. Artist as Curator

On the other hand, there is quite a history of artists making use of certain aspects of curatorial and organizational work in their practice by assuming the role of curator. At times this has been a response to the inadequacy of existing institutions, their hostility to artists, or their total absence—prompting the creation of many of the artist-run spaces of the 1970s—or as a response to a particular emergency, as with ACT UP and Gran Fury. As Group Material, Martha Rosler, and other artists in the 1980s demonstrated, curating can become a part of artistic practice just as any social form or activity can. For

example, Martha Rosler's *If You Lived Here* began as an immediate response to a lack of institutional support for an exhibition she was invited to do at the Dia Center for the Arts. Rosler felt that the best way to do something there was by positioning herself as curator/organizer—a kind of one-person institution rather than an individual artist. This resulted in a project comprising several exhibitions on housing and homelessness involving numerous artists, architects, activists, and community groups, which then turned out to be a seminal artwork that influenced several generations of artists including Rirkrit Tiravanija, Renée Green, Liam Gillick, Jeanne van Heeswijk, Marion von Osten, and many others.

[figure partialpage
f73f7b3342de70d7fae811b344697e0b.jpg
Martha Rosler, *If you lived here...*, Dia Art Foundation, 1989-92.

]

Likewise, what passed largely unnoticed in Paul Chan's production of *Waiting for Godot in New Orleans* was Chan's peculiar positioning of the artist in relation to the work: he did not write the play, direct it, or act in it. The set was essentially a city street. Chan's artistic involvement consisted largely of spending many months teaching as a volunteer in a local college, building close relationships with local community groups and grassroots organizations—in other words, creating the conditions necessary for the production and reception of the play, while ensuring that part of the money raised for the project would go to local needs other than culture.

I feel that whereas artists' engagement with a range of social forms and practices not normally considered part of the vocabulary of art serves to open up the space of art and grant it increased agency, curatorial and institutional attempts to recontextualize their own activities as artistic—or generalize art into a form of cultural production—has the opposite effect: they shrink the space of art and reduce the agency of artists.

An artist can aspire to a certain sovereignty, which today implies that in addition to producing art, one also has to produce the conditions that enable such production, its channels of circulation. Sometimes the production of these conditions can become so critical to the production of work that it assumes the shape of the work itself. This should not be confused with the job curators have and the work they do. As an artist, I would not attempt to propose a solution for curators; they themselves need to come up with ways of thinking and working that do not undercut the sovereignty of artists.

X

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1
"Cultures of the Curatorial," Academy of Visual Arts Leipzig, January 22–24, 2010. The press release is available on the Academy's website, http://www.kdk-leipzig.de/veranstaltungen.html .

2
While I agree in principle with the description of "the Curatorial" as it has been articulated by Irit Rogoff and practiced by such figures as Maria Lind—insofar as that curatorial methodology and knowledge is not limited to exhibition-making only, and can be productively applied to many different activities from book publishing to teaching—my concern is with a rather large gap between theory and concrete power relations that exists within the culture industry, and only grows due to misunderstandings.

3
As Manuel Borja-Villel commented, "With all respect to Adrià, whom I consider to be an absolutely brilliant cook, I believe that he is responding to a certain dilettante extravagance of the artistic director (Roger M. Buergel), who, in my view, conceives of the political space as something merely festive and communal." Jennifer Allen, "MACBA Director Takes On Culture and Cooking," *Artforum*, http://webcache.googleusercontent.com/search?q=cache:7rktJrhVy10J:artforum.com/new.php%3Fpn%3Dnews%26week%3D200646 (accessed April 25, 2010).

4
Documenta 12 Press Release, June 13, 2007, http://www.documenta12.de/fileadmin/pdf/PM/Adria_%20en.pdf .

5
It is interesting to note that Adrià actually seems to understand this in a way, while Buergel does not. Here is a statement Adrià gave to the *Guardian*: I feel like an intruder. Artists all over battle all their lives to receive an invitation to display their work at Documenta and now I, a cook, am asked to go along! So I worry. It's not going to be a dinner I am going to make and—while I do have some ideas—I am not sure yet quite what I am going to do. I have met the organiser Roger Buergel who believes that to create a new cooking technique is as complicated and challenging as painting a great picture. He says that he sees the work we do as a new artistic discipline. He says that our work shows cuisine should be a new art form. I am thrilled and honoured to be given the chance to attempt this leap.

