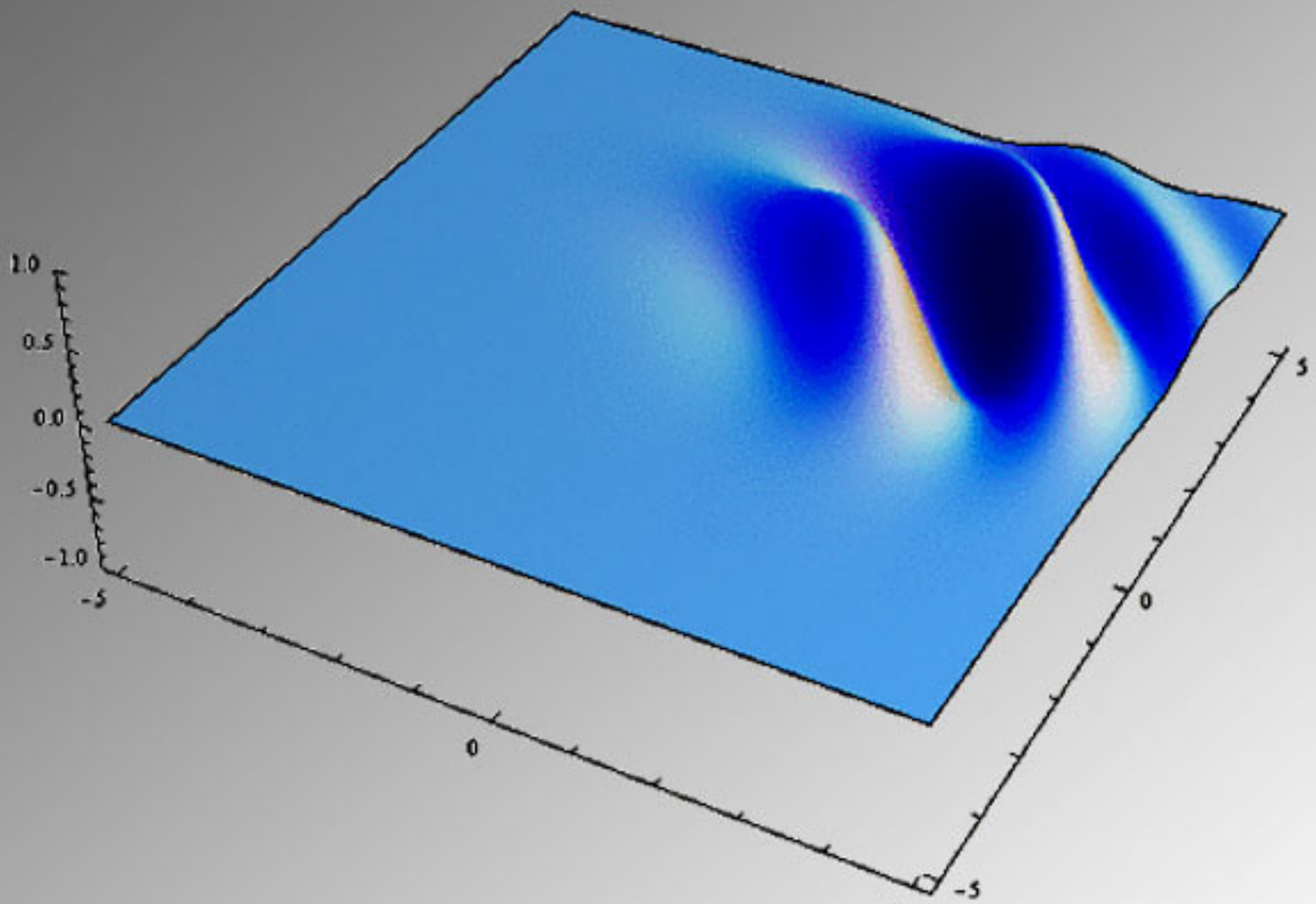
e-flux journal



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Editorial

The freeport method of art storage presents its critics with a problem. Is it something new? Or something old? What could be less surprising than an international aristocracy hiding treasures in a cave someplace? The CEO of the Geneva Freeport might have overcharged his Russian Oligarch, Dmitry Rybolovlev, by one billion dollars for thirty-five paintings, according to Sam Knight's recent, **riveting account**. Rybolovlev had himself acquired a large slice of the collective ownership of the means of production in 1992, when he was twenty-nine, in the form of Uralkali, a mining company developed by the State Planning Committee of the USSR in 1926. He sold his stake for five billion dollars in 2010. These sums feel like numbers from a different era, when boys regularly played with liquid money made from melting down some residual kingdom.

It's hard to know what to make of the transformation of so much Soviet capital into a Picasso or a Chagall. It feels like the end of a long sequence. It was said that Trotsky read Balzac in Central Committee meetings and that's why people didn't like him—and that it came back to haunt him, this antisocial love of high culture. And now all our masterpieces are locked in a box somewhere in the Alps while the world burns. But who among us has the courage to blame him?

Following Hito Steyerl, Stefan Heidenreich argues in "Freeportism as Style and Ideology" that although the freeport probably doesn't amount to a new mode of production, it might be a new mode of representation, replacing the one that ruled from the end of the Bretton Woods era up until the Great Recession. Like other such modes, freeportism has a value-form, post-internet art, that is optimized for contemporary accumulation, and an ideology, speculative realism, that attempts to transform its novel configuration of forces and relations into a new metaphysics.

Art, it turns out, has a unique role to play in stabilizing the contemporary regime of value. Thus the question is not the familiar one: "What is the value of art?" It is rather: "Which valuable is art and how?" The contemporary value-process requests that something be represented as art. And so art will always be represented. The relationship between the *Mona Lisa* and a dollar bill is not one of antagonism, but of scale, comparable to the space between the polio vaccine and an Advil.

Art is not only economically exceptional, in this respect, as Dave Beech memorably argues in his 2015 book, *Art and Value*, it is politically-economically exceptional. Because of art's stabilizing place within the mode of representation, it also participates in setting up the border between politics and economics in the first place. In "Big Business, Selling Shrimps," Jane DeBevoise traces the shifting coordinates of what she calls "the market imaginary" in Chinese art after Mao. Her essay takes part of its title from Wu Shanzhuan, whose *Selling Shrimps* consisted in selling

export-quality shrimp, brought from his home in Shanghai, in a stall at the national gallery in Beijing during the famous "China/Avant-Garde Exhibition" in 1989. The authorities shut the performance down after two hours. He had to borrow train fare for his trip home, where so many of the century's contradictions rode alongside him: the contested boundaries between market and state, the ambivalence of nationalism, regionalism, and scale, the distance between the country and the city. Who's selling who shrimp? Who's selling whose shrimp? Who is the shrimp? And how is it being sold?

Even two hours of these sorts of questions would have been unthinkable under Mao, when Eduardo Galeano reported to Luis Camnitzer that he had seen cracked cups dating to the Ming Dynasty discarded for lack of utility. No amount of history could pile high enough to overcome their fatal lack of use-value.

In "Agitprop!" Andrea Bowers, Nancy Buchanan, and Martha Rosler discuss the utility of mixing art and activism with Saisha Grayson. When is such a strategy effective? Is effective strategy the kind of thing that art does? In "The Truth of Art," Boris Groys argues that after the arrival of mass cultural production, contemporary art and artists no longer provide access to an extraordinary or atypical way of seeing. Instead, art and artists have themselves become paradigmatic, representative; an example of the general conditions of everyday life, though this does entail the kind of emancipation that the historical avant-garde imagined.

In "Factories of Resurrection," our very own Anton Vidokle, in conversation with Arseny Zhilyaev, considers the beginning of a different Communist sequence, when some sought to transform museums into institutes for eternal life, pushing beyond representation and into the distribution of life itself. If the real work of the revolution begins, as Kropotkin had it, when everyone has bread, then perhaps it ends when nobody is dead.

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Boris Groys

The Truth of Art

The central question to be asked about art is this one: Is art capable of being a medium of truth? This question is central to the existence and survival of art because if art cannot be a medium of truth then art is only a matter of taste. One has to accept the truth even if one does not like it. But if art is only a matter of taste, then the art spectator becomes more important than the art producer. In this case art can be treated only sociologically or in terms of the art market—it has no independence, no power. Art becomes identical to design.

Now, there are different ways in which we can speak about art as a medium of truth. Let me take one of these ways. Our world is dominated by big collectives: states, political parties, corporations, scientific communities, and so forth. Inside these collectives the individuals cannot experience the possibilities and limitations of their own actions—these actions become absorbed by the activities of the collective. However, our art system is based on the presupposition that the responsibility for producing this or that individual art object, or undertaking this or that artistic action, belongs to an individual artist alone. Thus, in our contemporary world art is the only recognized field of personal responsibility. There is, of course, an unrecognized field of personal responsibility—the field of criminal actions. The analogy between art and crime has a long history. I will not go into it. Today I would, rather, like to ask the following question: To what degree and in what way can individuals hope to change the world they are living in? Let us look at art as a field in which attempts to change the world are regularly undertaken by artists and see how these attempts function. In the framework of this text, I am not so much interested in the results of these attempts as the strategies that the artists use to realize them.

Indeed, if artists want to change the world the following question arises: In what way is art able to influence the world in which we live? There are basically two possible answers to this question. The first answer: art can capture the imagination and change the consciousness of people. If the consciousness of people changes, then the changed people will also change the world in which they live. Here art is understood as a kind of language that allows artists to send a message. And this message is supposed to enter the souls of the recipients, change their sensibility, their attitudes, their ethics. It is, let's say, an idealistic understanding of art—similar to our understanding of religion and its impact on the world.

However, to be able to send a message the artist has to share the language that his or her audience speaks. The statues in ancient temples were regarded as embodiments of the gods: they were revered, one kneeled down before them in prayer and supplication, one expected help from them and feared their wrath and threat of punishment. Similarly, the veneration of icons has a long history within Christianity—even if God is deemed to be invisible. Here the common language had its origin in

the common religious tradition.

However, no modern artist can expect anyone to kneel before his work in prayer, seek practical assistance from it, or use it to avert danger. At the beginning of the nineteenth century, Hegel diagnosed this loss of a common faith in embodied, visible divinities as the reason for art losing its truth: according to Hegel the truth of art became a thing of the past. (He speaks about pictures, thinking of the old religions vs. invisible law, reason, and science that rule the modern world.) Of course, in the course of modernity many modern and contemporary artists have tried to regain a common language with their audiences by the means of political or ideological engagement of one sort or another. The religious community was thus replaced by a political movement in which artists and their audiences both participated.

However, art, to be politically effective, to be able to be used as political propaganda, has to be liked by its public. But the community that is built on the basis of finding certain artistic projects good and likable is not necessarily a transformative community—a community that can truly change the world. We know that to be considered as really good (innovative, radical, forward looking), modern artworks are supposed to be rejected by their contemporaries—otherwise, these artworks come under suspicion of being conventional, banal, merely commercially oriented. (We know that politically progressive movements were often culturally conservative—and in the end it was this conservative dimension that prevailed.) That is why contemporary artists distrust the taste of the public. And the contemporary public, actually, also distrusts its own taste. We tend to think that the fact that we like an artwork could mean that this artwork is not good enough—and the fact that we do not like an artwork could mean that this artwork is really good. Kazimir Malevich believed that the greatest enemy of the artist is sincerity: artists should never do what they sincerely like because they probably like something that is banal and artistically irrelevant. Indeed, the artistic avant-gardes did not want to be liked. And—what is even more important—they did not want to be "understood," did not want to share the language which their audience spoke. Accordingly, the avant-gardes were extremely skeptical toward the possibility of influencing the souls of the public and building a community of which they would be a part.

At this point the second possibility to change the world by art comes into play. Here art is understood not as the production of messages, but rather as the production of things. Even if artists and their audience do not share a language, they share the material world in which they live. As a specific kind of technology art does not have a goal to change the soul of its spectators. Rather, it changes the world in which these spectators actually live—and by trying to accommodate themselves to the new conditions of their environment, they change their sensibilities and attitudes. Speaking in Marxist terms: art can be seen as a part of the superstructure or as a part of the material basis. Or, in other words, art can be understood as ideology or as technology. The radical artistic avant-gardes pursued this second, technological way of world transformation. They tried to create new environments that would change people through puttting them inside these new environments. In its most radical form this concept was pursued by the avant-garde movements of the 1920s: Russian constructivism, Bauhaus, De Stijl. The art of the avant-garde did not want to be liked by the public as it was. The avant-garde wanted to create a new public for its art. Indeed, if one is compelled to live in a new visual surrounding, one begins to accommodate one's own sensibility to it and learn to like it. (The Eiffel Tower is a good example.) Thus, the artists of the avant-garde also wanted to build a community—but they didn't see themselves as a part of this community. They shared with their audiences a world—but not a language.

Of course, the historical avant-garde itself was a reaction to the modern technology that permanently changed and still changes our environment. This reaction was ambiguous. The artists felt a certain affinity with the artificiality of the new, technological world. But at the same time they were irritated by the lack of direction and ultimate purpose that is characteristic of technological progress. (Marshall McLuhan: artists moved from the ivory tower to the control tower.) This goal was understood by the avant-garde as the politically and aesthetically perfect society—as utopia, if one is still ready to use this word. Here utopia is nothing else but the end stage of historical development—a society that is in no further need of change, that does not presuppose any further progress. In other words, artistic collaboration with technological progress had the goal of stopping this progress.

This conservatism—it can also be a revolutionary conservatism—inherent to art is in no way accidental. What is art then? If art is a kind of technology, then the artistic use of technology is different from the nonartistic use of it. Technological progress is based on a permanent replacement of old, obsolete things by new (better) things. (Not innovation but improvement—innovation can only be in art: the black square.) Art technology, on the contrary, is not a technology of improvement and replacement, but rather of conservation and restoration—technology that brings the remnants of the past into the present and brings things of the present into the future. Martin Heidegger famously believed that in this way the truth of art is regained: by stopping technological progress at least for a moment, art can reveal the truth of the technologically defined world and the fate of the humans inside this world. However, Heidegger also believed that this revelation is only momentary: in the next moment, the world that was opened by the artwork closes again—and the artwork becomes an ordinary thing that is treated as such by our art institutions. Heidegger dismisses this profane aspect of the artwork as irrelevant for the

Dziga Vertov kneels to shoot a train in Man with a Movie Camera (1929).

essential, truly philosophical understanding of art—because for Heidegger it is the spectator who is the subject of such an essential understanding and not the art dealer or museum curator.

And, indeed, even if the museum visitor sees the artworks as isolated from profane, practical life, the museum staff never experiences the artworks in this sacralized way. The museum staff does not contemplate artworks but regulates the temperature and humidity level in the museum spaces, restores these artworks, removes the dust and dirt from them. In dealing with the artworks there is the perspective of the museum visitor—but there is also the perspective of the cleaning lady who cleans the museum space as she would clean any other space. The technology of conservation, restoration, and exhibition are profane technologies—even if they produce objects of aesthetic contemplation. There is a profane life inside the museum—and it is precisely this profane life and profane practice that allow the museum items to function as aesthetic objects. The museum does not need any additional profanation, any additional effort to bring art into life or life into art—the museum is already profane through and through. The museum, as well as the art market, treat artworks not as messages but as profane things.

Usually, this profane life of art is protected from the public view by the museum's walls. Of course, at least from the beginning of the twentieth century art of the historical avant-garde tried to thematize, to reveal the factual, material, profane dimension of art. However, the avant-garde never fully succeeded in its quest for the real because the reality of art, its material side that the avant-garde tried to thematize, was permanently re-aestheticized—these thematizations having been put under the standard conditions of art representation. The same can be said of institutional critique, which also tried to thematize the profane, factual side of art institutions. Institutional critique also remained inside art institutions. Now, I would argue that this situation has changed in recent years—due to the internet and to the fact that the internet has replaced traditional art institutions as the main platform for the production and distribution of art. The internet thematizes precisely the profane dimension of art. Why? The answer to this question is simple enough: in our contemporary world the internet is the place of production and exposure of art at the same time.

A movie theater audience participates by calling out in response to onscreen actors' lines at a screening of Rocky Horror Picture Show.

This represents a significant departure from past modes of artistic production. As I've noted previously:

> Traditionally, the artist produced an artwork in his or her studio, hidden from public view, and then exhibited a result, a product—an artwork that accumulated and recuperated the time of absence. This time of temporary absence is constitutive for what we call the creative process—in fact, it is precisely what we call the creative process.
>
> André Breton tells a story about a French poet who, when he went to sleep, put on his door a sign that read: "Please, be quiet—the poet is working." This anecdote summarizes the traditional understanding of creative work: creative work is creative because it takes place beyond public control—and even beyond the conscious control of the author. This time of absence could last days, months, years—even a whole lifetime. Only at the end of this period of absence was the author expected to present a work (maybe found in his papers posthumously) that would then be accepted as creative precisely because it seemed to emerge out of nothingness.[1]

In other words, creative work is work that presupposes the desynchronization of the time of work and the time of the exposure of the results of this work. The reason is not that the artist has committed a crime or has a dirty secret he or she wants to keep from the gaze of others. The gaze of others is experienced by us as an evil eye not when it wants to penetrate our secrets and make them transparent (such a penetrating gaze is rather flattering and exciting), but when it denies that we have any secrets, when it reduces us to what it sees and registers—when the gaze of others banalizes, trivializes us. (Sartre: the other is hell, the gaze of the other denies us our project. Lacan: the eye of the other is always an evil eye.)

Today the situation has changed. Contemporary artists work using the internet—and also put their work on the internet. Artworks by a particular artist can be found on the internet when I google the name of this artist—and they are shown to me in the context of other information that I find on the internet about this artist: biography, other works, political activities, critical reviews, details of the artist's personal life, and so forth. Here I mean not the fictional, authorial subject allegedly investing the artwork with his intentions and with meanings that should be hermeneutically deciphered and revealed. This authorial subject has already been deconstructed and proclaimed dead many times over. I mean the real person existing in the off-line reality to which the internet data refers. This author uses the internet not only to produce art, but also to buy tickets, make restaurant reservations, conduct business, and so forth. All these activities take place in the same integrated space of the internet—and all of them are potentially accessible to other internet users. Here the artwork becomes "real" and profane because it becomes integrated into the information about its author as a real, profane person. Art is presented on the internet as a specific kind of activity: as documentation of a real working process taking place in the real, off-line world. Indeed, on the internet art operates in the same space as military planning, tourist business, capital flows, and so forth: Google shows, among other things, that there are no walls in internet space. A user of the internet does not switch from the everyday use of things to their disinterested contemplation—the internet user uses the information about art in the same way in which he or she uses information about all other things in the world. It is as if we have all become the museum's or gallery's staff—art being documented explicitly as taking place in the unified space of profane activities.

The word "documentation" is crucial here. During recent decades the documentation of art has been more and more included in art exhibitions and art museums—alongside traditional artworks. But this arena has always seemed highly problematic. Artworks are art—they immediately demonstrate themselves as art. So they can be admired, emotionally experienced, and so forth. But art documentation is not art: it merely refers to an art event, or exhibition, or installation, or project which we assume has really taken place. Art documentation refers to art but it is not art. That is why art documentation can be reformatted, rewritten, extended, shortened, and so forth. One can subject art documentation to all these operations that are forbidden in the case of an artwork because these operations change the form of the artwork. And the form of the artwork is institutionally guaranteed because only the form guarantees the reproducibility and identity of this artwork. On the contrary, the documentation can be changed at will because its identity and reproducibility is guaranteed by its "real," external referent and not by its form. But even if the emergence of

art documentation precedes the emergence of the internet as an art medium, only the introduction of the internet has given art documentation a legitimate place. (Here one can say like Benjamin noted: montage in art and cinema).

Meanwhile, art institutions themselves have begun to use the internet as a primary space for their self-representation. Museums put their collections on display on the internet. And, of course, digital depositories of art images are much more compact and much cheaper to maintain than traditional art museums. Thus, museums are able to present the parts of their collections that are usually kept in storage. The same can be said about the websites of individual artists—one can find there the fullest representation of what they are doing. It is what artists usually show to visitors who come to their studios nowadays: if one comes to a studio to see a particular artist's work, this artist usually puts a laptop on the table and shows the documentation of his or her activities, including production of artworks but also his or her participation in long-term projects, temporary installations, urban interventions, political actions, and so forth. The actual work of the contemporary artist is his or her CV.

Today, artists, like other individuals and organizations, try to escape total visibility by creating sophisticated systems of passwords and data protection. As I've argued in the past, with regard to internet surveillance:

> Today, subjectivity has become a technical construction: the contemporary subject is defined as an owner of a set of passwords that he or she knows—and that other people do not know. The contemporary subject is primarily a keeper of a secret. In a certain sense, this is a very traditional definition of the subject: the subject was long defined as knowing something about itself that only God knew, something that other people could not know because they were ontologically prevented from "reading one's thoughts." Today, however, being a subject has less to do with ontological protection, and more to do with technically protected secrets. The internet is the place where the subject is originally constituted as a transparent, observable subject—and only afterwards begins to be technically protected in order to conceal the originally revealed secret. However, every technical protection can be broken. Today, the *hermeneutiker* has become a hacker. The contemporary internet is a place of cyber wars in which the prize is the secret. And to know the secret is to control the subject constituted by this secret—and the cyber wars are the wars of this subjectivation and desubjectivation. But these wars can take place only because the internet is originally the place of transparency ...
>
> The results of surveillance are sold by the corporations that control the internet because they own the means of production, the material-technical basis of the internet. One should not forget that the internet is owned privately. And its profit comes mostly from targeted advertisements. This leads to an interesting phenomenon: the monetization of hermeneutics. Classical hermeneutics, which searched for the author behind the work, was criticized by the theoreticians of structuralism, close reading, and so forth, who thought that it made no sense to chase ontological secrets that are inaccessible by definition. Today this old, traditional hermeneutics is reborn as a means of economically exploiting subjects operating on the internet, where all the secrets are supposedly revealed. The subject is here no longer concealed behind his or her work. The surplus value that such a subject produces and that is appropriated by internet corporations is the hermeneutic value: the subject not only does something on the internet, but also reveals him- or herself as a human being with certain interests, desires, and needs. The monetization of classical hermeneutics is one of the most interesting processes that has emerged in recent decades. The artist is interesting not as producer but as consumer. Artistic production by a content provider is only a means of anticipating this content provider's future consumption behavior—and it is this anticipation alone that is relevant here because it brings profit.[2]

Mark Zuckerberg unveils a Facebook team dedicated to creating social experiences in virtual reality.