6
See press release at https://web.archive.org/web/20100611061543/http://www.28bienalsaopaulo.org.br/presentation .

7
See https://web.archive.org/web/20100729201949/http://www.curatingdegreezero.org/archive.html .

8
See Aleksandr Rodchenko, *Experiments for the Future: Diaries, Essays, Letters, and Other Writings* , ed. Ed. Alexander Levrentiev and Jamey Gambrell, trans. John E. Bowlt (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 2005).

9
Michelle White and Nato Thompson, "Curator as Producer," *Art Lies*, no. 59 (Fall 2008).

An Open Letter to Clifford Irving

Paris, 19.6.2009

Subject: Clifford Irving Show

Dear Clifford Irving,

No matter how familiar Paris feels—and after all this time there *are* days in which its monotonous, elegant beige-stone skin fits like a kid glove—I still always manage to lose my bearings in the coiled and cobbled inclines of Montmartre. Since I landed in this city fifteen years ago, I've lived alone in a cramped and dim illegal sublet a minute's walk from the red-light district Pigalle. Despite my geographical proximity to the hilltop neighborhood just north of here, there was a time I never ventured further than my late-night tobacconist on the Boulevard de Clichy. I frequented that particular tobacconist because his is the nearest of three local shops to a pitiful, barren plinth that once hosted a statue of Charles Fourier (1772–1837).[1] During the Nazi Occupation of France (1940–1944), poor, utopian Charles, like so many of his bronze compatriots, became bitter metallic grist for the war mill.

In the past, the east–west axis of the boulevard incised a horizontal boundary on a mental map I had drawn of safe spaces and spaces where I could be at risk, much like the Seine River divides the Left and Right Banks. The hill to the north of the boulevard was off-limits. Christened the Mons Martyrum after the bishop of Paris Saint Denis was martyred there (ca. 275), legend has it the decapitated Saint Denis trekked two miles north with his head in his hands, accompanied by angels, to the site where his namesake church would be built. I was not bothered by the hordes of tourists seeking ersatz traces of bohemian life around the Moulin Rouge, the Lapin Agile, and the Place du Tertre, immortalized by the Montmartre school of painters. In my state, I wouldn't have noticed them. Instead, it was the Sacré Cœur basilica, with its great white cupola soaring up like God's blanched phallus, that repelled me. Back then I could never shake the feeling that it was standing guard expectantly, wanting me to succumb and worship it on my knees. I instinctively knew I should not get too close, or I would be doomed.[2]

Most nights I would drink cheap red wine until I had developed a soft buzz, before leaving the apartment to replenish my cigarettes. Then I would begin my ritual trudge east along the Boulevard de Rochechouart, eyes to the ground to avoid glimpsing Sacré Cœur. The pull of the Sacred Heart faded once I reached the bright Tati department store, which sits on the corner of the grimy Boulevard Barbès like a giant crate overflowing with a kaleidoscope of peddler's wares. From there, I'd veer diagonally toward the derelict 1920s cinema, Le Louxor, with its neo-Egyptian mosaics all in disarray, and walk down to my regular haunt, the Gare du Nord. I went to the station because I found its stern rooftop row of sentinel Queens comforting, and because the dank, echoing bleakness of the interior matched my own. Night after night I'd sit there for increasingly long stretches, smoking

Charles Fourier statue's base, Place de Clichy, Paris.

and watching and waiting. In retrospect, I see that it was an alternative form of penance, as well as an urgent form of procrastination.[3] I was procrastinating on my return to sanity; I sat there and poked at its possibility, like a tongue that unintentionally probes a rotten tooth and instantly retracts at the pain.