But here the following question emerges: who is the spectator on the internet? The individual human being cannot be such a spectator. But the internet also does not need God as its spectator—the internet is big but finite. Actually, we know who the spectator is on the internet: it is the algorithm—like algorithms used by Google and the NSA.

Frances Bacon's studio, photographed by Perry Ogden.

But now let me return to the initial question concerning the truth of art—understood as a demonstration of the possibilities and limitations of the individual's actions in the world. Earlier I discussed artistic strategies designed to influence the world: by persuasion or by accommodation. Both of these strategies presuppose what can be named the surplus of vision on the part of the artist—in comparison to the horizon of his or her audience. Traditionally, the artist was considered to be an extraordinary person who was able to see what "average," "normal" people could not see. This surplus of vision was supposed to be communicated to the audience by the power of the image or by the force of technological change. However, under the conditions of the internet the surplus of vision is on the side of the algorithmic gaze—and no longer on the side of the artist. This gaze sees the artist, but remains invisible to him (at least insofar as the artist will not begin to create algorithms—which will change artistic activity because they are invisible—but will only create visibility). Perhaps artists can still see more than ordinary human beings—but they see less than the algorithm. Artists lose their extraordinary position—but this loss is compensated: instead of being extraordinary the artist becomes paradigmatic, exemplary, representative.

Indeed, the emergence of the internet leads to an explosion of mass artistic production. In recent decades artistic practice has become as widespread as, earlier, only religion and politics were. Today we live in times of mass art production, rather than in times of mass art consumption. Contemporary means of image production, such as photo and video cameras, are relatively cheap and universally accessible. Contemporary internet platforms and social networks like Facebook, YouTube, and Instagram allow populations around the global to make

their photos, videos, and texts universally accessible—avoiding control and censorship by traditional institutions. At the same time, contemporary design makes it possible for the same populations to shape and experience their apartments or workplaces as artistic installations. And diet, fitness, and cosmetic surgery allow them to fashion their bodies into art objects. In our times almost everyone takes photographs, makes videos, write texts, documents their activities—and then puts the documentation on the internet. In earlier times we talked about mass cultural consumption, but today we have to speak about mass cultural production. Under the condition of modernity the artist was a rare, strange figure. Today there is nobody who is not involved in artistic activity of some kind.

Thus, today everybody is involved in a complicated play with the gaze of the other. It is this play that is paradigmatic of our time, but we still don't know its rules. Professional art, though, has a long history of this play. The poets and artists of the Romantic period already began to see their own lives as their actual artworks. Nietzsche says in his *Birth of Tragedy* that to be an artwork is better than to be an artist. (To become an object is better than to become a subject—to be admired is better than to admire.) We can read Baudelaire's texts about the strategy of seduction, and we can read Roger Caillois and Jacques Lacan on the mimicry of the dangerous or on luring the evil gaze of the other into a trap by means of art. Of course, one can say that the algorithm cannot be seduced or frightened. However, this is not what is actually at stake here.

Artistic practice is usually understood as being individual and personal. But what does the individual or personal actually mean? The individual is often understood as being different from the others. (In a totalitarian society, everyone is alike. In a democratic, pluralistic society, everyone is different—and respected as being different.) However, here the point is not so much one's difference from others but one's difference from oneself—the refusal to be identified according to the general criteria of identification. Indeed, the parameters that define our socially codified, nominal identity are foreign to us. We have not chosen our names, we have not been consciously present at the date and place of our birth, we have not chosen our parents, our nationality, and so forth. All these external parameters of our personality do not correlate to any subjective evidence that we may have. They indicate only how others see us.

Already a long time ago modern artists practiced a revolt against the identities which were imposed on them by others—by society, the state, schools, parents. They affirmed the right of sovereign self-identification. They defied expectations related to the social role of art, artistic professionalism, and aesthetic quality. But they also undermined the national and cultural identities that were ascribed to them. Modern art understood itself as a search for the "true self." Here the question is not whether the true self is real or merely a metaphysical fiction. The question of identity is not a question of truth but a question of power: Who has the power over my own identity—I myself or society? And, more generally: Who exercises control and sovereignty over the social taxonomy, the social mechanisms of identification—state institutions or I myself? The struggle against my own public persona and nominal identity in the name of my sovereign persona or sovereign identity also has a public, political dimension because it is directed against the dominating mechanisms of identification—the dominating social taxonomy, with all its divisions and hierarchies. Later, these artists mostly gave up the search for the hidden, true self. Rather, they began to use their nominal identities as ready-mades—and to organize a complicated play with them. But this strategy still presupposes a disidentification from nominal, socially codified identities—with the goal of artistically reappropriating, transforming, and manipulating them. The politics of modern and contemporary art is the politics of nonidentity. Art says to its spectator: I am not what you think I am (in stark contrast to: I am what I am). The desire for nonidentity is, actually, a genuinely human desire—animals accept their identity but human animals do not. It is in this sense that we can speak about the paradigmatic, representative function of art and artist.

The traditional museum system is ambivalent in relation to the desire for nonidentity. On the one hand, the museum offers to the artist a chance to transcend his or her own time, with all its taxonomies and nominal identities. The museum promises to carry the artist's work into the future. However, the museum betrays this promise at the same moment it fulfills it. The artist's work is carried into the future—but the nominal identity of the artist becomes reimposed on his or her work. In the museum catalogue we still read the artist's name, date and place of birth, nationality, and so forth. (That is why modern art wanted to destroy the museum.)

Let me conclude by saying something good about the internet. The internet is organized in a less historicist way than traditional libraries and museums. The most interesting aspect of the internet as an archive is precisely the possibilities for decontextualization and recontextualization through the operations of cut and paste that the internet offers its users. Today we are more interested in the desire for nonidentity that leads artists out of their historical contexts than in these contexts themselves. And it seems to me that the internet gives us more chances to follow and understand the artistic strategies of nonidentity than traditional archives and institutions.

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Boris Groys is an art critic, media theorist, and philosopher. He is currently a Global Distinguished Professor of Russian and Slavic Studies at New York University and Senior Research Fellow at the Karlsruhe University of Arts and Design in Karlsruhe, Germany. He has been a professor of Aesthetics, Art History, and Media Theory at the Karlsruhe University of Arts and Design/Center for Art and Media in Karlsruhe and an internationally acclaimed Professor at a number of universities in the United States and Europe, including the University of Pennsylvania, the University of Southern California and the Courtauld Institute of Art London.

1
Boris Groys, “Art Workers: Between Utopia and the Archive,” *e-flux journal* 45 (May 2013) https://www.e-flux.com/journal/45/60134/art-workers-between-utopia-and-the-archive/ .

2
Boris Groys, “Art Workers: Between Utopia and the Archive,” *e-flux journal* 45 (May 2013) https://www.e-flux.com/journal/45/60134/art-workers-between-utopia-and-the-archive/ .

Saisha Grayson

Agitprop!: A Conversation with Martha Rosler, Nancy Buchanan, and Andrea Bowers

Saisha Grayson: Because we think of you all as co-curators of this exhibition, I wanted to start by talking about how the invitation to nominate a fellow artist struck you when we first presented that as part of the invitation to participate in an exhibition. It's sort of an unusual model.[1]

MR: It threw me into an absolute panic. It took me ages to answer. There were so many aspects of art and activism to consider, not to mention the title of the show, which is "Agitprop!"

[figure 2016_03_M_ZinzunWEB.jpg
Artist and activist Michael Zinzun reports for *Message to the Grassroots*, 1992.]

That's a very specific type of address to the public. I've been an ardent supporter of Nancy's work for decades upon decades, ever since we knew each other in California. Her work is complex, always political in every aspect—feminist and other forms of activism, as well as always embodied. Political thinking pervades everything she does.

Because of the "agitprop" part of the brief, I thought that it would be really important to highlight *Message to the Grassroots*, which was an hour-long, monthly television show she hosted and coproduced with activist Michael Zinzun, every month in LA, for nearly ten years, until it was brought to a close by Michael's untimely death in 2006. It was a show which I thought spoke to every audience, but certainly to the present one. And for many reasons, it exemplified not only Nancy's commitment to speaking, if you'll allow me, to the grassroots, but also her feminism in her collaborative relationship to it, and her willingness to sort of take a backseat in its public presentation.

Nancy Buchanan: When I was thinking about who to nominate, actually very quickly I thought of Andrea because her work always involves an activist group. She has managed, somehow, to bridge so many different issues with her work, and yet still present things that are elegant, that are beautiful, but that bring in a lot more than just the artwork. Usually, there's a component that involves some kind of activity out in the real world. So that people come away not just educated about the issue, but able to contribute to change.

Andrea Bowers: I didn't have to curate anyone. But I'm so honored to be in this chain, because I think one of the most important things for me, as an artist, is the ethical aspects of it. And I think there's probably five artists who I really look to for guidance in these issues. And two of them are sitting on the stage right now.

SG: I was hoping you might talk a little bit about how each of you decided it made sense to fuse your activism and your art. For some of you that's something that happened right away, and for some of you, art and activism were separate practices that merged later on.

NB: Well, when I was an art student, I was also demonstrating against the war in Vietnam. And then I realized that I didn't have to compartmentalize my life, that I could bring the subject right into my practice. That was an amazing revelation at the time, because it wasn't a very popular thing at that moment in some art circles. Since then, one of the central questions that I've always had is: How can the individuals responsible for some of the problems that we see think the way they do?

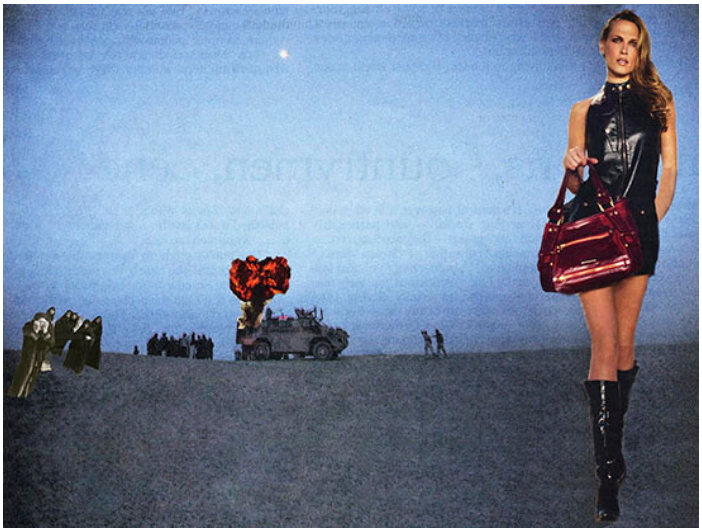
When I met Michael, I was actually doing community art workshops in the city of Pasadena. They had just set up their cable television station. And I did these workshops for adults and children. And I'd met Michael on an art panel, actually, in an exhibit. And then, later on, just as I was planning to leave the Public Access Corporation, he walked in and said, "I want to produce a show."

And I said, oh, great. I'd like to help you. And that was that. When I went on to work at CalArts, we had a public program where artists and students went out into the community and did their workshops with a partner organization. I was in the Film School, and I was partnered with the Watts Towers Arts Center. And I said, well, if I'm going to go to this center, I would like a collaborator who really knows this community. And so I said I would only do it if they also hired Michael. So we also did these workshops together with people down in Watts, which included some of the members of the groups that came together in the historic gang truce in 1992. And so that was part of our show and also part of our workshops.

SG: Very cool. And Martha?

MR: Yeah, art and activism. I grew up about ten blocks from here, in Brooklyn, and when I was a junior in high school I was an Abstract Expressionist painter in training. The Brooklyn Museum hosted an art school that was, one could say, pitched at Sunday painters. But, I was a high school kid, and anyway, there were serious painters teaching there. And that's where I was as an artist when I also became a protester, first, against having to take cover for air raid drills, which I always thought was ridiculous. As though we can hide from nuclear bombs! But it was illegal to not take cover in those days, to be standing in a public space when you were supposed to be cowering in a cellar.

But it took me a while to integrate any kind of subjectivity, aside from an abstract one, into my work. It first happened, actually, in my use of photography, because I had gotten the idea that abstract painters dealt with narrativity by



Martha Rosler, Afghanistan (?) and Iraq (?), (Detail), 2008. Photomontage. This image constitutes the right half of a diptych.

taking photographs of things, in real everyday life.

I think feminism was the first activist practice that made a direct appearance in my work, when I started making montages of the representation of women in magazines and newspapers, especially in ads. It was always a question of how representation produces and promotes and carries forward a picture of who we are. But one day, sitting at my mother's dining room table, looking at a photograph of a Vietnamese woman swimming across the river with a child, desperately trying to escape, it occurred to me that that kind of imagery was central to trying to talk about who are we, and who are the supposed "theys" on the other side. And I realized that I could incorporate this idea into the work that I was doing. But it took me about six or seven years to quit the painting, which I carried on simultaneously. But at that point, I was doing activist work, which I kept out of the art world. I have to say it was not intended for the art world. It really was agitprop!

SG: This definition of agitprop came up during the nomination discussion. You said that it means something quite specific to you, that it refers to how something is distributed, where it lands originally. You also mentioned being an abstract painter. Andrea, you mentioned that male activists, in your opinion, were sometimes like abstract painters. Can you talk a little about where that critique comes from?

AB: From studying with many feminists? I went to school and studied with Millie Wilson. Nancy was there. And also with Charles Gaines and Michael Asher.

I became really aware of issues of subjectivity, and that that was the standard modernist methodology for how you work. What did Pollock say? That he was painting his internal arena or something like that? It just seemed that if

Martha Rosler, Untitled (Small Wonder), 1972. Photomontage.

that was the standard, then women and artists of color just didn't live up to it. And so I didn't want to work that way. I wanted to throw that out the window.

So in almost all of my work, there are jabs at these involuntary, expressive, emotional, dysfunctional men that are celebrated in the art world. Once I became really involved in activism I realized that these same personalities existed there too, especially in climate justice and environmentalism. Just because I was doing activism didn't mean I was overcoming patriarchy or mansplaining. So I've been making some work that comments on that.

Andrea Bowers, Radical Feminist Pirate Ship Tree Sitting Platform, 2013. Recycled wood, rope, carabiners, misc. equipment and supplies. Photo: Nick Ash.

SG: This one you said is a radical feminist pirate ship.

AB: Yeah. I got arrested for tree sitting in Arcadia, California. There was a forest of 250 pristine oaks and sycamores. I'd never walked on ground like that, where no one's ever walked, it was this really soft kind of growth. Plus it was pitch black, because we were breaking in at four o'clock in the morning. There were four of us, including this young man named Travis who spent three of the last six years as an Earth First! activist living in a tree in Northern California.

He doesn't really make money living in a tree. He's doing really good work, but he has no money. So, every once in a while, he would call and say, do you have any work for me? And I said, well, sure, let's make some sort of pimp-my-ride tree-sitting platforms, because when you're in a tree, you can't sit on a tree branch for a year. You have to have a platform up there. And I thought it would be really funny to make these really accessorized tree-sitting platforms.

And I just see them as super, elaborate, ornate, political posters, because they're covered in slogans, and they're just really entertaining. Often, you can sit in them.

So I had said to Travis, "Travis, so what's your dream tree-sitting platform?" And he was like, "A pirate ship." And I got so pissed off because I would never have thought of that. Of course a guy would make that. I just don't have that mentality. So then, I thought, I'll make this radical, pirate, tree-sitting platform. There is this amazing quote from Mary Daly where she says:

> Ever since childhood, I have been honing my skills for living the life of a radical feminist pirate and cultivating the courage to win. The word "sin" is derived from the Indo-European root "es-," meaning "to be." When I discovered this etymology, I intuitively understood that for a woman trapped in patriarchy … "to be" in the fullest sense is "to sin."

But then I found out that Mary Daly wrote—and it was a long time ago—a lot of transphobic comments. And I didn't know that. I hadn't done my research properly, and so that's kind of the problem with the piece, which I decided to correct with this show, actually, that's up now.

SG: That's always an interesting question, sort of how I think all of you have so many intersexual—inter *sectional*— issues.

AB: We do.

(*Rosler laughs*)

SG: Intersexual, intersectional, they're all of a piece. There's an origin in feminism, but it leads you to many different places. How do you prioritize when you're across-the-board concerned about economic injustice, environmentalism, racial issues? How do you move between these?

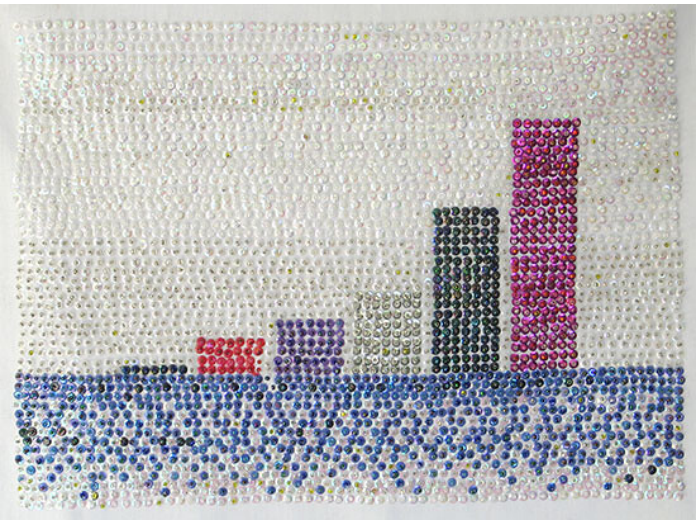
NB: I've been, in the last many years, actually, really concerned about money and consumption. And so, for

me, it's like, how can I bring the issue of commodification and consumerism really upfront? What's a new way to do that? Because that's at the bottom of so much that's wrong.

It's the problem with police brutality. It's the problem with housing. It's the problem with most everything, these issues of disempowerment and inequality. And so, because of how widespread a problem it is, there's always a new way to represent it. The image is from a web-based piece that was called *Sleep Secure*, which invited visitors to the website to create a pattern inside one of the slices of the annual pie chart made by the War Resisters League.

Every year they make a pie chart to show you what US taxes are spent on. I tried to find web-based images for these different categories, so you could click on one of the slices and kind of play with it. You could make a pretty pattern. But you could also print out that pattern and make your own real, physical—as in, not-virtual—quilt. You could save your decorative pies on the website, and share them, too.

I like to use humor with things, when I can, and make them playful. The image is a flag embroidered with sequins representing income inequality. I had glommed onto George H. W. Bush's statement about voodoo economics. And I thought, okay, all right, let's make some voodoo flags about economics.



Nancy Buchanan, Income Increases, 2002. Embroidery with sequins.

SG: Martha, your *Garage Sales* are also a feminizing of an economic critique, or getting at international economics by way of the domestic.

MR: There's an extensive, direct quote from the chapter on commodity fetishism in volume one of *Capital* that played continuously throughout each of the *Garage Sales*. I understood that when you say to someone, "Here's some cheap stuff!" they're not listening to somebody talking about commodity fetishism. But it represents an unacknowledged background to a general critique.

But this, in and of itself, is a playing out of the tacit underpinnings of our lives, which are often neither audible, nor visible, even though they're in our face every minute. Which is kind of what Nancy was talking about when both she and Michael were pointing out, bluntly, how neoliberal capitalism basically controls who we are and how we inhabit our social spaces.

AB: Martha, the night before last you were talking about the cycle of visibility for women artists, about being invisible for decades and then suddenly visible when they want the old broads back again.

MR: Yes, every actress will tell you this as well. As a young female, you're a phenom, the talking dog. Like: "Wow! She's got this shape, and that shape, and this shape! (*gesturing*) And she talks. She walks. She acts. She makes art! Look at that. Wow." And then, in middle age, the bloom's off the rose. That was then, they say. And then, when you've reached a certain age, it's: "Look, she's still alive! Maybe we should go talk to her before she stops being alive."

There's nothing that has changed. But if I point this out to men, they may say, "But I disappeared, too … " No, you didn't.

SG: From inside the art world, what do you feel like you can you do? What would you like to see change that we should be working on?

AB: Equality. I think it's visibility and it's economics. Personally I would, of course, love to get rid of patriarchal capitalism. But that's probably not going to happen immediately. That's going to take a longer time. But in the meantime, I would like to see women have equality with men, and have the same visibility, and also survive, financially.

SG: Very often, each of you are building platforms and creating spaces for other people to present and talk. And I want to open up the conversation about how this connects to feminism, because very often, I think, we do feel conscious about our own invisibility and how that is created. With the result being that feminist artists are constantly creating platforms and making space for other people to speak, too.

NB: I think that it's a matter of deeply feeling and understanding our connection to other human beings. That's it. It's not me struggling to be at a certain level in the art world, or anywhere else. It's a real visceral, literal connection. We're all going to sink. Or we're going to change.

AB: I don't know. I learned about an alternative practice through feminism in the Seventies, studying you guys and some of your early practices. Why can't we have models of collectivity? Why can't we start to question authorship in some way? It's about learning, too. I need to be around other artists I respect so I can grow and learn. Nancy's always calling me: "There's this protest," "There's this talk." She keeps me on my toes. I need that. That's what I need community to help me with. It's sort of selfish, in a way, for personal growth. I'm so grateful for it.

MR: Obviously, the art world is driven at base by the fact that it's a market economy. And the institutions within it have to figure out how to carve out spaces that are relatively insulated from the payment structure.

Every institution tries to open up a space of autonomy within itself. On the tour I conducted at the Frieze Art Fair as one of its artists' projects, I forgot to have the group interview a dealer. We did everybody else. Every single person, from the toilet keeper—there is a famous toilet facility at the Frieze—to the sandwich people, security, the newspaper, the accountants, the Royal Parks rep., and the doorkeepers at the VIP Lounge, and the VVIP Lounge. But I forgot to talk to the dealers, which I admit was idiotic. But those financial constraints can never be cast aside.

And obviously, the museum world is driven by donors and by budgets that come from places where people don't look kindly on stuff that doesn't fit with that desired aesthetic separation between the street and the museum. And there's something to be said for that.

There's a constant negotiation of how we make a space within these places. Curators have to answer to that same structure. You can't do a show because you feel like doing a show. You have to sell it. It has to go up the chain of management like anywhere else, and often this takes years.

There was a moment of relative democratization, in the US and beyond, in the '70s, when we had artist-run spaces at a time when artists were developing apparently noncommodifiable forms in a bid for autonomy from the market. And then the dealers reestablished—I mean this quite literally—the market, with neo-neoexpressionist painting, reestablished a certain kind of control over the whole system. The government funding for artist-run spaces was yanked, which meant that we, then, had to be cast back on the kindness of established institutions.

But because of the gigantic floods of money currently flowing everywhere through the economy, art fairs actually supplanted the exhibition model, and this has made things a lot worse. The art fair model is not too concerned about ethics. I mean, business centers on people with big bucks who can buy a Wu-Tang album and stick it in a drawer, or whatever the hell it is.

Martha Rosler, Frieze Art Fair (Walking Tour of Sites of Labor), 2006. Performance.

AB: Is that what they're buying?

NB: There was a great moment at one of the recent LA art fairs where some younger artists, Audrey Chan and Elana Mann, remounted Suzanne Lacy and Leslie Labowitz's piece about myths of rape. And so, at this cocktail reception, when people were enjoying themselves and having their drinks, they were accosted, or confronted, by young people carrying colorful signs and talking about how this is a myth about rape, and here's the truth. It was a nice collision, I thought.

SG: That's an interesting example, because it touches on the usefulness of history in your projects. You work with archives a lot. You revive the structure of certain strategies. Why are we not learning from history? Or, how we can learn better from history, through a look to the archives, or by looking to the older performance projects that are in danger of being lost?

AB: I think archiving accidentally fell into my lap because most of my projects sort of start with an activist that I learn about, just through circles of friends, or I seek out, because I see they're doing something. And I email them, or I try to get a hold of them.

But what I started finding out was that all of these activists that I would go and interview in videos—because I almost always interview in videos, because I'm trying to create literally an archive of activists, during my lifetime, that I think are amazing and may be underrepresented—but what I discovered was, in all of their closets, or in all of their drawers, were these amazing archives that no one was seeing. So I just asked them if I could scan them. I'd give them all the scans back. And then, that started circling into social media and stuff. And then, I'm collecting all of that stuff, too. But it's really about under-recorded, underrepresented, under-seen, really important historic events, because activism doesn't end,

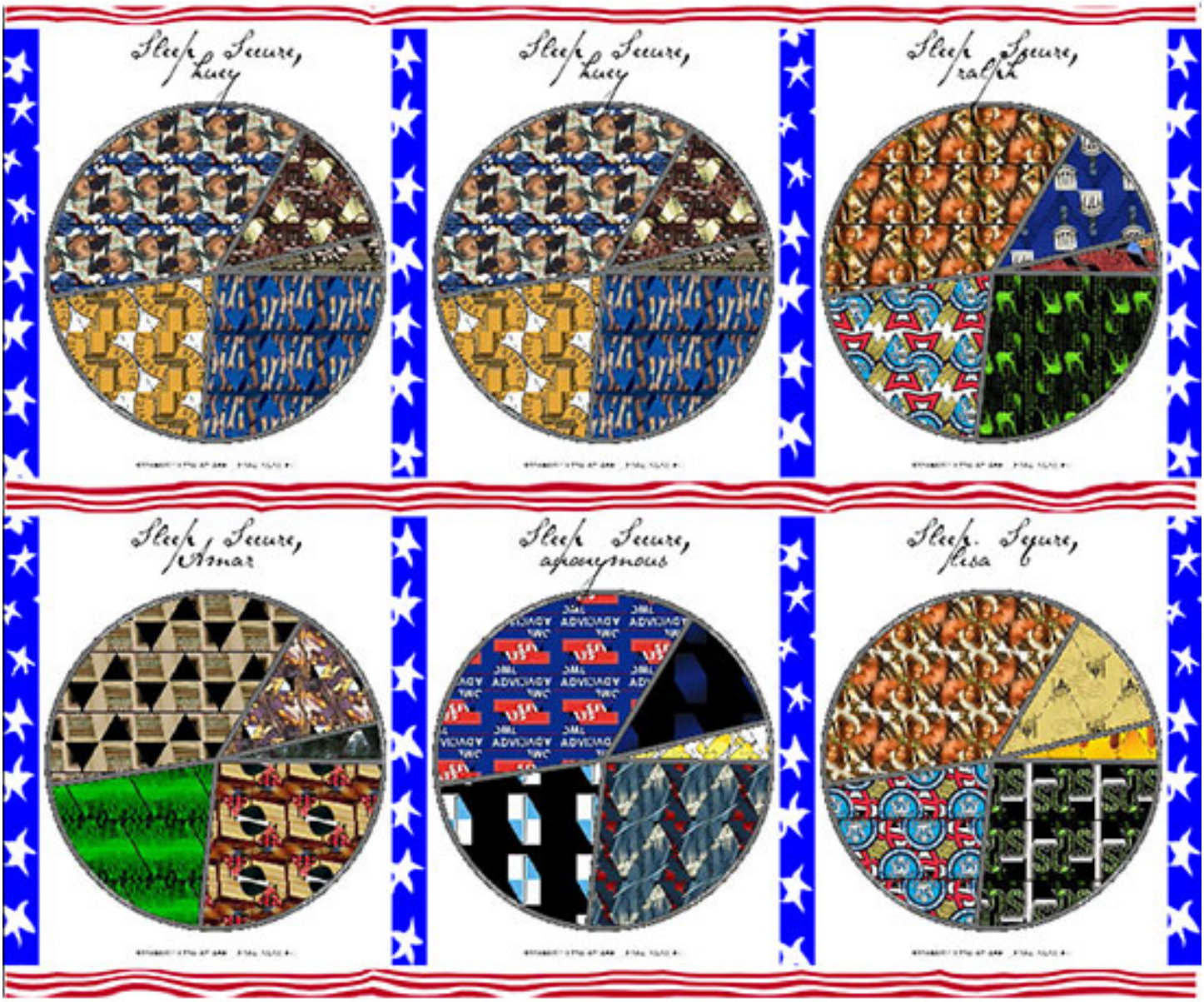
right? These actions don't end.

MR: That's right.

AB: People work their lifetimes doing different things. But the issues keep coming up again and again and again. So it's important to look back.

somehow public projects wind up being social management tools for social and political elites.

But it's a mistake to make a totalizing criticism of a process that's actually very porous—the idea of inviting other people into whatever space you've been accorded for whatever amount of time.



Nancy Buchanan, Sleep Secure, 2003–4. Interactive web project for The Alternative Museum; this is a detail of quilted income tax pie charts created by users.

MR: There's a trend in academe, and perhaps elsewhere, to critique the idea of collaboration, and participation. And interestingly, a number of these attacks on inclusiveness have come from female scholars, which I always find interesting. I did write a little bit about it in the book that I did on the culture class, in part to agree with the idea that

Let's say you are working with people who have not otherwise been given access to a public space to represent themselves. You never want to *speak for* people, which is a serious issue. So how to name them in the production of the work? Repeatedly, when I've invited

other people to collaborate with me, I've run into a problem with the curators and the art space who refuse to acknowledge the collective authorship of the work. The problem of saying, "no, it's not a work by me. It's a work by me and this person, and this person, and this person, and this person, and this person."

Noah Fischer, who I see in this audience today, with Occupy Museums, has managed to write a contract in which the institution acknowledges the co-authorship of the other people who have participated in a project, because otherwise you wind up, against your will, with people seemingly in a subordinate relationship to you, because of the way the institution insists on naming the author of the work, whom they call "the invited artist." This is something not talked about publicly, the way that institutions insist on controlling the record, telling artists, "We nominated you. You don't have the right to nominate anyone else,"—But the partial departure from that model is what makes this particular exhibition, *Agitprop!,* unique.

SG: Thank you. And I want to add, Interference Archive, which is in the show and has this great poster that says, "We Are Who We Archive," gave us a wall label with sixty people's names, every single person who was involved in that group during that period of time. Because we're not trying to shut down [crediting] based on the market-driven interest to name one artist in relation to this.

NB: My friends Christine and Margaret Wertheim, who made the *Crochet Coral Reef*, which has traveled around the world, felt that the reason why some places didn't want to take their work, and why there's no market for it, is that they insisted on listing every single name of every person involved as being a part of that work. They would not allow it to be represented as "by Christine and Margaret Wertheim."

MR: This is a kind of an ossified mindset that comes from people who have been trained, and rightly, to verify historical facts. They become so stuck in the fetishization of the shards of evidence that they have trouble stepping backward to an actual larger event, or a larger piece of evidence. Hence this problem of segmenting out the artist as the one who gets nominated. And everybody else is, well, who the hell are you?

SG: And focusing on the fetishized object instead of the issue, or the moment, or the event that's being brought up. Speaking of fetishization, I read a number of interviews with each of you in preparing for this. And almost in every case you guys are asked to speak to the efficacy of activist art. "Did you successfully end the war, or stop patriarchy through your work?," and so on.

AB: Yes, we did.

NB: We did.

SG: Yeah.

NB: War's gone.

SG: Okay. Good. So that's settled. I was wondering if your beginnings in activist feminist spaces helps avoid the expectation of totalizing successes or failures.

MR: Well, activism is a process. And we're dealing here in a world of objects, art objects.

AB: I mean, activist change is inherently about collectivity, right? We're back at that idea again. So all you can do is do your part. You do your part. You speak up, as a citizen—

MR: You took the word right out of my mouth!

AB: —and you trust that there are others who are like-minded who are out there working as hard as you are. And together, over time, change will occur. Chris Carlsson, who is an activist from San Francisco has spoken of radical patience, of knowing that it was started before you arrived and that it will continue after you are gone.

Andrea Bowers, #justiceforjanedoe, Anonymous Women Protestors, Steubenville Rape Case, March 13–17, 2013, 2014. Graphite on paper. Courtesy of the artist and Susanne Vielmetter Los Angeles Projects. Photo: Robert Wedemeyer.

NB: I have a quote from Michael Zinzun which I think is really important. Michael founded the Coalition Against Police Abuse in 1976 and was tireless as a worker and an advocate working with families whose children, or loved ones, had been injured or killed by the police. He called for a lot of changes that we still need to make today regarding racial profiling and demonizing young people. And he ended this speech that I found by saying: "We won't struggle for ya. But we will struggle with ya. We can bring some lessons and experience to the struggle, but the most important one is that the people are their own liberators."

SG: That's great. Thank you.

MR: I want to say something about art.

SG: Okay, great.

MR: Because you asked specifically about art and "did you guys stop the war?" And I want to affirm that I think art is revolutionary. I truly mean that, and I think we probably all do. But art doesn't make revolution. People make revolution. And it's as citizens, as Andrea said, that we struggle. And if our art is imbricated and implicated in that struggle, that's what we do. But it's still people who make the revolution, whatever that revolution is.

X

Andrea Bowers works in a variety of mediums including drawing, installation, and video, and centers her work on the convergence of art and activism. The topics she has addressed in her practice range from workers' rights and the Occupy Movement to sexuality and gender discrimination. She is a self-described feminist artist.

In her artwork, **Nancy Buchanan** uses various media to bring social realities into view, while remaining grounded in the observation of lived history. Known for her performances in the 1970s and '80s, she also works in video, drawing, and installation.

Saisha Grayson is Assistant Curator at the Elizabeth A. Sackler Center for Feminist Art. Her PhD work at the Graduate Center, CUNY, focuses on contemporary art, feminist theory, and museum practice.

Martha Rosler is an artist who works with multiple media, including photography, sculpture, video, and installation. Her interests are centered on the public sphere and landscapes of everyday life—actual and virtual—especially as they affect women. She is the author of *Culture Class* (2013), among other books.

1
This conversation took place on February 20, 2016, at the Brooklyn Museum in connection with the exhibition “Agitprop!”

Stefan Heidenreich

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

Works in Wooden Boxes

The Geneva Freeport can hold up to one million artworks. Recently its facilities had to be expanded due to increasing demand. The artworks end up in wooden transport boxes, stacked in rows on shelves in huge halls, where they sit and wait for their price to rise or fall, or to be shipped to an auction or to another freeport. The air temperature measures 21 degree Celsius, with exactly 55 percent humidity.[1] These are considered ideal conditions for the survival of artworks.

We know of many strange cults that have produced works of art not meant to be seen, at least not in this world: paintings in Egyptian pyramids; a terra-cotta army buried alongside the first Chinese emperor; ritual art, when it isn't entirely funereal; totems and fetishes; shrines where artworks remain hidden; triptychs opened only once a year.

It is safe to say, however, that never before now have so many artworks been produced to remain hidden, all enclosed in disenchanted wooden boxes, suspended in a permanent circuit of exchange, in a place called a "freeport" because it is free of customs duties and taxes of all kinds. Since no one is allowed to see the art, it is also free of audience and spectators, an anti- *theatron*; it is a place of un-seeing. We must examine the conflict between the forces that create new ways of representing and being seen, and the relations that just as quickly place these out of sight.

What does it mean to participate in such a cult? What discursive operations accompany the production and marketing of these works? Art and ideas alike have always responded to their conditions of encounter, to how they are exhibited, inscribed, perceived, bought, and sold, adapting to whichever is dominant among their various modes of representation. Hito Steyerl was the first to recognize the significance of "duty-free art" and to theorize the mode of representation I am calling "freeportism." Steyerl notes how this tax-free art concretizes and complicates the old dream of total artistic self-legislation, of autonomy from the heteronomous laws of the market, the court, and the state:

> Art's conditions of possibility are no longer just the elitist "ivory tower," but also the dictator's contemporary art foundation, the oligarch's or weapons manufacturer's tax-evasion scheme, the hedge fund's trophy, the art student's debt bondage, leaked troves of data, aggregate spam, and the product of huge amounts of unpaid "voluntary" labor—all of which results in art's accumulation in freeport storage spaces and its physical destruction in zones of war or accelerated privatization.[2]

There must be contemporary forms of art and thought that have adapted to the political economy of this mode, which I begin by considering in a little more detail, before examining post-internet art and speculative realism, as its corresponding style and ideology, respectively.

Risk and Collection

The market for art is about 5 percent of the trillion-dollar market for luxury goods. Contemporary art accounts for about 13 percent of the 5 percent, or less than 1 percent of the total market. It is a small fraction, but the most risky.

Not coincidentally, the notion of risk has recently undergone a deep reevaluation, not to say a revolution. Since the invention of the Black-Scholes formula in 1973, risk can be calculated, separated from its underlying assets and priced appropriately. This ability to price risk was a huge advance, we can say, in the technological forces of representation, as risk was brought under the regime of value. The result was an explosion in the market for derivatives and their dissemination throughout the world economy. Today, it is possible to purchase insurance against almost any contingency one can think of. This has made risk management crucial to contemporary investing, much of which now involves bundling risky assets into larger collections, or securities, diversifying the dangers and minimizing, presumably, the chances of everything going wrong at once.

Buying an artist's work is a risky position. Collection means diversification. Buying a contemporary artist is especially risky, but since Black-Scholes, we can represent risk—or we think we can—insofar as we can price it. The risks of contemporary art can be managed, and they are. Contemporary speculation on art and artists relies less and less on individual judgment and more and more on benchmarking with other collectors. It's just a subfield of modern portfolio theory, with proper risk assessment and diversification strategies; meaning and criticism are simply outdated methods of managing risk. They belong to another time.

If risk is a claim about the future, then the capacity to price risk is a technology for disenchanting prophecy. It reaches out towards the future, and the strain affects all kinds of goods and assets, artworks included. Even if there are, as yet, no derivatives on artworks, these are nevertheless being evaluated in the same way. In fact, every artwork functions like a derivative on the artists' future output. Artists are priced according to their implicit volatility. When still young, they appear as prized call options with very good potential—potential they lose as they grow older. Volatility expectations shrink as they near their expiration date.

No investor looks at an asset's inherent or eternal value—whatever that might mean—but instead considers the probability of a different price in the time to come.

Assets at Zero Interest

Today's collectors know that being rich means having claims on future payments. Liquidity is the key, and this is measured not in stocks, but in flows. In 2008, the housing crisis resulted in a fundamental shift in economic policy that has left assets at the center of the political economy. Artworks can be assets and their value rises and falls in parallel with the value of other assets, like houses or land.

As yields fall, any asset with claims on rent—a piece of land, a house, a highway or other infrastructure—rises in value relative to nonproductive assets. The point is not the rent-seeking; the point is the rising price of rent-producing assets relative to other, historically higher-ceiling investments. With yields closing in on zero, these valuations can rise to infinity: as returns of any kind become rarer and rarer, even a limited return becomes relatively more and more valuable, even if the return on an asset is limited.[3]

After the housing crisis, as interest rates went down to zero—and recently, below zero—even the demand for unproductive assets increased, so long as they were risk-free. This is why works of art have been so powerfully affected by the general rise in asset prices. Although works of art do not pay rent, they are nevertheless a kind of real estate, titles to a piece of a limited body—no matter what, there are only so many Picassos. And this makes them safe places to put money. Being exhibited, being shipped here and there, being viewed by people—all of this is considered risk. It's costly. It's useless, and it's potentially damaging. Those works of art better stay in their wooden coffins in a freeport! And so, post–securitization crisis, the freeports grow in number and in size. Art is more valuable out of sight, stabilizing value-as-such. As Steyerl has it: "The freeport contains multiple contradictions: it is a zone of terminal impermanence; it is also a zone of legalized extralegality maintained by nation-states trying to emulate failed states as closely as possible by selectively losing control."[4]

In freeportism, the contradiction between the work of art as an asset and its existence as a work of art is installed permanently. Like the gold in the Swiss banks near the Geneva Freeport, the strange—and limited—visual qualities of art make it too significant to be seen. Freeportism is the institutional location of a perpetual disruption in the value process. It is an effort to harness the energy generated by an endless crisis of representation by creating a permanent liquid hoard, an alchemical anti-museum art-bank which captures and hides art as a way of propping up and stabilizing the mode of representation more generally.

Artists Nik Kosmas, Martin Thacker, and Bitsy Knox produced a brand of matcha which they suggested for use as a green tea mask, offering the following recommendation: "If, when you rinse away the mask, you notice that your face looks a little bit, er greener than normal, don't panic: simply remove any excess 'greenness' using a cotton swab and some face oil, or gentle cleanser."

Lack of Transparency, Black Money

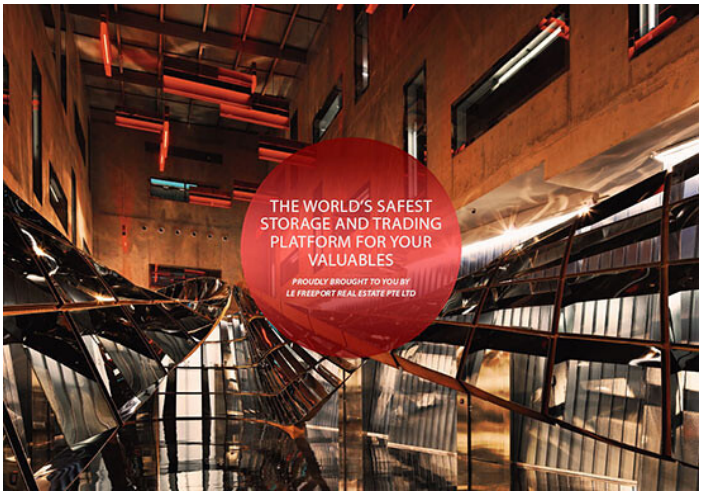
The lack of transparency is not a bug, but a crucial feature of the art market. There is no central clearing house. Nobody needs to know about a deal except the dealer and the client. Prices remain secret. Assessing a "real" value is impossible, because reality is an effect of the transaction.