Occasionally, and to my great surprise, smart-suited businessmen would try to pick me up. They must have presumed from my regularity that I was working the station. Even if they were staying in nearby hotels I chastely only ever accepted to cross over to the café Terminus Nord. From there, my precious Queens and I could keep our eyes on each other. While it is generally agreed I am a well-read person, and though I am fluent in several European languages, nights were the regimented time in which I could release the seething incoherence that had swelled, during the day, in a tiny space I pictured as a stage prompter's trapdoor in my brain. I am by nature taciturn, but in the evenings a perfectly random cue could release an endless staccato torrent of nonsense. My gibberish and, I suppose, the suffused weight of my physical passivity, which were cloaked behind my pleasantly average figure and features that betrayed no illness, caused these men to flee. I'd return to a bench by the tracks and sit and smoke distractedly[4] until my fingers yellowed and stunk rankly of ash and I sensed daybreak. I so desperately wanted to leave, I longed to be one of those admirable, shiny, buoyant girls who just hop on a train destined for adventure, but I've always had trouble with departures.[5]

In the morning, I would heave my chilled and creaky bones out of the station and use the slow return home to recompose a presentable self.[6] After sour black coffee and a scalding shower, I'd embark on another day of "research" in the Labrouste reading room at the Bibliothèque Nationale. At the time, I was financed by a scholarship and feared The Foundation might discover my predicament. I was not ready to be rescued; that would come much later. I would meticulously fill out the paper request slips and deliver them wordlessly to the punctilious librarians on their perches. When my books arrived I spent my time feverishly filling notebooks with literary and philosophical citations that both corresponded to and fed my decaying state of mind.[7] I no longer possessed words of my own for what I was feeling; I had become alien to myself.[8] Remarkably, I had successfully compartmentalized myself for two different publics—the peers I might encounter during the day and the nameless crowd[9] that passed through the train station, and through me, at night. Two mirrored halves, one functional, one collapsing, held apart by an electromagnetic strength of will.

Benoit Rosement performing at the Clifford Irving Show; Image courtesy of the artist; Photo: Aurélien Mole.

By now, Mr. Irving, you are surely wondering what any of this has to do with you. It has nothing to do with you at all, and yet, because you are the sole conduit for its expression, you are everything to it. Such is the curious plight of the surrogate. Though your reputation precedes you and was already known to me through a viewing of Orson Welles' film *F for Fake* (1974),[10] which I saw on an outing with my father when I was a schoolgirl, I had tucked the facts of your life away, including your authorship of *Fake! The Story of Elmyr de Hory, the Greatest Art Forger of Our Time*, and your *Autobiography of Howard Hughes*.[11] Then, last night I found myself standing on a backstreet in Montmartre in front of the Ciné 13 theatre, which crouches in the shadow of Sacré Cœur, shyly clutching a black-and-gold, faux-art-deco-style invitation to the "Clifford Irving Show." And your name, and this soirée, unleashed a flood of associations and involuntary memories[12] that I am starting now to work through,[13] and which I feel compelled to share.

It was a most extraordinary thing. I can say that on this occasion I did not go to this theatre of my own volition and

have no recollection of the journey or of who may have thrust this card into my hand. What I recall is this: yesterday afternoon I went alone to the Gustave Moreau atelier-museum and got lost in reverie while admiring the thick and lustrous coat of the black feline in the right foreground of the artist's painting *Salomé Dancing Before Herod* (1876).[14] The next thing I knew night was falling and I was standing at the edge of a cluster of young, attractive men and women, who appeared to be well acquainted with each other and, through their chatter, I discerned, with you. These sorts of lapses in my consciousness still occasionally occur. However, I was not frightened but rather intrigued, since, in the past, their consequences have proven quite significant *après-coup*.[15]

Rene Gabri and Ayreen Anastas meet Modigliani and Every One; photo: Aurélien Mole.

It was a typical June night in Paris: quite warm, but with tickling tendrils of cooler air, wafting out of cellars and swirling around bare ankles. Inside, the small black, red, and gilt theater was infernal;[16] it was as if all the heat from the day had conspired to gather and stagnate in that one place. Shifty glances and murmured complaints were exchanged as the audience took their seats; its anticipation and discomfort were palpable. I kept to myself, as usual. A springy jazz piano and drums sliced through the thick air. I found a place near the exit, fearing I might be overcome with torpor or a sudden need to escape. The Master of Ceremonies, dressed casually, left the drum set he had been playing, to welcome the guests with a humorous flourish.

I will not provide an extensive report of the three and a half hours I spent fixated on the stage; in fact the details of the show are of quite secondary importance. However, I will now sketch for you some thoughts and provisional conclusions about this soirée.