This is perhaps what Yves Bouvier, the CEO of the Geneva Freeport, understood that Dmitry Rybolovlev, the Russian collector he overcharged by roughly one billion dollars for several paintings, did not.[5] By reinvesting that money in new arms of his freeport empire in Luxembourg and Singapore, he was creating the institutional architecture that would retroactively confirm the validity of the exorbitant prices he had charged, which then became the founding deposits, securing his bank of art. The value of a Picasso without a system of freeports might be much less than the value of a Picasso in a world equipped with a full-service, international network of institutions designed to preserve, and thus recognize, in perpetuity, the absolute value of the works in question.

Art exists, relatively autonomously, at the border of the mode of representation, and makes the art market similar to money laundering, because this border is always being crossed and recrossed, such that the numbers that appear on either side can't really be compared. When I recently asked a dealer active in the international market what percentage of dirty money was involved in the art business, his reply was: 200 percent. The joke was instructive: the amount a painting is sold for might be less than what was paid, but the circuit through the art-asset value-form will also have cleaned it off.

What the art market demands are objects of durable quality produced in large numbers. Yet, each one should be unique in order to warrant the impossibility of falsifications and reproductions. "Movable assets" is what Rybolovlev told Bouvier he needed, and so Rybolovlev bought art.

Liquidity reflects the power of an artist's brand. She or he has to issue a certain amount of work, and, at the same time, obey safety regulations against overproduction.



An ad exhibits the chrome high-tech interior of a freeport art storage facility in Singapore.

Anselm Reyle, a pre-post-internet artist, whose output looked very much like many recent post-internet products, and which was also directed towards a smooth adaption to market needs, nevertheless retired after overproduction caused the price of his work to crash in 2013. A liquid market has also another side. Not only supply must be guaranteed, but also demand has to be carefully managed. This is where the challenge and the risks rest on dealers, in the primary and sometimes also the secondary market, and on auction houses. In order to provide liquidity they have to act as market makers, meaning they have to guarantee minimum prices or buy back artworks. The liquidity constraint poses a major danger to all these market participants, and maybe that is why artists have not failed to address the issue.

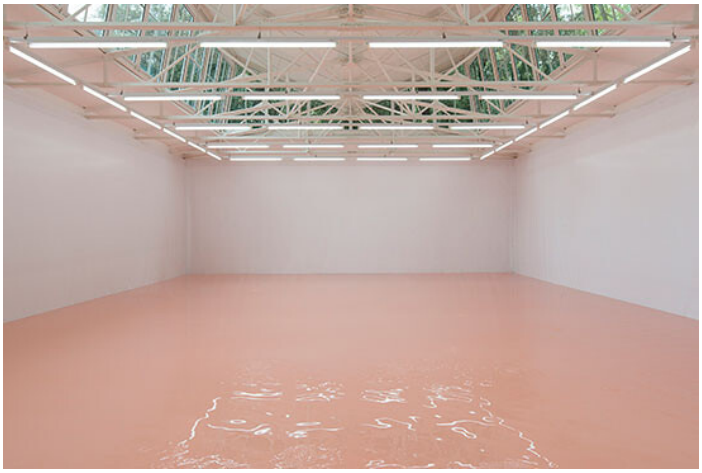
It was impossible to miss, in this respect, the appearance of a certain "liquid" surface in so many early post-internet artworks. The style soon became so widespread that an exhaustive list is impossible. Especially memorable examples include the slurps of color in Timur Si-Qin's work and the use of fluid surfaces and water bottles by Pamela Rosenkranz. Steyerl, of course has shown the way here, too, with her show *Liquidity Inc.*

The use of liquidity is an example of the metaphorical appropriation of technology by art, one of four kinds of such responses I will discuss. When gold was the stuff of hoards, art was placed in frames painted gold. Today, having broken gold's monopoly on liquid wealth, it is liquid which limns the surface of the post-internet work.

Post-Internet

The term "post-internet" did not spread because it was well defined. On the contrary, its ambivalence and its openness allowed it to resonate widely. Its prefix "post-" is borrowed from notions like the "postmodern" or the "post-digital." "Post-" used to mean "after," but now it also includes "beyond" and "deriving from." It confirms and denies at the same time, exerting a kind of double bind. It says: we belong to the internet, knowing that the internet is over. We are digital, but it does not matter, because that is just what everybody is. "Post-" also presumes to know the border of something: post-internet means we believe that the end of the event called "the internet" is somewhere in sight, in the same way that postmodernism served first of all to consolidate modernism into something we could have conceivably moved beyond.

Post-internet represents the latest episode in the long trajectory of artistic responses to shifts in the forces of representation and the evolution of media technology. We can characterize these responses in one of four ways: 1) the aforementioned metaphorical appropriation; 2) "technologism"; 3) tech- *derived* projects and practices, or "derivatives"; and 4) tech- *related* projects and practices, or "relatives."



Pamela Rosenkranz, Our Product, 2015. Installation view at the Pavilion of Switzerland, Venice Biennale. Photo: Marc Asekhame.

Technologism

Technologism describes artwork that threaten to be entirely exhausted by an embrace or a rejection of a given technology. There are both technophiliac and technophobic examples of technologism, in this respect. The point of departure for classic modernism, for example, can be seen as a technophobic rejection of the new technologies of representation that appeared in the nineteenth century. By contrast, many movements of the second half of the twentieth century, like Fluxus, Land Art, and Conceptual Art, paved the way for the reentry of technophilia, a belief in the liberating power of tech in and of itself.

As the name implies, Media Art was an attempt to

formulate a technophile modernism, liberating it from its technophobic constraints. Of course, by refusing mechanical reproduction, this phobia had made modernist works exceptionally attractive as repositories of value. In contrast to the dire prophecies of certain critics, the effect of the mass media was to make singular, "authentic" expression more valuable than ever, precisely as this value was no longer different in kind. The relationship between high modernism and mass-market representation was one of reciprocal stabilization, in this respect, rather than total antagonism or total identity. The Media Artists' unfettered belief in the progressive nature of technology naturally led them to collapse this structure, refusing materialization and art's economic exceptionalism in the same gesture, and creating art irrespective of the capacity of the market to price it *as art*. And so it didn't sell.

Media Art did however manage to settle down in the lap of the new neoliberal governments of the Eighties, whose fiscal policy called for the massive subsidy of technological innovation. The appearance of Media Art allowed the funding of culture to be channeled towards this, more directly lucrative, goal, and so Media Art was institutionalized alongside media-related commercial disciplines at universities and academies.

Like Media Art, most of the proponents of Net Art fall under the category of technophile technologists, and, to a certain degree, they repeated the strategies of their predecessors. But the window of opportunity was closed. Neither were states willing to create another body of media-related institutions, nor were the established institutions of Media Art willing to share their funds. In the United States the situation was somewhat less strict, with some funding provided by institutions like the Walker Art Center and the Dia Foundation. But it never allowed for a second wave of institutionalization. And it did not change the enmity of the market for these self-hating valuables.

This was because Net Artists made even fewer concessions to the demand for assets. Nor were market participants willing to expand the conventional understanding of value. The first wave of Net Art took place entirely outside the marketplace, and was mostly about applying conceptual practices within the novel environment of the internet. With few exceptions, immateriality was crucial for works like those of Jodi.org, Heath Bunting, and Olia Lialina. Even more so than Media Artists, whose production adapted to established institutional career opportunities, many Net Artists were deprived of profitable options and were forced into productive desperation.

There are contemporary artists who similarly elude materialization and operate only within the web. Unfortunately, the disruptive energy that the curator Tatiana Bazzichelli, among others, has claimed for these art practices remains somewhat hermetic and limited to a closely connected network, without spreading out towards the larger culture.[6]

It is only with what is known as "post-internet" art that technologism—either pro or con—begins to fade. None of the post-internet artists claims to be spearheading technological progress. But nor are they wringing their hands at the colonization of the life-world by the march of reification or calculability due to relentless technological advancement. Quite the opposite: practices shared by most post-internet artists derive from activities in social media, awareness of technological change, well-established techniques of production, and a preference for new materials.

Derivatives

Practices *derived* from the internet include artworks whose core motif remains an internet practice. Commodities and objects may *result*, but the practice can be sustained without them. Among early post-internet artists, many projects regarded the act of exhibiting as a slightly old-fashioned ritual, opening the possibility for a freeport to replace a gallery. One of the most famous examples are the staged exhibitions and TV projects of LuckyPDF in London.

Oliver Laric can be seen as another proponent of web-derived practices. The website vvork.com, which Laric cofounded, provided a showroom-like service for artworks, focusing entirely on their visual qualities. With the *Lincoln 3-D Scans* project, Laric realized an online distribution platform for freely available 3-D scans of sculptures from the holdings of the Collection and Usher Gallery in Lincoln, UK. Both projects are centered within the web and extend to artistic practices outside it.

But there are examples from beyond the first wave, too. Being disappointed by what he perceived as a surrender to market forces, curator Ben Vickers initiated the *unMonastery* project to encourage internet-based conceptual practices. As he stated in response to a questionnaire in the catalogue for the 2014 exhibition *Art Post-Internet: INFORMATION/DATA*:

> I guess I'd define "post-internet" as a lost sign post to a community that doesn't exist anymore, one that fell apart due to opportunists and general distrust but that serves as a convenient marketing term for dealers and young curators wanting to establish themselves on the first rung of the art industrial complex ladder.[7]

Unfortunately, the possibility to turn web-related practices into a conceptual questioning of the art market itself was never fully recognized. The very few gestures in that

A screenshot of artist Oliver Laric's website and project Lincoln 3-D Scans (2014).

direction were limited to imitations of web commerce stripped of all conceptual originality—the signal example being *DIS* magazine's webshop featuring artists' products like printed T-shirts for ordinary consumers.[8] This was a depressing echo of early, Net Art technophilia, albeit one shorn of even the slightest utopian desire. Sometimes a cigar is just a cigar, Freud said, and sometimes retail is just retail.

Relatives

With web-*related* practices, the core consists in conventional material artworks that nevertheless could not exist or would not make sense without some web-related activity.

The most representative example of web-related practices can be found in the work of Katja Novitskova. Her works install images taken from the web as sculptures in the gallery. Here the artwork is not much more than a transitional stage through which the images are being fed before slipping back into the online circulation of images.

Many post-internet artists have applied this kind of dual strategy by closely interlinking web-based resources with material production. The resulting artworks possess a double existence, as material objects and as information. The object is hosted in the gallery—or for that matter in a wooden transport box—while the images are hosted on social media and websites like vvork.com and Contemporary Art Daily. Many more people get to see the images of the artworks than the objects.

On one level, of course, this has been the case at least since the introduction of image-reproduction techniques in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, a revolution in the mode of representation that made the careers of Marcantonio Raimondi and Albrecht Dürer. But entering the internet not only allows a different scale of distribution; there is also a reversed circuit of representation. The sequential relationship between depiction and object is turned upside down: it is not that the original doesn't exist or doesn't matter, but that it exists only to occasion its representation somewhere else. The work of art is not a simulacra, but a stage on which to perform social media. To a greater or lesser degree, all post-internet artists partake of this shifting cycle of attention. But only some of them declare this practice as the conceptual core of their production, whilst others simply take it as a given and unavoidable side effect. Navigating like this—between web-related aspects and material work—is no longer limited to post-internet artists. As art critic Michael Sanchez pointed out, it had already become a widespread practice by 2011.[9]

As we saw with "liquidity," metaphoric appropriation means that conventional artworks are produced independently of new technological practices—like the internet and securitization—but nevertheless claim some link with them.

In terms of "post-internet," this fourth category—web-*related* art—encompasses all those works that relate metaphorically to the internet, by either applying online available production processes or being hosted within social media communities. The works in question tend to take a very conventional shape, as either sculptures or videos. And these may be very interesting, but not for reasons of the internet.

This fourth strain has grown to be the most successful, and in consequence the most attractive and populated. This is no surprise. Liberated from conceptual concerns, artists were free to go where an imaginary market would be waiting for them.

There are positions that embrace this attitude, most notably the work of Simon Denny, who openly promotes a practice of product development learned from start-up culture. His idea of user or exhibition experience became most apparent in his works at the DLD 2012 conference, which in turn sped the adaption of post-internet to market demands.[10]

The turn taken by post-internet—from its early preference for derivatives to its later, inflated output composed chiefly of densely material metaphorical appropriations—is both an example and a reflection of the imperatives the market is currently forcing on artistic production. In the course of less than five years, an artistic movement growing out of networks and mutual recognition within social media was turned into a branded production machine providing liquidity for speculation. That the freeports do not yet house many post-internet artworks does not matter. What matters is the speculative approach that leads venture collectors to invest in these assets. In order to claim their future value, artworks have to fit the site of non-exhibition at a freeport. The better objects are optimized for circulaton through social media images, the more they adapt to the requirements of freeportism. The secondary layer of online-existence allows the "real" object to be completely withdrawn, buried in a wooden coffin.

In the second part of this essay, I will show how speculative realism became the ideological partner of this mode of representation.

X

A contribution coordinated by *e-flux journal* editor Julieta Aranda will reply to this text in an upcoming issue.

Stefan Heidenreich is a writer and theoretician based in Berlin. Currently, he teaches art theory at the Kunstakademie Düsseldorf. In his most recent book, *Forderungen* (Demands), published by Merve in 2015, he develops an outline of a utopian postmonetary economy.

1
For details, see https://lux-hsh.com/ .

2
Yield is defined as the combination of interest and dividends an investment is likely to return in the future, not including capital gains, which is itself partially determined by yield. So, for example, a risky investment with a high yield may be worth less than a safe investment with a low yield. With fewer and fewer high-yield investments available, of any kind, the safety of a fixed income comes to be valued higher and higher.

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4
Eileen Kinsella, "Gagosian Says Freeport King Yves Bouvier's Activities Pose 'Terrible Conflict of Interest,'" *artnet news*, September 24, 2015 https://news.artnet.com/market/gagosian-comments-bouvier-rybolovlev-335165 .

5
Eileen Kinsella, "Gagosian Says Freeport King Yves Bouvier's Activities Pose 'Terrible Conflict of Interest,'" *artnet news*, September 24, 2015 https://news.artnet.com/market/gagosian-comments-bouvier-rybolovlev-335165 .

6
Cf. Tatiana Bazzichelli, *Networked Disruption: Rethinking Oppositions in Art, Hacktivism and the Business of Social Networking* (Aarhus, Denmark: Digital Aesthetics Research Center Press, 2013).

7
"How do you define 'post-internet'? How does this terminology relate to artistic practice?" in *Art Post-Internet: IN FORMATION/DATA* , eds. Karen Archey and Robin Peckham (Beijing: Ullens Center for Contemporary Art, 2014), 98. Published in conjunction with the exhibition of the same name shown at Ullens Center for Contemporary Art, Beijing, March 1–May 11, 2014.

8
See http://disown.dismagazine.com/ .

9
Michael Sanchez, "2011," *Artforum* , Summer 2013 https://artforum.com/inprint/issue=201306&id=41241 .

10
Cf. Timo Feldhaus, "The Soul of Simon Denny," *Spike*, July 29, 2015, https://spikeartmagazine.com/?q=articles/soul-simon-denny .

Jane DeBevoise

Big Business, Selling Shrimps: The Market as Imaginary in Post-Mao China

For decades critics have written disapprovingly about the relationship between the market and art. In the 1970s proponents of institutional critique wrote in *Artforum* about the degrading effects of money on art, and in the 1980s Robert Hughes (author of *Shock of the New* and director of *The Mona Lisa Curse*) compared the deleterious effect of the market on art to that of strip-mining on nature.[1] More recently, Hal Foster has disparaged the work of some of the markets hottest art stars—Takashi Murakami, Damien Hirst, and Jeff Koons—declaring that their pop concoctions lack tension, critical distance, and irony, offering little more than "giddy delight, weary despair, or a manic-depressive cocktail of the two."[2] And Walter Robinson has spoken about the ability of the market to act as a kind of necromancer, reanimating mid-century styles of abstract painting for the purposes of flipping canvas like real estate—a phenomenon he calls "zombie formalism."[3]

Moralistic attacks against the degrading impact of the market on art are not unique to US-based critics. Soon after the end of the Cultural Revolution, when few people think China had any art market at all, plainly worded attacks on commercialism appeared regularly in the nationally circulated art press. As early as 1979, Jiang Feng, the chair of the Chinese Artists Association, worried in writing that ink painters were churning out inferior works in pursuit of material gain. [4], *Meishu* 12 (1979): 10–11.] In 1983, the conservative critic Hai Yuan wrote that "owing to the opportunity for high profit margins, many painters working in oil or other mediums have switched to ink painting." And, what was worse, to maximize their gain, these artists "sought to boost their productivity by acting like walking photocopy machines."[5], *Meishu* no. 1 (1983): 42. Hai Yuan is probably a pen name and may be short for Qian Haiyuan.] In the 1990s supporters of experimental oil painting also came under fire. After visiting the 1992 Guangzhou Biennial Art Fair, avant-garde art critic Li Xianting was reportedly so overcome by the potential dangers of commercialism that he wept.[6], ed. Wang Lin (Hong Kong: Yishu chaoliu zazhishe, 1997), 92–93.] Other visitors were so upset by the contaminating effect of commerce that they sprayed the exhibition hall with Lysol to extinguish its stench. And a few months later, still others organized a mock funeral to mourn the death of artists that had succumbed to the fatal temptations of market exchange.

But for critics in China, unlike those in the West, the foreign identity of many of the buyers of contemporary art added to the sting, and for decades, nationalism, even xenophobia have inflected the debate. When Zhu Qi complained in 1999 that Westerners do not understand Chinese art and suggested that artists who pander to their tastes not only risk compromising their personal integrity but also their creative ability, many critics in the 1980s would have agreed, as they still might agree today.[7]

While the concerns of these important critics are certainly

valid, it is also possible to argue the opposite: that in the context of China in the 1980s, the liberalization of the economy and the introduction of markets liberated artists from the strictures of the state, and created an alternative space, incipient yet real, unstable yet protean, from which emerged artistic experiments of great imagination and force. Among the artists who recognized the empowering potential of the market and its pitfalls was Wu Shanzhuan whose early work crystallizes the process I am trying to describe.

appearance of a market, first in the countryside and soon after in towns and cities, where farmers and villagers alike sold produce and handmade products for prices determined by supply and demand, rather than state policy. By the mid-1980s these economic directives had expanded to include some of the large state-owned enterprises, from media concerns to manufacturers, who were encouraged to become financially accountable and to make a profit.

The state agencies in charge of cultural programs

Two views of the Zhejiang Academy of Fine Arts in 1980, now the China Academy of Art. Courtesy of the artist and the China Academy of Art.

1. Big Business

For the three decades between 1949—when Mao Zedong declared the establishment of the People's Republic of China—and 1979, when Deng Xiaoping and his allies in the government ousted the ultraleft Gang of Four and began reforming the economy—the dominant and singular system of support and control of Chinese art was the state. Artists were not only educated and employed by the state, in state-controlled schools, but they lived in state-owned housing and produced work in state-owned studios with allocated state-owned art supplies; work which was then displayed at state-organized exhibitions that took place in state-controlled venues. If they were lucky, their work might garner state-organized awards and be published in the state-controlled media.[8]

But starting in the late 1970s, China embarked on a series of far-reaching economic reforms. Beginning in the agricultural sector, these reforms were aimed at re-igniting a stalled economy and were defined by the

followed suit, organizing exhibitions at first of ink painting and later oil painting that were sent abroad, to Japan and the West, to develop diplomatic ties and to generate business opportunities. In an effort to accumulate foreign currency, shops selling paintings to an increasing influx of tourists proliferated all over China. Even the National Gallery expanded its retail initiatives, rented gallery space, and hosted sales exhibitions, like the series organized between 1986 and 1989 by the Beijing International Art Palace, a partnership between the Chinese government and a Japanese real estate developer. Headed by Liu Xun, a senior official of the Chinese Artists Association, the Art Palace held fifteen sales exhibitions at the National Gallery, until establishing its own gallery at the Holiday Inn Crown Plaza in Wangfujing in 1991. The pressure to generate income became so great that the National Gallery started rotating their exhibitions with almost unprecedented frequency. By 1988, it was presenting two-hundred shows a year, of which 95 percent lasted less than two weeks and many were only open for a few days.[9]

], *Zhongguo meishu nianjian, 1949–1989* [Annual of Chinese art, 1949–1989]] (Nanning: Guangxi meishu chubanshe, 1993), 1058–68. The shortest exhibition during this time period lasted only two days. See ibid., 1068.] The museum had begun to resemble a commercial gallery, and the largest percentage of work displayed in these short-term shows was ink painting. Ink painting was the most commercially viable form of art at the time, and, despite the hype around the handful of oil paintings that achieve six or seven figure prices, ink painting still accounts for the largest segment of the domestic Chinese art market today.[10]

[figure 2016_03_oil-paintingWEB.jpg
Cover of *Xiandai youhua: Beijing guoji yiyuan diyijie youhuazhan*, the catalogue for the First Beijing International Art Palace Oil Painting Exhibition (1986). Cover image: Wang Yidong.]

An exception to this preference for ink was the "Nude Oil Painting Exhibition," one of the most popular and profitable shows in the history of the National Gallery, which ran for a mere eighteen days from December 22, 1988 to January 8, 1989. "The nude art show," writes Richard Kraus writes in *The Party and the Arty in China,* "created a sensation even before it was opened. As early as June, forty-seven Chinese newspapers and seven foreign news services carried reports on the coming show. The unprecedented exhibit attracted about a quarter of a million visitors in eighteen days."[11] Taking advantage of its immense popularity, the cost of admission was increased ten times, from the usual two mao to two yuan, and fully illustrated catalogues were sold (and sold out) for the then-exorbitant price of forty-five yuan.[12]

But it wasn't just fee-hungry museum administrators and organizers with overtly commercial goals who saw the possibilities inherent in the newly emerging space between the state and the market. Champions of experimentalism saw it, too. In 1985, after three years of effort, Robert Rauschenberg succeeded in procuring gallery space at the National Gallery from the Chinese International Exhibition Agency, an arm of the Ministry of Culture, to produce an installment of the Rauschenberg Overseas Culture Interchange. Gao Minglu, the indefatigable advocate of the Chinese avant-garde, was one of the purported 300,000 people who came to see Rauschenberg's show.[13] He would go on to rent the National Gallery himself after raising funds from several sponsors, including a fast food entrepreneur named Song Wei, in order to present the now infamous "China/Avant-Garde Exhibition" in 1989.[14] And it was here that the market imaginary for Chinese contemporary artists finally stepped out onto center stage.

2. Selling Shrimps

"What mattered that day was not the art," remembers the artist Zhang Peili, "or the show itself"—which anyway "looked more like a farmer's market" than a typical art exhibition. "Everyone knew that they were making history. We were totally invested in our roles as actors on a stage where anybody could suddenly become a star."[15] One of the stars of this grand art bazaar was Wu Shanzhuan, who brought thirty kilograms of raw shrimp from his hometown of Zhoushan (Shanghai) to the National Gallery. There he set up shop by erecting a makeshift sign board, on which he wrote the following message:

> Dear Customers:
>
> As our entire nation celebrates the Year of the Snake, in order to enrich the spiritual and material life of the people of our nation's capital, I have brought from my hometown of Zhoushan the highest-quality export shrimp (to be sold to the domestic market). Venue of display and sale: National Gallery of Art. Price: 9.5 yuan per catty. Hurry while supplies last.[16]

On the day of the opening, visitors to the museum crowded around Wu's makeshift market stall to buy the frozen blocks of shrimps. Business was brisk, and Liu Kaiqu, the director of the National Gallery, was one of Wu's first customers.[17] However, the exhibition had only been open for half an hour when two plainclothes policemen ordered Wu to stop and took him away. A little while later, the artist returned to the exhibition hall to write on his chalkboard: "temporarily closed for stocktaking."[18]], *Zhongguo meishubao* 11 (1989): 2. See translation in Acret and Lau, *Wu Shanzhuan*, Artists' Writings/14.]

Wu Shanzhuan's deceptively straightforward performance has been interpreted in a number of ways. Gao Minglu wrote that Wu's actions were a "rebellion against the art museum and art critics."[19] Some of Wu's own writings support this interpretation:

> Selling shrimps in the National [Art] Gallery is a protest against the court that judges artworks: the art museum itself. The authority of the art museum subjects art—an "innocent lamb"—to a trial conducted according to a quasi-legal process, as well as subjecting artists to the process of testifying as eye witnesses, resulting in a waste of good space.
>
> Selling shrimps is also a protest against art critics, as their dominance of the critique of art will end in the tragedy of turning art from nothing into everything, and turning artists into salesmen who peddle the "goods" they produce, resulting in a waste of good money (referring to the commission fees paid to these

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在美术馆卖对虾，即对美术理论家的反抗。因为理论家评论美术品的权力，将导致美术品这一什么都不是的东西成为什么都是的悲剧；导致艺术家作为"货"的生产者到处推销；导致稿酬浪费。

1989年2月4日上午，美术馆成为它出现时就有的一个地道的黑市；理论成为它产生时就有的一个地道的二道贩子。

大生意取之你有一种东西但不能直接卖掉；你要一种东西但又不能直接买到，中间的这个领黑提包的人正把握着我们讲神话的传统。

吴山专　大生意　行为艺术

Page two of Zhongguo meishubao no. 11 (1989), with an article by Wu Shanzhuan and an image of Liu Kaiqu, director of NAMOC, buying shrimps from Wu's market stall. Wu Shanzhuan archive at Asia Art Archive, Hong Kong. Courtesy of the artist.

theorists).[20]

Dissatisfaction with state-controlled institutions of art was widespread at the time, and another artist to voice his disdain was Huang Yongping, who conducted a series of provocative performances, including the display of junk inside a museum and the incineration of artworks outside of it.[21] In a more muted yet equally pointed work, Huang extended his assault on the art institution by submitting a proposal to the "China/Avant-GardeExhibition" in which he planned to attach up to four thousand meters of rope to sixty locations on the façade of the National Gallery, in order to pull the building away from its site.[22] By trapping it like a whale in a large fishing net, Huang sought to subdue the behemoth, dislodging the museum from its position of authority, and exposing not only the depth of its structural supports but also its vulnerability.

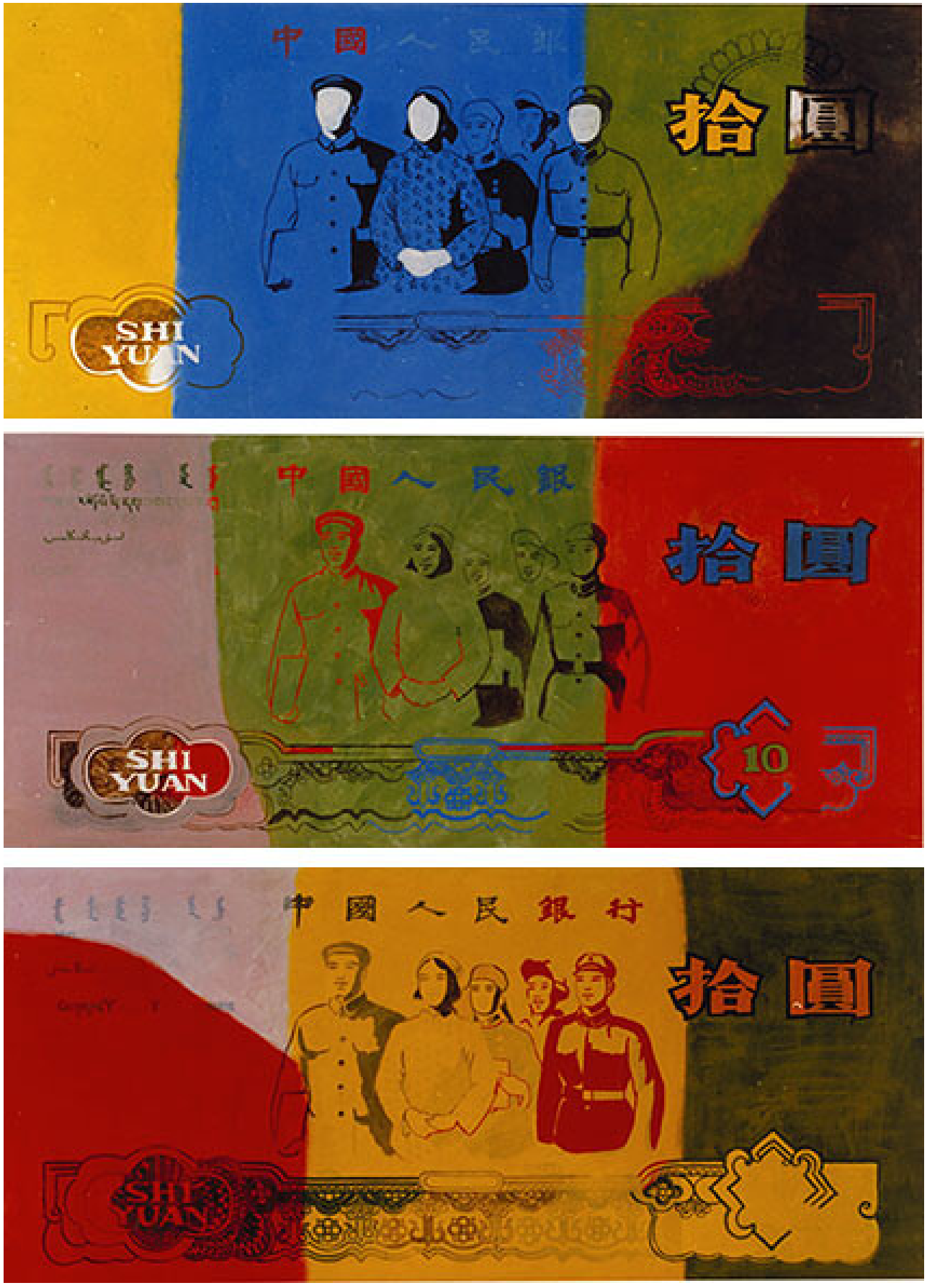
One of Geng Jianyi's submissions to the "China/Avant-GardeExhibition" targeted the bureaucratic tendency of many of the participants, including the aspiring avant-garde organizers. Prompted by the blizzard of official-looking notices and forms issued by Gao Minglu and his organizational team, Geng disseminated his own mock registration form which he asked the unwitting recipients to fill out. These deceptively official but ultimately useless forms not only exposed the eager willingness of the organizers to adapt to official protocols, but also reflected the conformist impulses of aspiring artists equally eager to comply with any authority in hopes of gaining acceptance. Huang Yongping, however, saw through the ruse, as did Wu Shanzhuan, who responded with tongue in cheek. Many others, however, answered Geng's forms in earnest.[23]

Art-institutional critique was perhaps a common lens through which many local Chinese art critics viewed the work of the avant-garde, and Wu's work in particular, but other critics (often foreign) focused on its political and economic context. Norman Bryson, for example, writing in a later moment, saw Wu's performance as a rebellion against the state: " *Selling Shrimps* was all about restriction," he wrote, revealing "that behind the museum and behind even big business, lay the iron hand of the state."[24] Geremie Barmé, on the other hand, has noted that Wu's conflation of the museum with the marketplace revealed that the National Gallery, which, he said, was making its halls "available to virtually any self-styled avant-garde who can afford the rental fee," was not so much controlled by socialist dogma as it was by the dollar bill.[25] Wu's writings, always arcane, could support this interpretation as well:

> On the morning of February 4, 1989, the art museum became every bit the black market that it was when the museum was built, where the theories produced there could be resold in the secondary market.
>
> With big business, you have something to sell but you cannot just go out and sell it: you want to buy something but you cannot just go out and buy it. There is always this man in the middle toting a black briefcase and controlling our myth-making traditions.[26]

Wu would strenuously resist any attempt to put too fine a point on his comments. He's more philosopher than political economist, and would probably not want his words to be attached to a specific current event or even historical moment. Still, Wu's equation between the ecology of the art system and big business was prescient. Early on Wu identified 1987 as the year that the Chinese masses, including the intellectual class of which artists were a part, accepted business as integral to their new way of life. And in 1988, at an important art world conference, he declared, "Although some Chinese intellectuals tried to escape from this commercialism, *da shengyi* (big business) has become an affair of all Chinese citizens."[27] The Shanghai artist Yu Youhan must have noticed a similar tendency when also in 1988 he painted a set of pop-inspired renminbi .

Like many of his contemporaries, Wu's work was about exposing boundaries and breaking taboos, and the question of what precisely constitutes business provided a tantalizing new field of conceptual inquiry. Wu and his close family members had long been involved in enterprise in one form or another. Wu's father was an amateur inventor who was constantly dreaming up new ways to try and make money.Wu also tried his own hand at



Yu Youhan, Renminbi, 1988. Oil on canvas. Photo: Carl Brunn. Courtesy of the artist and Ludwig Forum Aachen, collection Ludwig.

business by selling fish in his hometown of Zhoushan. "The 1980s," he explained, "was the time of the middleman in business, and I sold fish."[28]

Selling Shrimps, in fact, was inspired by the concept of the middleman—the broker who negotiated, mediated, and facilitated exchange—and whose flexibility and pragmatism offered a refreshing alternative to the ponderous strictures of an economy that had been, until recently, entirely centrally planned. People were selling everything, Wu recalled, from shrimps and fish to pots and pianos, and so he began to think of art in that way, although, he said, it was not really that way at the time.[29] And while Wu's performance involved "selling shrimps in the name of art," as he would later write in his "Alphabetical Aphorisms," fully intended to make a profit from his performance.[30]] in the name of art. As an artist he is in debt to the shrimp seller at large."] If he had not been stopped by the police, Wu remembered, he would have earned the equivalent of $200. But his shrimps were ruined, so he made no money. Wu's "business in the name of art" had faltered, with the result that he had to borrow from a friend to pay for his train ticket home.[31]

3. To Buy Is to Create

In the context of the contemporary debate about the market and the state, Wu was the middleman in art and in business. By exploiting their intersection and making it the subject of his work, he erected a special "zone of art," as Norman Bryson has written, where neither the rules of the state nor of the capitalist market fully applied.[32] "It was the time of grey money," Wu said.While all salaries were much the same in the early 1980s, by mid-decade the ability to make "grey" money became increasingly important, which Wu claimed ultimately was one of the reasons for the Tiananmen Square incident. "The economy was booming. There was grey money everywhere."[33] But, as Wu explained, grey money led to grey thinking,people called for democracy, and things went too far; that was when the government cracked down.[34]

Yet it was in this shifting landscape that making money became a new ideology. Wu even celebrated money's allure by putting it in a commemorative frame. Exposing the new paradigm of exposure and support that emerged in the hybrid space between state and market, Wu made the dynamic middle zone the very subject of his investigation. The museum had become a marketplace and as such the marketplace had assumed the sanctity of the museum. As Wu would later say, "To buy is to create."Straddling the fault lines between political and economic cultures, between ideology and materialism, Wu gave form to a new imaginary, exposing art's newest source of energy.

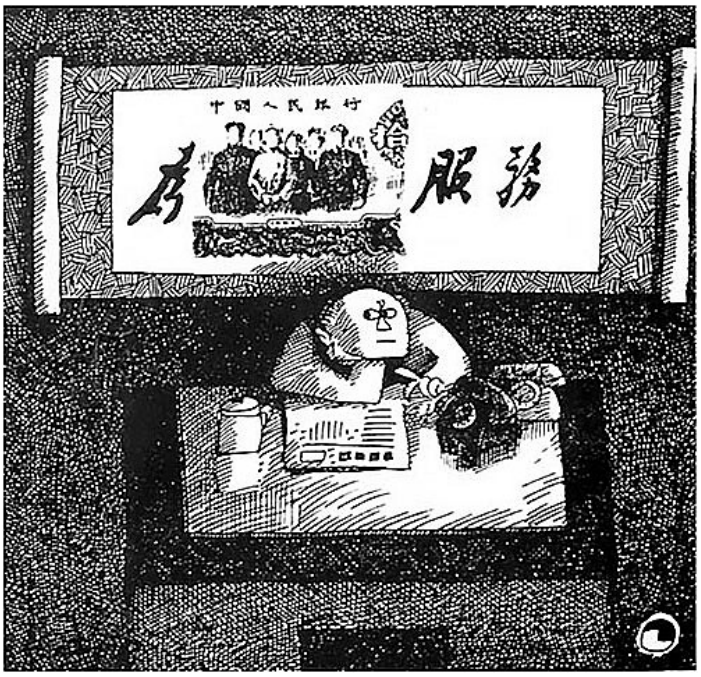
Four months after the conclusion of the "China/Avant-Garde Exhibition," government tanks and military trucks rolled through the streets of Beijing and into Tiananmen Square, leaving dead and injured a still-unknown number of unarmed citizens who had joined a massive anticorruption, pro-democracy demonstration. The impact of this event on the arts was swift. The number of exhibitions presented at the National Gallery in the following six months dropped about 40 percent from the year before. Art publications were censored or shut down. Curators and editors were demoted or reassigned. Champions of experimentalism in the arts, including their right-wing protectors within the political establishment, had lost the struggle for greater social and cultural freedoms. The state-sponsored institutional system made up of national museums, national exhibitions, national awards, and national media platforms was once again off limits to the experimental fringe. The conservative left wing had won.[35]

But the empowering potential of market reform identified by Wu and his compatriots did not falter. If, in the 1980s, the market for art had become an imaginary offering artists and their advocates the prospect of an alternative space of legitimization and support, in the aftermath of the Tiananmen crisis, the market was not just an imaginary. It had become an imperative, at least for some. Responding to the institutional intolerance for experimental art that characterized the 1990s, certain enterprising artists and their entrepreneurial champions began to embrace the art market as a possible solution to their professional constraints. Exemplifying this trend were the Guangzhou Biennial Art Fair organized by Lü Peng in 1992, and the early career of artist Wang Guangyi. Bearing further witness to the enabling role of commerce are the curatorial projects of Chang Tsong-zung whose gallery Hanart in 1993 organized the seminal exhibition *Post-1989: New Art from China.*

4. Between State and Market

Today, the tables may have turned again. Given the accelerated pace of economic development in China over the last twenty years, could artists in the 1980s and early '90s have foreseen that the means by which they sought independence from the instrumentalism of the state would itself become a trap? Could they have imagined that the promise of the market to deliver them from the suffocating authority of the government-controlled agencies would become a new and equally prescriptive authority?

It is tempting to attribute certain deleterious trends to the introduction of the art market. These trends, as prevalent is the West as they are in China, include the development of signature styles and the widespread repetition of stereotypical images. It is also tempting to blame the market for encouraging artists to remain within the safety of successful formulas at the expense of risky experimentation. But in the late 1980s and early '90s, the



Zhang Liang, Serve the Renminbi, published in Beijing Review, vol. 32, no. 2 (January 9–15, 1989): 35.

market in China had the potential not only to corrupt but also to liberate, helping artists to reposition themselves and redefine their possibilities. Commenting on the proliferation of privately funded art exhibitions in Beijing in the 1980s, Nicholas Jose observed that "behind entrepreneurship lay the desire to achieve a new self-determination and self-identity."[36]

Nonetheless, the precipitous rise in prices since 2000 for Chinese contemporary art in the international art market, combined with the dearth in China of durable independent platforms of visibility and debate, raises urgent questions. Commenting on the current situation whereby quality seems to have become synonymous with fashion, and value is determined primarily by monetary results, Martina Köppel-Yang has asked, "How can tautology be avoided? How can individuals and local positions be articulated without being swallowed, reproduced, and assimilated by national and global thought, and by the culture industries? Can art refuse ideological models offered by the market?"[37] The state system of support for the arts in post-Mao China was neither monolithic nor static, and neither is today's art market. Instead, it is complex and evolving. And just as in the 1980s and early '90s, today there continues to be artists and advocates who hold fast to the promise of self-determination by exploring the creative space between the state and the market, to resist the instrumentalism of both.

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A portion of this text is based on material that originally appeared in Jane DeBevoise, Between State and Market: Chinese Contemporary Art in the Post-Mao Era *(Leiden: Brill, 2014).*

Jane DeBevoise is Chair of the Board of Directors of Asia Art Archive in Hong Kong and New York. Previously DeBevoise was Deputy Director of the Guggenheim Museum, where, in 1996, she first joined as Project Director of "China: 5000 Years, a large-scale exhibition of traditional and modern Chinese art," which was presented in 1998 at the Guggenheim New York and Bilbao. DeBevoise holds a BA from Tufts University, an MA from the University of California, Berkeley, and a PhD from The University of Hong Kong, all in art history.

1
For Robert Hughes's famous quote ("What strip mining is to nature the art market has become to culture"), see http://www.theguardian.com/books/2012/aug/07/robert-hughes-quotes-best

2
Hal Foster, "The Medium is the Market," *London Review of Books*, October 9, 2008 http://www.lrb.co.uk/v30/n19/hal-foster/the-medium-is-the-market

3
Walter Robinson, "Flipping and the Rise of Zombie Formalism," *Artspace* , April 3, 2014 http://www.artspace.com/magazine/contributors/see_here/the_rise_of_zombie_formalism-52184

4
Jiang Feng, "Guanyu Zhongguohua wenti de yifengxin" [A letter about the problem of Chinese painting

5
Hai Yuan, "Jingti yishu shangpinghua de buzheng zhifeng" [Watch out for an incorrect tendency toward commercialization in the arts

6
Zhongguo : Bajiuhou-yishu [China: Post-'89 art

7
Zhu Qi, "Do Westerners Really Understand Chinese Avant Garde Art?," in *Chinese Art at the End of the Millennium: Chinese-art.com 1998–1999* , ed. John Clark (Hong Kong: New Art Media Limited, 2000), 55–60.

8
The Gang of Four is described as "ultraleftist" because that is how the Chinese would have described the extreme conservatism and doctrinaire Maoism of this group. In contrast, many of the leadership figures who advocated for a more liberal—meaning more open—social, political, and cultural space in the 1980s would have been described as "right-leaning."

9
Zhongguo meishuguan [NAMOC

10
The Art Market in 2014, 25–32 http://imgpublic.artprice.com/pdf/rama2014_en.pdf . According to this report, ink painting and calligraphy represent 84 percent of the Chinese domestic fine art auction market, with oil painting and contemporary art representing 16 percent.

11
Richard Curt Kraus, *The Party and the Arty in China* (Boulder, CO: Rowman & Littlefield, 2004), 80.

12
Forty-five yuan was equivalent at the time to approx. one month's salary.

13
See Rauschenberg Foundation website http://www.rauschenbergfoundation.org/art/art-in-context/roci

14
The rental cost, including utilities, was about 50,000 RMB. To close the deficit in his original 150,000 RMB budget, Gao's financing strategy included selling artwork in the show. But ultimately this plan failed, leaving him with a large unpaid debt. Gao Minglu, interview by author, New York, August 11, 2004; Kong Chang'an, interview by author, Los Angeles, August 20, 2005; Gao Minglu, *Total Modernity and the Avant-Garde in Twentieth Century Chinese Art* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2011), 152–54; and for a price list of works in the "China/Avant-Garde Exhibition," see Tokyo Gallery archive at Asia Art Archive, Hong Kong.