Billed as a variety show, the program notes for the "Clifford Irving Show" posed the following question: "Where do authors go when characters interrupt the story?" This question affirms that a character is not an author's invention, but has agency that determines plot, a commonplace notion that is repeatedly borne out in literature, as well as in autobiography,[17] as you well know. Upon reading this, I was prepared for a certain narrative aspect to the evening of performances; and, indeed, the spoken word, to varying effect, dominated: texts were declaimed, mostly from printed sources, words were ventriloquized, tales were told. Please, you must not interpret "to varying effect" as criticism.[18] Some people are more adept at throwing their voices than others; some are keener improvisers; some are altogether lacking as performers. I belong to the latter group and so my relationship to the stage is necessarily skewed by the most debilitating combination of longing and repression. As a child, whenever I would express my truest emotions my parents would declare me a consummate actress. I believed them, so imagine my surprise when, years later, my acting teacher dispensed with me as too emotionally glib to ever hit the boards. I do not suffer from stage fright, but since I have always been told I am too much or too little, I have opted for the wings over any sort of spotlight.

But I digress.

Will Holder reads Black Dada.

Several performances in the "Clifford Irving Show" were entertaining enough to divert my attention from the rivulets of perspiration that coursed down my sides: I enjoyed the magician of the mind, I admired a sensual, writhing dancer who combined her gestures with words, and I empathized with the nervousness of the sculptress unveiling her work; she moved me more than any other, perhaps because it seemed harder for her than for most. By contrast, I hated the vulgarity and delivery of the jokes. A vulgar joke is only successful if its delivery is elegant and practiced. I loved the bearded English fellow's performative reading of a long manifesto, entitled "Black Dada," the only title I remember. By contrast, I hated the

joke he ended with, despite its elegant and practiced delivery. Mostly, I sat in wonder at the collective display of lack of inhibition.

By intermission, I had grasped that attaining a form of artistic perfection was hardly the point of this gathering of friends. There was an outline, but no script. Evaluating it from an assumed position of critical "authority" would serve no purpose. In fact, it seemed the whole event emphasized and undermined the fragile fiction of critique. This intrigued me and I chose to stay. In such an artless, amateur space, the audience and the performers become conjoined by a pact that suspends their normal positions of expertise, of judgment, of talent. Nobody is acting; everyone resolves into a stuttering self-portrait, a narcissistic staged self, a projected ideal self, a self that is able to accept its limitations. Prosopopoeia is our dominant trope. We are all the products of ghostwriting. To my patched-together psyche, witnessing this liberty of self-representation was exhilarating.

Gabriel Lester meets sculpture and painting on stage together with Audrey Cottin, Alex Cecchetti, and Mark Geffriaud; photo: Aurélien Mole.

Once the show ended, I cut across the plaza in front of Sacré Cœur and joined the throng that had assembled there to gaze down at the city. My back to the church, it occurred to me that the "Clifford Irving Show" reveals that the stories we tell ourselves about ourselves, the stories of defeat and discovery that help and harm us, the stories we tell others about ourselves will only ever be partial, and it does no damage to make them public. If this "Clifford Irving Show" can indeed be said to "represent" you, it is only as a cobbled construction, built out of some legendary or traceable fragments of a life, teased from documents and oral histories, edited, filtered, and subject to montage by multiple authors. You were performed last night, yet these filtered fragments are in no way "evidence" of you, and this is not because you trafficked in hoaxes or half-truths, but because you trafficked in autobiography.[19] I realized, as I moved toward home, that it is really high time I change my story. And so I will.

Yours truly,

Vivian Rehberg

1
"Stylistic quirks reminiscent of Jean Paul. Fourier loves preambles, cisambles, transambles, postambles, introductions, extroductions, prologues, interludes, postludes, cismediants, mediants, transmediants, intermedes, notes, appendixes."; "Fourier recognizes many forms of collective procession and cavalcade: storm, vortex, swarm, serpentage." Walter Benjamin, *The Arcades Project* , ed. Rolf Tiedemann, trans. Howard Eiland and Kevin McLaughlin (Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1999), 642 (W13,3 and W13,5).

2
"O, what a noble mind is here o'erthrown / The courtier's, scholar's, soldier's, eye, tongue, sword, / Th' expectancy and rose of the fair state,/ The glass of fashion and the mould of form, / Th' observed of all observers, quite, quite down! / And I, of ladies most deject and wretched, / That sucked the honey of his music vows, / Now see that noble and most sovereign reason, / Like sweet bells jangled, out of tune and harsh, / That unmatched form and feature of blown youth / Blasted with ecstasy. O, woe is me / T' have seen what I have seen, see what I see!" William Shakespeare, *Hamlet*, ed. William Farnham (Baltimore: Penguin, 1957), act 3, sc. 1, lines 150–61.

3
"We have a task before us which must be speedily performed. We know that it will be ruinous to make delay. The most important crisis of our life calls, trumpet-tongued, for immediate energy and action. We glow, we are consumed with eagerness to commence the work, with the anticipation of whose glorious result our whole souls are on fire. It must, it shall be undertaken to-day, and yet we put it off until to-morrow; and why? There is no answer, except that we feel *perverse* , using the word with no comprehension of the principle. To-morrow arrives, and with it a more impatient anxiety to do our duty, but with this very increase of anxiety arrives, also, a nameless, a positively fearful, because unfathomable, craving for delay. This craving gathers strength as the moments fly. The last hour for action is at hand. We tremble with the violence of the conflict within us—of the definite with the indefinite—of the substance with the shadow. But, if the contest has proceeded thus far, it is the shadow which prevails,—we struggle in vain. The clock strikes, and is the knell of our welfare. At the same time, it is the chanticleer-note to the ghost that has so long over-awed us. It flies—it disappears—we are free. The old energy returns. We will labour *now*. Alas, it is *too late*!" Ed gar Allan Poe, "The Imp of the Perverse" (1850), in *Edgar Allan Poe: Poetry and Tales* , ed. Patrick F. Quinn (New York: Library of America, 1984) 828.

4
"Weren't you always distracted by expectation, as if every event announced a beloved?" Rainer Maria Rilke, "The First Elegy," in *Duino Elegies* (1922), trans. Stephen Mitchell, available at hre f="http://homestar.org/bryannan /duino.html">→.

5
"My life closed twice before its close; It yet remains to see / If Immortality unveil / A third event to me." Emily Dickinson, "My life closed twice before its close" (1896) in *Final Harvest: Emily Dickinson's Poems* , ed. Thomas H. Johnson (Boston: Little, Brown, 1961), 314-5.

6
"Who am I? If this once I were to rely on a proverb, then perhaps everything would amount to knowing whom I haunt." André Breton, *Nadja* (1928), trans. Richard Howard (New York: Grove Press, 1960), 11.

7
"So little is known about the psychology of emotional processes that the tentative remarks I am about to make on the subject may claim a very lenient judgment. The problem before us arises out of the conclusion we have reached that anxiety comes to be a reaction to the danger of a loss of an object. Now we already know one reaction to the loss of an object, and that is mourning. The question therefore is, when does that loss lead to anxiety and when to mourning. In discussing the subject of mourning on a previous occasion I found that there was one feature about it which remained quite unexplained. This was its peculiar painfulness. And yet it somehow seems self-evident that separation from an object should be painful. Thus the problem becomes more complicated; when does separation from an object produce anxiety, when does it produce mourning, and when does it produce, it may be, only pain?" Sigmund Freud, *Inhibitions, Symptoms, and Anxiety* (1926), trans. Alix Strachey (London: Hogarth Press, 1936), 166.

8
"In a way, they seemed to be arguing the case as if it had nothing to do with me. Everything was happening without my participation. My fate was being decided without anyone so much as asking my opinion." Albert Camus, *The Stranger* (1942), trans. Matthew Ward (New York: Random House, 1989), 98.

9
"What men call love is a very small, restricted, feeble thing compared with this ineffable orgy, this divine prostitution of the soul giving itself entire, all it poetry and all its charity, to the unexpected as it comes along, to the stranger as he passes." Charles Baudelaire, "Crowds," in *Paris Spleen* , (1869), trans. Louise Varèse (New York: New Directions Publishing, 1970), 20.

10
"In attempting to explain *F For Fake'* s state-side failure, it has occurred to me that perhaps the subject matter was at least partially to blame, and that this country is so blissfully enslaved by the notion of the special sanctity of the expert that an overtly anti-expert film was bound to go too much against the national grain." Orson Welles (1983), available at http://www.w ellesnet.com/?p=205 .

11
"We sense a man persistently escaping the mould he's being cast in. The story confirms that anyone can fake the lecture but it takes a superior imposter to fake the thinking." Clifford Irving, *Phantom Rosebuds* (San Francisco: New Langton Arts, 2008).