15
Francesca Dal Lago, "The Avant-Garde Has Its Moment of Glory," *Time*, September 27, 1999, 98.

16
Cited in Norman Bryson, "Something to Do with Freedom," in *Wu Shanzhuan: Red Humour International* , eds. Susan Acret and Lau Kin Wah Jaspar (Hong Kong: Asia Art Archive, 2005), 9.

17
Wu Shanzhuan, interview by author, Hong Kong, February 13, 2004.

18
Wu Shanzhuan, "Guanyu 'dashengyi'" [On "big business"

19
Gao Minglu, "Wu Shanzhuan's Red Humour International Series," in Acret and Lau, *Wu Shanzhuan* , 63.

20
Wu Shanzhuan, "Guanyu 'dashengyi,'" 2.

21
See Fei Dawei, "Two-Minute Washing Cycle," in *House of Oracles : A Huang Yong Ping Retrospective,* eds. Philippe Vergne and Doryun Chong (Minneapolis: Walker Art Center, 2005), 9; and Gao Minglu, "The '85 Movement," ibid., 160, in which he cites an unpublished essay by Huang that states, "Regardless of their market price, to burn artworks is a proper way to keep their substantial value." This incineration took place on November 23, 1986 outside an art museum in the southern Chinese city of Xiamen.

22
See Vergne and Chong, *House of Oracles* , 23.

23
Geng Jianyi, interview by author, Hangzhou, July 13, 2006, and confirmed by Wu Shanzhuan. See also Vergne and Chong, *House of Oracles* , 21. The questions on these forms started conventionally enough, asking for names, birthdates, and employment status, but gradually evolved towards an unusual curiosity, to include questions about favorite plants, animals, and people, attitudes towards work, ideological tendencies, and lifestyle.

24
Bryson, "Something to Do with Freedom," 9–10.

25
Geremie R. Barmé, "Arrière-Pensée on an Avant-Garde: The Stars in Retrospect," in Chang Tzong-zung, Michael Sullivan, Huang Rui, Yan Li, Ma Desheng, Ahcheng Zhong, Wang Keping, Chen Yingde, Geremie Barme, and Li Xianting, *The Stars: Ten Y ears, 79–82* (Hong Kong: Hanart 2, 1989), 82.

26
Wu Shanzhuan, "Guanyu 'dashengyi,'" 2. See also Acret and Lau, *Wu Shanzhuan,* Artists' Writings/14.

27
Wu Shanzhuan cited in Gao Minglu, "Wu Shanzhuan's Red Humour International Series," 63.

28
Wu Shanzhuan, interviews by author, Hong Kong, December 15, 2003, and Nanjing, June 12, 2005. In the 1980s, after graduating from the Hangzhou-based Zhejiang Academy of Fine Arts (now named alternatively the China National Academy of Art or the China Academy of Art), Wu returned to his hometown of Zhoushan (located on an island not far from Shanghai) and was assigned to and worked at a small local state-run organization called the Institute for Mass Culture, from which he received a modest salary and other benefits. Since the 1990s Wu has lived between China, Germany, and Iceland.

29
Wu Shanzhuan, interview by author, Hong Kong, February 13, 2004.

30
Wu Shanzhuan, "Alphabetical Aphorisms," unpublished booklet. The "D" entry reads, "Debt: Wu was selling shrimps at the National Gallery [NAMOC

31
Wu Shanzhuan, interview by author, Hong Kong, July 5, 2005.

32
Bryson, "Something to Do with Freedom," 9. In his discussion of the nature of the Chinese avant-garde, Bryson suggested that the totalitarian state voluntarily created quasi-independent areas, such as Special Economic Zones and "zones of art," in which, by implication, emerging businessmen and artists were able to work.

33
Wu Shanzhuan, interview by author, Hong Kong, December 15, 2003.

34
In the 1980s these so-called avant-gardists were not political dissidents advocating the overthrow of the Communist Party—an interpretation that has been favored by some Western writers. This interpretation appears somewhat self-serving, projecting a Cold War perspective and a certain American triumphalism. If anything, these artists were clamoring for admission to the "center," hence the great excitement around exhibiting inside the National Gallery, the ultimate Socialist Art Palace.

35
The Chinese Communist Party (CCP), which is the sole party in China and defines the political establishment, has a left wing and right wing, and many factions in between. The right wing, which held sway during the 1980s, was more liberal, and tolerated (if not

advocated) debate in a more open sociopolitical space. The left wing is and was more conservative. The left wing won the internal CCP ideological struggle that was waged during the 1980s, and after Tiananmen the relatively open sociopolitical space that had emerged at that time was closed, market reforms were accelerated, and economic growth became the singular goal at the expense of political plurality. The Faustian bargain was struck, and making money became the new ideology. This a basic sense of a story that is, of course, much more complicated.

36
Nicholas Jose, "Notes from Underground, Beijing Art, 1985–89," *Orientations*, July 1992, 8.

37
Martina Köppel-Yang, "The Surplus Value of Accumulation: Some Thoughts," *Yishu: Journal of Contemporary Chinese Art* , December 2007, 18.

Irmgard Emmelhainz

Geopolitics and Contemporary Art, Part II: The Nation-State as the Possible Container for Global Struggles

Continued from "Geopolitics and Contemporary Art, Part I: From Representation's Ruin to Salvaging the Real"

One of the consequences of globalization and the deterritorialization of financial capital has been that the decisions that affect world citizens are now made by representatives of a corporate oligarchy untethered from the direct interests of nation-states. Secret negotiations and treaties have taken the place of constitutions and other forms of social contract, becoming the dominant method for managing natural resources, transnational security, copyright, privatization, food autonomy, financial fluxes, drug patents, and so forth. The International Monetary Fund, the World Bank, the Group of Seven, the GATT, and other organizations and agreements, like the TTIP and the TPP, make up our de facto global government, one designed to serve the interests of transnational corporations, banks, and investment firms. What does the loss of national autonomy mean for the project of self-legislation more generally? What sort of sovereign practices remain available to nation-states when most of their historical mandate has been remanded to the coordinating committee for transnational accumulation?

At the peak of the antiglobalization movement in 2000, Frederic Jameson argued that despite its faults, "the Nation-State today remains the only concrete terrain and framework for political struggle." This was so despite "the recent anti-World Bank and anti-WTO demonstrations" which, although they seemed "to mark a promising new departure for a politics of resistance to globalization within the US," nevertheless left it "hard to see how such struggles in other countries could be developed in any other fashion than the 'nationalist' [one]."[1] This was the case because the only apparent alternatives to national struggle were cultural forms of resistance based on religion or a general defense of "our way of life." And these are limited by the lack of a universalizing frame.

In other words, for Jameson, the struggle still boiled down to a conflict between the "social" and the "economic," and, for this reason, the forms of social cohesion that preceded globalization, alongside national myths and narratives, remained an indispensable precondition for any effective and long-lasting political struggle. But twenty-five years into neoliberal reforms, the liberalization of the market, and the global homogenization of culture, it is worth asking if the nation-state can still serve as such a framework. Can the nation-state still be the container for defending the commons—infrastructure, biodiversity, natural resources, traditional knowledge, the means of production and reproduction—against the ravages of transnational corporations?

Several "Merry Crisis" tags appeared in Athens during riots in December 2008.

As the nation-state has become a proxy for global corporate and oligarchic interests, what precisely is at stake is the legitimacy of governments and their institutions. Following the Invisible Committee, must we wage war against any and all infrastructure that organizes life by suspending and sacrificing worlds, in order to delegitimize institutions which rely on our consent to operate and oppress? This would involve creating zones of dissent and then establishing strategic links to other dissident zones so as to pursue secession through a different geography than the nation-state—not by revindicating the local, but against the global:

> As the Zapatistas have shown, the fact that each world is situated doesn't diminish its access to the generality, but on the contrary is what ensures it. The universal, a poet has said, is the local without walls. There seems, rather, to be a universalizing potential that is linked to a deepening per se, an intensification of what is experienced in the world at large. It is not a question of choosing between the care we devote to what we are constructing and our political striking force. Our striking force is composed of the very intensity of what we are living, of the joy emanating from it, of the forms of expression invented there, of a collective ability to withstand stresses that is attested by our force.[2]

This would mean exerting the power of society over the state—not to free the individual from the social (one of the main principles of neoliberalism), but to take seriously the idea that the individual can be freed only through the social. That is to say, the individual's well-being always depends on the collective's well-being, and vice versa. As Castoriadis put it,

> to abolish heteronomy does not signify abolishing the difference between instituting society and instituted society—which, in any case would be impossible—but to abolish the *enslavement* of the former to the latter. The collectivity will give itself the rules, knowing that it itself is giving them to itself, that these rules are or will always at some point become inadequate, that it can change them.[3]

Undoubtedly the nation-state arose as one such set of self-given rules. The question today is whether these have become inadequate, and thus how and in what way they should be changed.

Palestinians climb Israel's separation wall to attend prayers at Al-Aqsa Mosque, July 26, 2013. Photo: Oren Ziv.

The Impossibility of the Nation-State

A remnant of the anti-imperialist and decolonizing struggles from the 1960s and '70s, the Palestinian struggle is one that is still being fought within the horizon of the nation-state, as ending Israeli occupation is understood to mean the recognition of Palestine as a sovereign, self-determining nation. In this respect, the so-called "two-state solution" is really a "two nation-state solution," and it is interesting to consider the way this struggle has been variously framed over the decades as political vocabularies have changed.

In the 1960s, the armed struggle of the Palestinians was posited as a manifestation of anti-imperialism in the service of national liberation, and it elicited the corresponding solidarity from the international Left. In the 1980s and '90s, the Palestinians were cast as seeking recognition on the way towards the restitution of their human rights, including the right of return.

Today, and in contrast to the 1970s, militarism and armed struggle are almost always perceived as "mistaken" or as a suspicious form of politics because of their association with terrorism and dictatorship. Instead, solidarity with the Palestinian cause is expressed through the International Solidarity Movement, as activists around the world act as human shields protecting Palestinian houses slated for demolition and document abuses on the ground in an effort to give visibility to the numerous injustices perpetrated in the Occupied Territories. There is also the Boycott, Divestment, and Sanctions (BDS) campaign against Israel, a form of putting pressure on Israel inspired by a similar movement against apartheid in South Africa.

In spite of the fact that the idea of nationhood, cultivated through memories passed on from generation to generation, is what unites Palestinians inside and outside the Middle East, facts on the ground make it increasingly difficult to envision a two-state solution. According to many observers, Israel-Palestine is a binational state governed by Israel in two distinct ways. Israel governs Palestinians not as an occupying power—which, according to international human rights law, would imply being responsible for providing services such as healthcare, education, and so forth—but through differential governing, with Palestinians as "impaired citizens," according to Ariella Azoulay. In her account, Israel actually governs Palestinians differentially through a set of mechanisms that deny them citizenship by treating them as exceptions to the rule.[4]

Azoulay shifts the paradigm of analysis by highlighting the discrepancy between considering Palestinians as citizens of a hypothetical Palestinian state and considering them as citizens of the actual state of Israel that currently governs them. From this perspective, in the territory in which Palestinians live, power is programmatically deployed to create a state of suspension premised on violence and the threat of violence. Through targeted assassinations, the destruction of infrastructure and homes, violent arrests, restrictions on travel, bombings from the air, nighttime raids, expropriation, and the prohibition of demonstrations, the existence of Palestinians remains on the threshold of catastrophe, a chronic and prolonged situation which is known to the locals in the West Bank and Gaza as "the tyranny of incertitude."

In fact, the way Palestinians are governed by Israel is less exceptional than characteristic of nation-states in the era of neoliberalism. Nation-states often resort to the logic of exception as a way of obscuring their own relative powerlessness. According to Aihwa Ong, neoliberal governments treat different populations differentially, creating a diversity of zones, each with different regimes and levels of exception. She calls this model "graduated sovereignty":

> The model of graduated sovereignty shows that it is not so much a question of market versus the state, but

> that market society at our particular moment in history entails the existence of some areas in which the state is very strong and its protections very significant, and other areas where it is near absent, because these zones must be flexible vis-à-vis markets, or else they become structurally irrelevant. What we see then is a system of displaced sovereignty, a model of galactic governance that may be traceable back to premodern roots in Southeast Asian trading empires.[5]

The differential governing of Palestinians in Israel, as an extreme form of graduated sovereignty, is thus different only in degree from the rest of the world's experience, rather than different in kind. The Palestinian case is simply one of the more extreme examples of differential governing, which manifests as episodes of targeted violence against a backdrop of manufactured precariousness justified by an underlying ethnic and religious narrative. But just as the Palestinian National Authority is sometimes described as a proxy for non-national interests, the same is said, for example, of the Mexican government, which has been described as a "failed state" because it is not fully sovereign in its own territory. If Palestine is governed according to foreign and Israeli interests, Mexico is governed according to the interests of transnational corporations and organized crime, two pillars of the international oligarchy that are often difficult to distinguish in practice. Arguably, neither is a case of state malfunction, but rather, they exemplify the way in which nation-states operate under neoliberalism, as instruments for denigrating or even exterminating forms of life in accordance with the needs of oligarchs.

This model of governance emerged alongside new regionalizations and territorializations that began in the 1960s and '70s as a response, arguably, to the success of the workers' movement in leveraging first-world national communities to raise the price of labor. The resulting capital flight arranged the world into clusters of innovation and progress, or alternatively, of destitution and poverty. With its ability to go beyond national divisions, the globalized market integrated first and third worlds, forcing certain areas to "develop" by creating pockets of wealth and cultural sophistication within the third world, and areas of destitution and misery within the first. The result is that it is increasingly difficult to think in terms of first- and third-world nations—or even developed and underdeveloped ones—rather than in terms of territories and zones connected in various degrees to global processes. There are thus zones where the extraction of surplus value is particularly intense, coexisting side by side with abandoned zones or pacified spaces: Milan and Campania, Tel Aviv and the Gaza Strip, San Diego and Tijuana, Los Angeles and Skid Row. The question then arises: How can the destitute territories and enclaves be politicized? What would that politicization look like?

Anti-TTIP protesters gather in Berlin, May 6, 2014. Photo: Mehr Demokratie/Flickr.

New Forms of Commonality

In the 1960s, the notion of underdevelopment served as a frame uniting the disparate efforts of third-world countries to utilize state intervention as an instrument of development and progress. In contrast, current "underdeveloped" areas are not abandoned by the state but governed differentially (as targeted neglect, strategic betterment, cultural intervention, violent dispossession, and so forth), and according to the demands of the global market. Through programs geared at "developing" these areas in the name of progress, international financial organizations, governments, and NGOs systematically undermine subsistence by subsidizing agriculture in the form of transgenic seeds and chemical fertilizers, and by creating forms of labor—whether on industrial farms, in tourist complexes, or in sweatshop factories—that destroy traditional forms of community organization, seeking to transform native peoples into consumers. These kinds of state and nonstate intervention reproduce global discrimination and poverty. "Development" nowadays means dispossessing peoples of their lands, providing differentiated (low-quality, in this case) access to healthcare, education, and employment, destroying traditional knowledges, and undoing communal forms of living and the idea that life can be independent and individualized. Contemporary "development" creates novel forms of intolerable interdependence, destroying the environment and transforming resources into privileges to which part of the population has access based on the dispossession or destruction of communities elsewhere.

If in the 1960s and '70s emancipation meant an alternative to capitalism and a means to overcome colonized identities, realize equality of rights, and de-repress sexuality, today emancipation means equality in the sense of achieving equal rights of access to goods, services, a living wage, and other kinds of privileges like water, electricity, and infrastructure. And yet, access to these kinds of commodities and their corresponding

infrastructure implies an impossible model of development, since the Earth lacks enough resources for everyone to live modernized lives. Evidently, the main problem is the logic of development and progress driving extractive capitalism. Perhaps emancipation and equality must now also mean taking into account the ethical dimension of the intolerable forms of injurious dependency—that is to say, the exploitation, dispossession, and destruction of many within what Naomi Klein calls "sacrificial zones"—for the benefit of a few.[6]

It is no longer the nation-state which is at stake, but life itself, and what is needed is the self-organization of our common life against neoliberal forms of social engineering. More than anticapitalism—which, embodying the everyday dialectic of leftist common sense, condemns capitalism without imagining anything else—what is urgently needed are new forms of collective organization. According to Sylvère Lotringer, we are just beginning to experience the consequences of savage industrialization and the massive exploitation of natural resources—mass extinctions, permanent war, climate change—and these do not fit into our existing idea of politics and critique. Thus, critique is not an answer to capitalism, because it introduces distance where there is none.[7] What is needed—and this is where art can play a crucial role—is a form of struggle that would elicit a long-term shift in values, leading to systemic change.

What is key here, as Jaime Martínez Luna suggests, is to plant the seeds for a new form of political organization, not through political identification or democratic participation, but as a form of *belonging*: a concrete relationship that presupposes commitment, obligation, and agreement. Identity (or common interest, which gives cohesion to a political cause) is an abstraction that mutates depending on the political action executed, while belonging is what is concrete. Belonging is the site for identity, and can help us create assemblages based on respect, work, and reciprocity. In the context of such assemblages, the relationships within social cells become concretized; as Martínez Luna puts it, such assemblages "exist to create life: that is movement, action, realization, intervention."[8]

A key concept that would be useful here is " *comunalidad* ," a notion from Oaxaca, Mexico that emerged in the 1980s. It describes communal being in traditional ways of organizing, opposing capitalism and colonialism in favor of an ethical reconstruction of peoples. Communality is a way of being in the world that revolves neither around a commons administered by bureaucrats, nor some transient, ephemeral, and nonbinding postcommunism. Rather, it is a pact that considers the commons less as common *property*, as something owned in common, *but as a common way of life*— without forgetting that communality implies new forms of inhabiting territories *from the other side of modernity*. According to decolonial thinking, modernity and coloniality are inextricable: two elements of the same movement, which involves establishing truth at the expense of different forms of knowledge. In this regard, decoloniality is the outside of modernity and embodies other forms of feeling, making, thinking, being, and inhabiting the world—forms which are nonmodern and non-Western. Following decolonial theorist Rolando Vázquez, the recognition of nonmodern geo-genealogies and trajectories would reveal the movement of exclusion, violence, invisibilization, and forgetting that are inseparable from modernity, and would open up new forms of politicization—for instance, the notion of " *buen vivir*," or living in plenitude, which orients indigenous communities and organization.[9]

According to Vázquez, this axial principle from outside modernity encompasses and recognizes the participation of human beings in a vital collectivity of close relationality, in the sense of mutual dependence and shared vulnerability. The notion of *buen vivir* also provides a different conception of the human, where the human is always in relation with the cosmos and with nature, beyond modern modes of appropriation and representation. The survival of humanity might depend on taking up a conception of the world beyond the dichotomy between humanity and nature in order to surrender the anthropocentric point of view. In this regard, I am not advocating a romanticized, ultraleft politics based on a return to the pastoral, as exemplified by the Zapatista experiments with autonomy. Rather, we must understand the role of the nonhuman world in helping us to construct more livable worlds by translating the autonomous forms of organization pioneered by indigenous peoples into urban contexts. For instance, in parts of Mexico citizens organize and arm themselves for the sake of their safety under a legal practice recognized as indigenous peoples' " *usos y costumbres*" (uses and customs). In this way, vigilante and community police forces have proliferated throughout Mexico as a means to stop organized crime and its complicity with differentially governing state institutions, or to prevent political powers from auctioning off the commons. Currently, there are self-defense groups in the states of Hidalgo, Puebla, Veracruz, Oaxaca, Guerrero, Michoacán, Tamaulipas, Quintana Roo, and areas of the State of Mexico; and although they are indeed recognized by the law as *usos y costumbres*, the government has begun to criminalize them.[10] These forms of autonomy point at the urgent need to experiment with means to build radically different socioeconomic relationships, instituting communal defense, property, and commons-management regimes. Another example would be the Territorial Land Use Law in Cuetzalan, in the State of Puebla, Mexico, which implies citizen participation in defining and diagnosing land use.[11] Thanks to this law, the municipality of Cuetzalan has recently been victorious in insisting that the area remain free of mining exploitation, hydroelectric plants, carbon extraction, and the use and exploitation of water by private entities.[12] This model of autonomous organization sets an important precedent in the struggle against neoliberal destruction.

Third-annual worldwide protest against Monsanto's monopoly, May 2015. Protesters claim Monsanto controls 90 percent of the seed market in the US.

We must take into account that autonomous community organizing in cities tends to be transitory and cut off from the means to satisfy immediate needs or the capacity to control territory. This is because relationships in cities tend to be highly stratified, as capitalist modes of organization create fictitious communities through hierarchical social structures, concentrating decision-making mechanisms in a few hands; therefore, it becomes difficult to establish authentic dialogues and long-lasting relationships. As I mentioned in Part I of this article, one of the strategies of neoliberal governance is to implement fictitious inclusion and participation mechanisms, hiding the fact that political decisions affecting citizens are taken in secret and are extremely remote from our influence. Is it possible to build autonomous spaces and to recuperate the immediate bases of social reproduction in cities? This is a difficult question. It must be remembered that if, in the countryside, what is at stake is territory, in cities the key is the materialization of forms of power and their distribution in space.

Moreover, autonomy is a communal and relational form of organization and thus, an alternative to the state and the market. In this regard, the "common" is a vague and yet necessary concept for today's struggles; it needs to be posited as an alternative horizon contesting the mercantilization of life and the seduction of the collective imaginary by capitalism. Communality is everything we share, but it also means rejecting our five-hundred-year-old system of socioeconomic relationships. It implies building new relationships outside the logic of capitalism and the market, which people all over the world are attempting to do through an array of experiments with cooperatives, collective work, solidarity, urban gardens, time banks, and free universities. These experiments are the beginning of the production and sharing of wealth in common, which would also fund, plan, project, establish, and organize something that already exists to institute forms of autonomy that are different from the forms of participation offered by neoliberal governance.

These experiments happen within the folds of institutions and against institutional fascisms that oppress and make decisions against our interests. Their aim is to disperse and transform power relationships. Autonomy means creating sites where rules different than those imposed on

us by the neoliberal system can be applied to construct different political, social, and economic relationships. To build autonomous spaces is to recover the immediate bases of social reproduction in urbanized areas. What is at stake is the materialization of forms of power and how they are distributed in space. In that regard, art has been, and can continue to be, a privileged laboratory for studying fields of power and for experimenting with sociatry, therapy, and new models of assemblage, organization, exchange, and the reproduction of life, not of capital. But without a social base, without establishing long-lasting collectivity in relation to a political project, it is difficult to begin building and inhabiting the world differently.

X

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Irmgard Emmelhainz is an independent translator, writer, researcher, and lecturer based in Mexico City. Her work about film, the Palestine Question, art, cinema, culture, and neoliberalism has been translated to Italian, French, English, Arabic, Turkish, Hebrew, and Serbian, and she has presented it at an array of international venues. She is member of the editorial board of *Scapegoat Journal* and has recently finished a book on neoliberalism as a sensibility and common sense embedded in urban planning, work and life, culture, social movements, mourning, and women's struggle.

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Luis Camnitzer

The Cracked Ming Cup

In 1963, the Uruguayan writer and journalist Eduardo Galeano went to China to interview the last emperor, Pu Yi. He and I were both working for *Marcha*, a Uruguayan weekly, at the time. Upon his return he commented about finding centuries-old Ming cups treated as useless garbage because they were cracked and had lost their functionality. This wasn't meant as a critical remark; Galeano was just surprised at how the parameters for what was considered valuable differed across cultures.

A decade or two later I participated in a tour that took a group of visiting faculty through the art conservation program at SUNY Buffalo. They showed us an early twentieth-century mechanical toy that had been used for an exercise in restoration. In good shape, the object was probably worth less than $100, but the labor invested in restoring it was worth well over ten times that much. The result was impressive.

I thought about how the relationship between value and labor might act as a filter for posterity. Outside a classroom, it probably wouldn't make sense to invest in conservation if the labor expenses involved exceeded the market value of the object. Instead, it would be classified as something disposable, the same fate that had awaited the chipped Ming cup in Mao's China. In that case, the judgment turned on the question of functionality. In the toy's case, the parameters were established by money. Both criteria affect legacy, determining what remains for future generations to encounter and what does not. Though a trivial insight, it hit me only then that the objects we use to understand different cultures are simply those that have been allowed to survive long enough to become symbols representing a set of relations we then define as culture.

In this sense, the collection of objects we inherit from the past is a legacy of values, and so becomes part of our education at the hands of history. Although such collections are often designed to flaunt power, they also demonstrate what value looks like for rising generations, shaping the way they think. Therefore the parameters that separate what will be preserved from what will not are as important as the objects that exemplify them. This problem is not limited to Ming cups or mechanical toys; it also extends to ideas. Ultimately, the parameters used for the preservation and elaboration of ideas are probably more important than those that apply to objects, since these precede them. Ideas determine if we see more in a Ming cup than the ability to drink from it, and they decide if the toy should be restored and conserved, and why.

This is why the disciplines emphasized in our educational institutions are at least as important as any content. For example, science, technology, engineering, and mathematics—the STEM curricula—have an ideological weight that affects institutional education long before a student even has a chance to decide if such an education is right for them. STEM, as the rhetoric around it tells us, is

designed to secure a competitive advantage for the countries that embrace it over those that don't. For obvious reasons, the humanities are understood to be less useful in this competition. Students are therefore educated not for their own betterment, or to leave a formative legacy for the future, but as foot soldiers in a national-corporate struggle. The number of universities in the US identifying as liberal arts colleges is down 39 percent from what is was twenty years ago, and the humanities—in particular, art programs—are shrinking for lack of funding and job prospects. In this landscape, the study of art is increasingly seen as a luxury associated with the leisure class.

The effect of this association is not hard to see. A couple of months ago, Pablo Helguera, another friend, posted on Facebook that he was invited to perform at an event that would require him to spend more money than he would receive as an honorarium. The post elicited an outpouring of sympathetic comments and other artists' complaints about underpayment. Artists invariably receive a letter offering a "symbolic honorarium" which they are expected to accept with the understanding that the institution is embarrassed for the exploitation that they are nevertheless about to engage in. It's true that not every institution is like Goldman Sachs. It's also true that not every artist has the recognition value of Hillary Clinton. Therefore the term "symbolic honorarium" may be appropriate. On the one hand it reflects the lack of funds for this purpose even as those extending the invitation recognize that the arts are important to keep humanist cultural parameters in motion. On the other hand it also reveals an expectation on the part of the hosts that the artists, particularly younger and emerging ones, will feel honored by the invitation.

Recently I was invited to talk to a General Education class at Harvard. My symbolic honorarium was $250. There was a second event cofunded by a private foundation that raised the honorarium to $500. I should emphasize that both invitations had come from a friend of mine, and so I was performing to honor the friend's request and not for my financial survival. However, I found out that in the General Studies Program, honoraria are capped at $250, which is, coincidentally, the recommended gratuity for a minister performing a funeral service. Given that the invitation required my researching and writing a special lecture—in addition to eight hours of travel—it was quite possible that when all was said and done, I would earn below minimum wage. I mentioned this to a law professor, whose response was: "What an honor to be invited by Harvard!" I don't know if they have the same restrictions at the Harvard business or law schools, but I doubt it.

I decided to write to Harvard's president, Drew Faust, less on my behalf than to spell out the general implications of unfair pay for intellectual work. She is an historian, I reasoned, so she would understand. (I received an answer some weeks later to the effect that the issue was being passed on to the administrative director of the Program in General Education. All correspondence is reproduced below).

Moreover, President Faust has made a point in her graduation speeches of encouraging students to do something other than working for Wall Street. It's an odd suggestion in the context of Harvard's reality, especially knowing that the school's endowment managers make, on average, $8 million per year.

Of course, such disparities impact the future choices of any young person trained to figure out what is considered valuable and what isn't, especially at a place like Harvard. I decided to share the correspondence with the *The Harvard Crimson*, and have yet to receive a response. Maybe underpayment has become so internalized that complaints of this nature are no longer news. Maybe artists have become the equivalent of cracked Ming Dynasty cups in Maoist China: objects that now fall outside the determining metric of value. But this metric is not a law of nature; it simply reflects the contemporary consensus, and this understanding can be shifted. For what it's worth, I think that starting to fight for an International Fair Artists Remuneration Treaty may be a good and noisy strategy.

Luis Camnitzer
124 Susquehanna Ave.
Great Neck, NY 11021

Dr. Drew Gilpin Faust
President, Harvard University
Massachusetts Hall
Cambridge, MA 02138

November 25, 2015

Dear Dr. Faust

On October 13th I was invited to give a lecture at a course that is part of a program in General Education. I was asked to address extensively very specific questions, which meant that I had to write a special lecture for this purpose. The event implied ca. 20 hours writing and a day for travel. I compute this as a total of 28 hours. I was informed that the cap for honoraria for these events is $250.00, in my case the equivalent of $9.00 per hour.

I was warned that this was only a "symbolic honorarium," which I interpreted favorably as meaning: "We are aware that you are worth much more, but we can't afford it." I know that Harvard is presently struggling economically. A 30% loss of the endowment caused by the 2008 recession, the payments to the administrators of the endowment apparently exceeding academic expenses, and the

atypical low returns on investments bordering only 15% as compared to 17% for the University of Pennsylvania and 19% for Dartmouth, are bound to take to take a toll.

Having been raised and educated in Uruguay, I am familiar with the poverty problems suffered by educational institutions. They were even worse in my country, since education there is mostly free. So, I can only say that I am very sympathetic to your plight. I also know that as an artist I'm expected to perform acts of philanthropy and support as many worthy causes as I can. Selectively, I do this gladly.

Fortunately I'm economically secure, the same as most of your guest speakers in other programs (I am thinking in particular of both your respected School of Business and the Law School). As part of your distinguished guests, and presumably like them, I willingly join this group in accepting minimum wage for my services. However, I would like to point out that most of the artists you might or should consider inviting cannot truly afford this kind of remuneration. Most artists I know are unable to live from either consultancy or their production. They might still feel they have to service you for the honor of inclusion. However, to ask them to lecture for this honor and at this rate of payment would not only be unfair, but also exploitative and below the standards that you probably espouse. On the other hand, favoring relatively affluent artists to report on their thoughts and production to your students poses the danger of giving them a distorted view of US and international culture.

I am sharing all these thoughts, experience, and my feelings with you because they have prompted me to found the "International Fair Artists Remuneration Treaty." I may list Harvard as one of the prominent seed organizations for this project.

Wishing your institution a prompt economic recovery, I send you my highest regards.

Luis Camnitzer

Luis Camnitzer
124 Susquehanna Ave.
Great Neck, NY 11021

Meg Bernhard
Managing Editor
The Harvard Crimson
14 Plympton St.
Cambridge, MA 02138

January 23, 2016

Dear Ms. Bernhard,

Over the last several months many artists have been complaining on social media pages about the increasingly prevalent pattern of underpayment when invited as guest speakers by academic institutions. In October I had the experience myself at Harvard, and while in my case it wasn't a hardship I think the time has come to call universities to account for their exploitation of artists. Their intellectual contributions should be valued to the same degree as those of guest speakers in other fields and disciplines. In a society that prioritizes STEM and has at the same time become increasingly oligarchical, it's the artists and humanists who are the protectors of sanity and should be rewarded sanely.

On December 11th, I received a letter from the office of the President informing me that the matter was being referred to Associate Dean Stephanie Kenen. There has been no further communication.

Since downgrading the arts affects the quality of academic life and the education of students, I felt the topic might be of interest to your publication. I also think *The Harvard Crimson* is better equipped than I am to inquire if any consideration is being given to the problem I tried to raise with Dr. Faust.

Sincerely,
Luis Camnitzer

HARVARD UNIVERSITY

OFFICE OF THE PRESIDENT
(617) 495-1502

MASSACHUSETTS HALL
CAMBRIDGE, MASSACHUSETTS 02138

December 11, 2015

Mr. Luis Camnitzer
124 Susquehanna Ave.
Great Neck, NY 11021

Dear Mr. Camnitzer:

Thank you for your letter to President Faust. We appreciate your taking the time to share your perspective and have, in turn, shared it with Stephanie Kenen, associate dean of undergraduate education and administrative director of the Program in General Education. I know she will give your concerns proper consideration.

Best regards,

Amy Fantasia

cc: Stephanie H. Kenen

Luis Camnitzer is an Uruguayan artist living in New York.

Alan Gilbert

Walid Raad's Spectral Archive, Part II: Testimony of Ghosts

Continued from " Walid Raad's Spectral Archive, Part I: Historiography as Process "

... we can no longer simply explain or simply cure.[1]

A city, perhaps like a person, remembers the most when confronted with its destruction. The aftereffects of trauma are a different story. They frequently give rise to individual and collective amnesias, along with the psychological symptoms that congeal when a traumatic experience is too painful for consciousness to address directly. In this sense, symptoms are strange documents. They are usually synonymous with a narrative—however fractured, however distorted, however unreal—that seeks to make sense of an event that carries within it something fundamentally inexplicable. Trauma is a violent transmission of the unknown, oftentimes in the service of something larger and more inscrutable than the event itself. Much of Walid Raad's art investigates not the failure of images to represent traumatic events but the refusal of the real to inscribe itself as a legible image. It's a subtle difference, one rooted less in conceptual art strategies (though Raad's work is filled with these) and more in the complex registering of the effects of traumatic historical events.

In this model, historiography becomes the writing of symptoms, and symptoms are repetitively repressive structures. As a symptomatology of indiscriminate warfare, Raad's serial car bomb projects are consciously failed attempts to locate either the disease or its cure. *My neck is thinner than a hair: Engines* (2001/2000–03) builds on the earlier *Notebook volume 38: Already been in a lake of fire* (1991/2002) to reproduce one hundred found and appropriated photographs of the only car part to survive relatively intact after detonation—the engine. (Here and in the following, first dates are attributions by The Atlas Group; the second refer to Raad's production of the work. Artworks with only one date are not part of The Atlas Group's "official" archive.) Unlike *Notebook volume 38*, this slightly later series expands the frame to show the immediate environment after a car bomb has exploded: a small blast crater, soldiers or officials of some sort on the scene, consistently quizzical looks on the faces of bystanders. Each black-and-white photograph sits directly to the left of a reproduction of its reverse side, which is usually marked with official stamps, dates, the photographer's name, and notes in Arabic—most all of which seems to have been added by the archives where Raad researched the images.

He floats these two adjacent images on an expanded white background, at the bottom of which appears basic information about the photograph and the details on its

reverse side, though not nearly as thoroughly as in *Notebook volume 38* or *Notebook volume 72: Missing Lebanese wars* (1989/1998). Rather, the image is left to fend hopelessly for itself. The one hundred 23 × 32 cm prints are arranged in a tight grid featuring five rows of twenty each, an installation decision that among other effects augments their repetitious quality (and relates the piece to conceptual-photo works such as Martha Rosler's groundbreaking *The Bowery in two inadequate descriptive systems* [1974–75]—right down to Rosler and Raad's shared use of diminutive lowercase titles that de-emphasize the autonomous art object). In Raad's explanatory note for the project, he writes, "During the wars, photojournalists competed to be the first to find and photograph the engines."[2] Like the historians in *Notebook volume 72*, they can never arrive on time. Rather, they appear after the fact to help gather data about a situation that in the final analysis remains elusive. Similarly, Raad is unable or unwilling—conditions that in post-traumatic situations become partially blurred—to register the full experience of the wars, even as someone who experienced them firsthand.

1. Secrets in the Open Sea

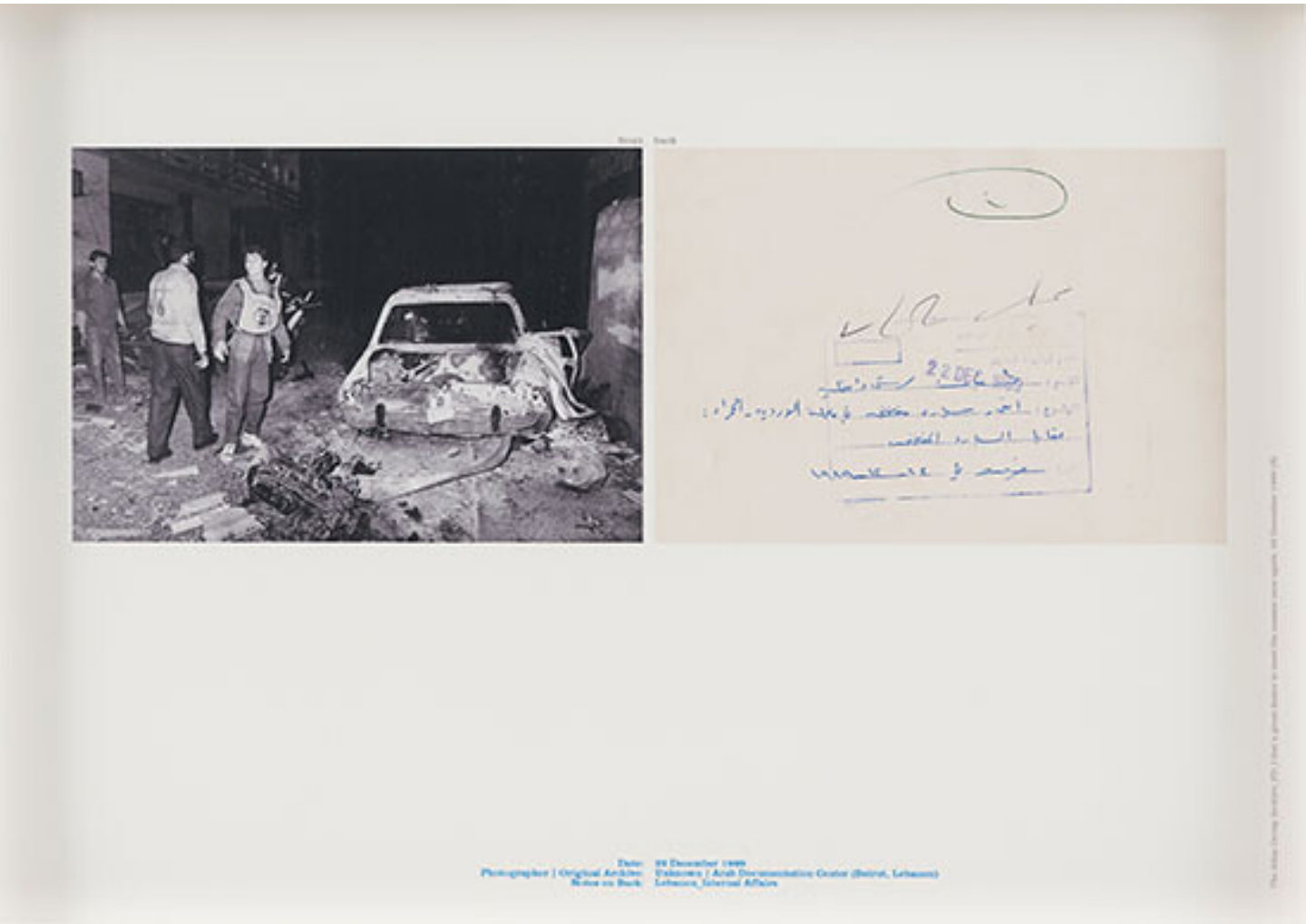
Testimony and witness, the two standard tropes of documentary photography (and especially war photography), have either gone missing or are under the severest duress in Raad's work.[3] In *Empathic Vision: Affect, Trauma, and Contemporary Art*, Jill Bennett differentiates between "narrative memory" and "traumatic memory."[4] Bennett argues that the representation of traumatic experience necessitates the creation of a new visual language that downplays testimony, incorporates fictional elements, and utilizes affect in order to move our encounter with trauma "beyond the realm of the interior subject into that of inhabited place, rendering it a political phenomenon"[5]; in this place, "perpetrators, victims, and bystanders are *all* compromised by a cycle of violence."[6] This pastiche of truth-claims captures the general and widespread symptomology of trauma. To record this condition, The Atlas Group vacates the authority of the artist, the historian, or the spokesperson for the underrepresented, in favor of the kind of personal cosmology that makes Lebanon kin with other sites of unremitting disaster: Baghdad ... Grozny ... New Orleans ... Fukushima ...

Raad's video *We can make rain but no one came to ask* (2003/2006) explicitly signals the formation of such a traumatic semiotics during an opening sequence in which dust clouds transform into stars that then form a constellation of car parts. "What I like about this piece is that it is literally creating a cosmology," Raad says in a *New York Times* profile, "It's not like people were idiots when they looked at the stars and told stories about them 2,000 years ago. Now there are other stories. Now is the fetish moment of the car engine."[7] The video captures the failure of the image to effectively witness history (and an element of failure in witnessing itself) as it disassembles—at times, dissembling—the survivor's tale in order to illustrate how even this seemingly immediate and authentic mode of expression is already mediated.

At one point, Raad briefly planned to assemble extensive files and construct small-scale dioramas for each of the wars' 3,641 car bombs. One result is the sculptural installation *I was overcome with a momentary panic at the thought that they might be right* (1994/2005), attributed to either topographer Nahia Hassan or car bomb expert Yussef Nassar, depending on the exhibition, installation, and other work with which it appears. For this reason its dates vary; its earliest incarnation appears to have been for a cultural program accompanying the 2004 Athens Summer Olympics. A spotlit white disc—or discs—made of dense foam, the sculpture is punctured by holes of different sizes meant to map every car bomb exploded during the war. It's a burden light enough to be carried almost anywhere.

We can make rain but no one came to ask is the result of investigations Raad undertook with writer Bilal Khbeiz and architect and visual artist Tony Chakar into a single car bomb detonated in Beirut on January 21, 1986. Like the ripple effects of damage that spread across the city with each car bomb explosion, the video is perhaps Raad's most expansive vision of Beirut during and after the war. Its catalogue of by-now familiar motifs from The Atlas Group—archival documents, car bombs, architecture, the color blue, passionate yet quixotic chroniclers of the war—extends to represent other devastated cities confronted with the complicated dynamic between remembering and rebuilding. Less a video per se, the piece more closely resembles a seventeen-minute digital slideshow consisting of hundreds of stitched images and a haunting soundtrack. Its composition from still images is not unlike *La Jetée* (1962) by Chris Marker, whose essay films have clearly influenced Raad's work. Its initial screen announces that the work is meant to document the tireless efforts of Georges Semerdjian, "a fearless photojournalist" killed in 1990, and Yussef Bitar, "the Lebanese state's leading ammunitions expert and chief investigator of all car bomb detonations."