12
"For a long time I would go to bed early. Sometimes, the candle barely out, my eyes closed so quickly that I did not have time to tell myself: 'I am falling asleep.' And half an hour later the thought that it was time to look for sleep would awaken me; I would make as if to put away the book which I imagined was still in my hands, and to blow out the light; I had gone on thinking, while I was asleep, about what I had just been reading, but these thoughts had taken a rather peculiar turn; it seemed to me that I myself was the immediate subject of my book: a church, a quartet, the rivalry between François I and Charles V." Marcel Proust, *In Search of Lost Time: Swann's Way* (1913), trans. C. K. Scott Moncrieff and Terrence Kilmartin, rev. D. J. Enright (New York: Random House, 1992), 1.

13
"This working-through of the resistances may in practice turn out to be an arduous task for the subject of the analysis and a trial of patience for the analyst. Nevertheless it is a part of the work which effects the greatest changes in the patient and which distinguishes analytic treatment from any kind of treatment by suggestion." Sigmund Freud, "Remembering, Repeating and Working-Through: Further Recommendations on the Technique of Psychoanalysis" (1914), in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud* , ed. and trans. James Strachey (London: Hogarth Press, 1986), 12:155–6.

14
"The discovery of the Musée Gustave Moreau, at around the age of sixteen, influenced forever the way I love . . . It goes so far that these kind of women probably concealed all the others, yes, I was completely bewitched." André Breton, *Manuscript: À propos de Gustave Moreau* (1950).

15
" (subst. M., adj. and adv.). Translation from the German *Nachträglichkeit* : Term frequently used by Freud in relation to his conception of temporality and psychic causality: experiences, impressions, memory traces are reformulated later depending on new experiences, and their accessibility to another degree of development. It is then possible for them to obtain a physic utility as well as new meaning." Jean Laplanche and Jean-Bertrand Pontalis, *The Language of Psycho-analysis* , trans. Donald Nicholson-Smith (New York: Norton, 1974).

16
"I once came close to a conversion to the good and to felicity, salvation. How can I describe my vision, the air of Hell is too thick for hymns! There were millions of delightful creatures in smooth spiritual harmony,

strength and peace, noble ambitions, I do not know what all?" Arthur Rimbaud, *A Season in Hell* , trans. Paul Schmidt (New York: Harper Colophon Books, 1976).

17
"Autobiography seems to depend on actual and potentially verifiable events in a less ambivalent way than fiction does. It seems to belong to a simpler mode of referentiality, of representation, and of diegisis. It may contain lots of phantasms and dreams, but these deviations from reality remain rooted in a single subject whose identity is defined by the uncontested readability of his proper name . . . but are we so certain that autobiography depends on its subject or a (realistic) picture of its model? We assume that life *produces* the autobiography as an act produces its consequences, but can we not suggest, with equal justice, that the autobiographical project may itself produce and determine the life and that whatever the writer *does* is in fact governed by the technical demands of self-portraiture and thus determined, in all its aspects by the resources of his medium?" Paul De Man, "Autobiography as De-facement," in *MLN* 94, No. 5 (December 1979): 920.

18
"Such reflections lead me to the conclusion that criticism, abjuring, it is true, its dearest prerogatives, but aiming, on the whole, at a goal less futile than the automatic adjustment of ideas, should confine itself to scholarly incursions upon the very realm supposedly barred to it, and which, separate from the work, is a realm, where the author's personality, victimized by the petty events of daily life, expresses itself quite freely and often in so distinctive a manner." "We have said nothing about Chirico until we have taken into account his personal views about the artichoke, the glove, the cookie, or the spool. In such matters as these, how much we could gain from his cooperation! As far as I am concerned, a mind's arrangement with regard to certain objects is even more important than its regard for certain arrangements of objects, these two kinds of arrangement controlling between them all forms of sensibility." Breton, *Nadja* , 13, 16.

19
"By making autobiography into a genre, one elevates it above the literary status of mere reportage, chronicle, or memoir and gives it a place, albeit a modest one, among the canonical hierarchies of the major literary genres. This does not go without some embarrassment, since compared to tragedy, or epic, or lyric poetry, autobiography always looks slightly disreputable and self-indulgent in a way that may be symptomatic of its incompatibility with the monumental dignity of aesthetic values." De Man, "Autobiography as De-facement": 919.