Somewhat unexpectedly for those familiar with The Atlas Group's motley cast of fictional characters, both are actual historical figures, though seemingly less likely is a declaration on the next screen stating that they collaboratively researched the car bomb in question. The reference to real participants, one of whom lost his life documenting the war, indicates that the video will partly function as an elegy, a relatively rare mode in Raad's work despite its persistent concern with loss. (This elegiac tone also appears in the seven-and-a half-minute film of repeating sunsets shot from Beirut's seaside corniche, *I only wish that I could weep* [2002/2002].) The two opening



The Atlas Group/Walid Raad, My Neck is Thinner Than a Hair: Engines (detail), 1996–2004. One hundred pigmented inkjet prints. The Museum of Modern Art, New York. Fund for the Twenty-First Century. Copyright: Walid Raad.

text captions are followed by roiling plumes of fire and smoke seen through a thin horizontal slit on a black screen that gives way to the sound and images of ocean waves as the perspective opens onto a panoramic shot of Beirut jutting into the Mediterranean. The screen then goes dark, voices on the soundtrack become distressed, and the previously mentioned constellation of car parts slowly takes shape as sirens fill the air.

A photo of Bitar is introduced before an image of car bomb carnage appears followed by short clips of a rebuilt Beirut along with birdsong and traffic noise. Next is an extended focus on architecture, which Raad depicts with moving images, skeletal renderings, and cropped photographs—sometimes superimposed on each other. The architectural drawings are ghostly versions resembling ones found in the master plans for Beirut's rebuilding.[8] Throughout the video, Raad splits the screen into three quadrants so that a car or pedestrian moving out of one part vanishes into another. The civil wars confined people in Beirut and its suburbs to their immediate neighborhoods within the larger demarcation (indicated by the Green Line) separating the Muslim-dominated western area of the city from the Christian eastern section. Raad's work refuses to allow a unified view, and the urban landscape it depicts is never more than a patchwork. In *We can make rain but no one came to ask*, this fracturing occurs on multiple formal levels: from its segmented screen to its nonlinear editing; from its combination of still images and short video clips to its associative logic; from its constant fades and dissolves to its digitally manipulated perspectives.

The screen goes blue after the passage through architecture, the color of Beirut unmoored between sky and sea. Then sounds of construction and images of signs and storefronts scroll by. This is followed by two headshots, one solarized, one not, of Semerdjian that introduce an extended stretch of car bomb photos similar to the ones in *My neck is thinner than a hair: Engines* but with an even broader view of the street and surrounding buildings. There are also a number of images of charred

bodies—to my knowledge the only moment in the entirety of Raad's oeuvre when victims of the wars appear, which gives these pictures an added gravity. It's possible (these kinds of concrete details can be difficult to verify in Raad's work) that these photographs are from the last roll of film Semerdjian shot before he was killed four years after the car bomb documented in the video.[9] Moreover, it is difficult not to notice the resemblance to images of the World Trade Center site in the days following September 11, 2001. The soundtrack goes silent, as these ghosts—of people and of buildings—seek recognition amid the earlier visual and aural evidence of rebuilding. Contemporary Beirut again returns with a camera pan of digitally fossilized architecture before the video ends with shots of buildings, trees, and storefronts.

The storefronts recall Raad's first attempt to systematically document the architecture of Beirut, *The Beirut Al-Hadath archive,* with its catalogue of storefronts evoking Eugène Atget's photographs of Paris. Raad published the project in *Rethinking Marxism* in 1999, and it foreshadows many of the strategies that would become associated with The Atlas Group, which was established around the same time:[10] an imaginary foundation established in 1967, the year of Raad's birth; a repository for documents made by other people; a fake list of funders (including a Mr. and Mrs. Fakhouri); a series of grainy, black-and-white photographs with somewhat elusive captions and dubious provenance; a pretend exhibition; and an introductory explanatory text written by a fictional expert named Fouad Boustani. Raad writes: "Al-Hadath critically confronts and examines issues of power, space, time, and trauma as they were and are manifested in the history of Lebanon and of the Lebanese civil war, in photographic and documentary practice."[11] Important to note here is that the accompanying photographs evidence very little about the wars—Raad would soon come to pluralize "civil war"—while simultaneously functioning as pleas against forgetting.

2. The Withdrawal of Tradition

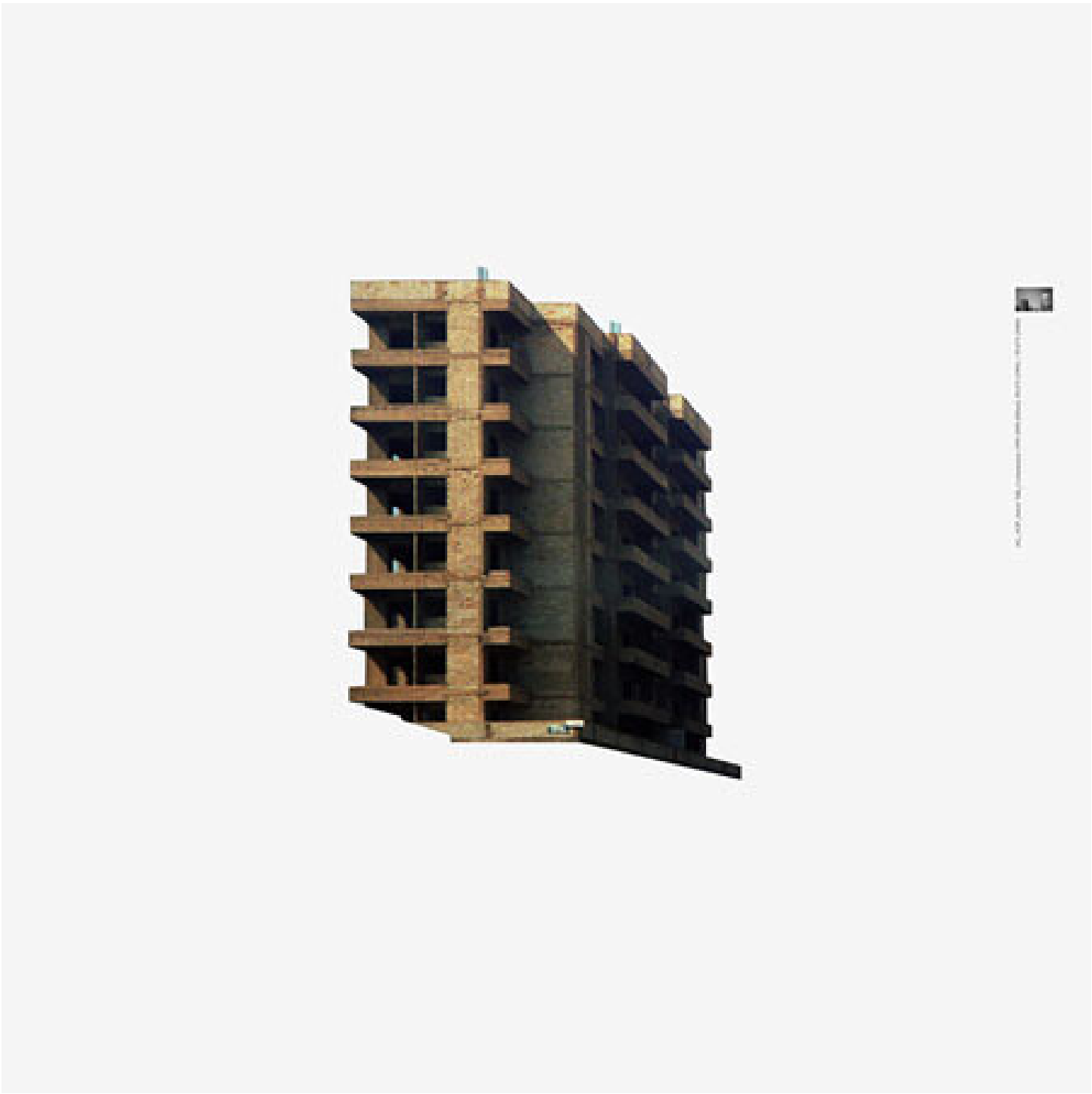
The seeds for The Atlas Group had been sown, not only in terms of its general format but also its growing obsession with architecture. Along with Atget—whose influence is "explained" by Boustani as a critique of the earlier French colonial presence in Lebanon—Raad's work owes much to Walker Evans's crisp formalism as well as Bernd and Hilla Becher's serial typologies. Like the Becher's project—and perhaps Evans's too—Raad's art contains a degree of sentimentality overlaid with an exacting formalism. Like Benjamin's *Arcades Project*, Atget documents a Paris that arrives and vanishes simultaneously, just as Raad and *Al-Hadath* capture Beirut somewhere between disappearance and renovation.

More ambitious and fully realized, *Sweet talk: The Hilwé commissions* (1992–2004/2004) finds Raad redeploying the *Beirut Al-Hadath archive* conceit in which numerous photographers—dozens for *Sweet talk*, one hundred for *Al-Hadath*—are sent out across the city to photograph architectural conditions as they existed before, during, and after the wars. Raad carefully crops the photographed building from its immediate environment (much as he did with the cars in *Notebook volume 38*), frontally aligns it to have a proper architectural perspective, floats it on a white background, and inserts in the upper-right portion of the print a miniature, almost indecipherable black-and-white version of the original unmanipulated image, rotated ninety degrees to the left. As Ulrich Baer writes, "If we analyze photographs exclusively through establishing the context of their production, we may overlook the constitutive breakdown of context that, in a structural analogy to trauma, is staged by every photograph."[12] Raad's formal precision shelters these edifices while simultaneously interrupting their history to diagram the impact of trauma on our sense of context.[13]

This is not unrelated to Jalal Toufic's idea of "the withdrawal of tradition past a surpassing disaster,"[14] which has inspired much of Raad's more recent work, especially his first large-scale project after The Atlas Group: *Scratching on things I could disavow*. For Toufic and Raad, this "withdrawal" effects not only history and tradition but also objects in the world, including buildings (as in *The Beirut Al-Hadath archive* and *Sweet talk: The Hilwé commissions*) and artworks—Raad's own and others. Paradoxically, acknowledging this withdrawal is the only way to safeguard what has already disappeared. For Raad and many other artists of his generation in Lebanon, this is as much a question of form as it is of content, i.e., the utilization of war imagery. The care shown toward these forms is synonymous with ministrations for what has vanished.

As Eduardo Cadava explains in *Words of Light: Theses on the Photography of History*:

> The present no longer struggles to lead knowledge, as one would lead the blind, to the firm ground of a fixed past. Instead the past infuses the present and thereby requires the dissociation of the present from itself. In other words, the past—as both the condition and caesura of the present—strikes the present and, in so doing, exposes us to the nonpresence of the present. If it is no longer a matter of the past casting its light on the present or of the present casting its light on the past (*N* 50 / *GS* 5:578 [Cadava's citation is to Benjamin's writings]), it is because the past and the present deconstitute one another in their relation. The coincidence of this exposure and deconstitution defines a political event, but one that shatters our general understanding of the political. It tells us that politics can no longer be thought in terms of a model of vision. It can no longer be measured by the eye.[15]



The Atlas Group/Walid Raad, Sweet Talk: The Hilwé Commission, 2005. Digital Print, 116 x 116 cm. Courtesy the artist and Sfeir-Semler Gallery, Hamburg/Beirut.

Scratching on things I could disavow disrupts vision in the service of something like Cadava's antivisual politics by manifesting Toufic's notion of withdrawal: from the literally miniature museum of artworks collected/produced by The Atlas Group (*Section 139: The Atlas Group [1989–2004]*)—imagine a less portable version of Marcel Duchamp's *Boîte-en-valise*—to the nearly invisible Arabic and English script of *Index XXVI: Artists* (2009), to the formal reductivism in the series of prints collectively titled *Appendix XVIII: Plates* (2009), to the absent artworks in *On Walid Sadek's Love Is Blind (Modern Art Oxford, 2006)* (2009). Throughout *Scratching on things I could disavow*,

artists and artworks have disappeared. So, too, has the political and historical imagery that rooted The Atlas Group—for all of its intentional elusiveness—in the Lebanese civil wars. Whereas Raad once compulsively preserved this imagery, his focus has now turned to artistic traditions and aesthetic forms in Lebanon and the larger Middle East. The prints in *Appendix XVIII: Plates* reproduce—albeit obscurely—the colors, fonts, and graphic design of books, catalogues, press announcements, and other materials used in the exhibition and dissemination of twentieth-century Middle Eastern art. In *Index XXVI: Artists*, it's the color red that has at some future point withdrawn.

just present," as Raad tells H. G. Masters in a feature for *ArtAsiaPacific* magazine. "It's getting away from a psychic model to a more phenomenological model … It's no longer about mediation."[16] In the collective amnesia that is a response to the massive shared trauma of the civil wars, history and culture *have* withdrawn, literally, and the task of the artist, according to Toufic, is to register this withdrawal. Yet both Raad and Toufic are aware that a generalized metaphysics of disaster is much more amenable to reactionary forces than progressive ones, specifically Christian, Islamic, and Jewish sacro-political fundamentalism. All three helped fuel the Lebanese civil wars, and continue to destabilize the country and the Middle East. As Derrida said of Benjamin's obsession with

Walid Raad, Scratching on things I could disavow: Walkthrough, 2015. Copyright: The Museum of Modern Art, New York. Photo: Julieta Cervantes.

3. New Hysterical Infrastructure

Interruption, whether historical or psychic, is a noninstrumental intervention in Raad's work. With an almost willful absurdity, he's stamped Toufic's "surpassing disaster" on his art in order to assert that it's not the artist who is causing history—or, in his latest project, artworks from the Middle East—to withdraw, but conditions themselves. "It is the world itself that acts this way and I'm

destruction: "One may well ask what such an obsessive thematic might signify, what it prepares or anticipates between the two wars, all the more so in that, in every case, this destruction also sought to be the condition of an authentic tradition and memory."[17]

Perhaps in response to this, Raad insists on concretely framing the work in *Scratching on things I could disavow*

as a mode of institutional critique, and he describes in performances, talks, and interviews his tracking and gathering of information related to a suddenly booming arts infrastructure in the Middle East. For instance, Beirut didn't have a traditional white-cube commercial art gallery until Sfeir-Semler Gallery (which represents Raad in Lebanon and Germany) opened a gleaming space in 2005.[18] In the summer of 2009, a new Beirut Art Center was profiled in *The New York Times*.[19] The Artist Pension Trust has expanded into the Middle East, assembling artists and art from the region for its fund, and there are now numerous biennials and art fairs proliferating across the Arab world. In Abu Dhabi, the Guggenheim is building its largest branch—designed by Frank Gehry—in terms of square footage, and has established a sizable acquisition budget for purchasing work from the Middle East to fill it. The Louvre is also opening a museum in Abu Dhabi, and Zaha Hadid is designing the city's performing arts center, all of which—and more—Raad mentioned in his talk-performance *Scratching on things I could disavow: Walkthrough*:

Of course these themes emerge naturally from Raad's previous work with The Atlas Group addressing the rebuilding of Beirut's infrastructure in the wake of the civil wars. This, too, was a highly contentious process, examined at the time and since by various individuals and groups both internal and external to Lebanon. In a 1997 article published in *Critical Inquiry*, Saree Makdisi describes how then-Lebanese prime minister Rafic Hariri's construction firm Solidere spearheaded the redevelopment of downtown Beirut without significant public input, and proceeded to destroy more of the area in a single year than the wars had ruined in the previous fifteen. Moreover, it did so before a final reconstruction plan had been approved:

> Not only were buildings that could have been repaired brought down with high-explosive demolition charges, but the explosives used in each instance were far in excess of what was needed for the job, thereby causing enough damage to neighboring structures to require their demolition as well … It is estimated that, as a result of such demolition, by the time reconstruction efforts began in earnest following the formal release of the new Dar al-Handasah plan in 1993, approximately 80 percent of the structures in the downtown area had been damaged beyond repair, whereas only around a third had been reduced to such circumstances as a result of damage inflicted during the war itself.[20]

Thus, when Raad documents pockmarked and crumbling buildings in *Let's be honest, the weather helped*, or *We can make rain but no one came to ask*, or *Sweet talk: The Hilwé commissions*, he isn't simply registering damage caused by the war, but also damage caused by the efforts to repair the damage caused by the war. Such events provide a historical and materialist explanation for the small role cause and effect play in Raad's world, allergic as it is to forms of instrumentality. Rather, Raad's latest projects address ongoing tears in the social fabric and structural flaws within history itself. Whereas earlier artworks by The Atlas Group registered these effects on individual and collective psyches, architecture eventually became the edifice on which they were inscribed.

In interviews and performances, Raad has characterized his work as a series of "hysterical symptoms": "We urge you to approach these documents as we do, as 'hysterical symptoms' based not on any one person's actual memories but on cultural fantasies erected from the material of collective memories."[21] Although, as he mentions in the *ArtAsiaPacific* feature, he's started to shift this discourse away from the psychological. A good example of an early project that combines a focus on symptoms with the political economics of postwar Beirut is *Secrets in the open sea* (1994/1999), which consists of six large (111 × 173 cm), lushly blue monochrome prints surrounded by a thin white border. In the bottom right-hand corner of each print is a tiny faded black-and-white photograph. In his description of the work, Raad states that twenty-nine prints were discovered in 1993 under the ruins of Beirut's central business district during the area's demolishment in preparation for rebuilding. Given to The Atlas Group, six of the prints were then sent to overseas photo labs for examination. It turns out that embedded within the blue images are group portraits—reproduced in miniature at the bottom of the print—of men and women who, The Atlas Group discovered, "drowned, died or were found dead in the Mediterranean between 1975 and 1991."[22]

An even earlier version, entitled *Miraculous beginnings* (1997), precedes The Atlas Group.[23] Accompanied by a fictional archive and consisting of grey instead of blue monochromes, it exists as one of Raad's earliest publicly disseminated solo works (Raad appropriated the title a couple years later for one of Fakhouri's two short films). In both iterations, the exhumed images are of suited men and women wearing dresses, signaling middle- and upper-middle class status, i.e., business people, politicians, civic leaders. If the members of this group constituted a relatively cohesive social core that crumbled during the wars, they also serve as symbolic representatives of a functioning nation-state. This political legitimacy, Raad seems to say, is as much imagined and projected as it is real. Most modern claims of sovereignty are. In an uncanny doubling, the documented absence of members of this governing coterie was only discovered during the razing of downtown Beirut by a related group claiming to represent the nation, but who in reality is another example from Lebanon's recent history of private interests triumphing over the collective good.

Is this why Raad specifically contextualizes the

rediscovery of a drowning fantasy within the postwar leveling of downtown Beirut? As Raad buries and then reanimates Lebanon's civic and business leaders, there's an undercurrent of violence to the work's seductive surface. Yet it's a violence directed against violence. As Miriam Cooke explains in her essay "Beirut Reborn: The Political Aesthetics of Auto-Destruction": "After the Israeli invasion of 1982 the increasingly visible involvement of war profiteers changed the conditions of possibility for telling a moral story."[24] For Cooke, both morality *and* narrative have been made impossible by the war—but this impossibility persists after its conclusion. The postwar profits to be reaped during reconstruction similarly trumped public memory, mourning, and the proposal of alternative narratives for postwar Lebanon. Raad's response is the creation of imaginary and symbolically charged "representational spaces" that seek to disrupt the rationally ordered "representation of space" imposed by the master plan for a new Beirut: "To be more precise, and to use the terminology introduced earlier: in the spatial practice of neocapitalism (complete with air transport), representations of space facilitate the manipulation of representational spaces (sun, sea, festival, waste, expense)."[25] Yet no amount of building, and no amount of commentary, will explain away the blue.

In Raad's early work, convoluted oedipal relations frequently entailed authority's demise—whether the artist's own, Fakhouri's, or that of the ciphers buried beneath the surface of *Secrets in the open sea*. Yet this authority—including Raad's—continues to reassert itself. The initially hidden individuals in business dress mimic the functioning of repression and its slow exposure by psychoanalysis. Sarah Rogers goes so far as to compare Raad's role to that of a psychoanalyst.[26] Raad has repeatedly argued that the psychological symptom is very much real, and this reality is reflected by its repetition on a more strictly formal level.[27] The repression wrapped in fantasy makes the figures' unexpected surfacing all the more haunting. After all, *Secrets in the open sea* is a series of so-called documentary prints that for all their splendor undermines conventional modes of vision and witnessing. As an attack on representation, it manifests a psychogeography of loss amid the irruptions of a strange sublime,[28] while its nonrepresentational monochromes counter the real estate speculators' linear blueprints.

4. Truth and Reconciliation

Time helps, in ways that are wholly mysterious, to complete the process of forgiveness, though never of reconciliation.[29]

A city, perhaps like a person, can only be at war for so long. Sigmund Freud may have posited the psyche's death-drive toward inanimate matter, but the desire in any organism—a person, a city—to remain animate is very

The Atlas Group/Walid Raad, Hostage: The Bachar tapes (English version), 2001. Video (color, sound), 16'17''. The Museum of Modern Art, New York. Gift of the Jerome Foundation in honor of its founder, Jerome Hill, 2003. Copyright: Walid Raad

strong. The ruling powers in postwar Lebanon decided against convening a truth and reconciliation commission. Instead, its parliament passed an amnesty law in 1991 pardoning most war crimes, which in turn allowed prominent figures in the civil wars to become part of the country's new government. Much has been written concerning the effectiveness of South Africa's Truth and Reconciliation Commission, the most famous of the dozens of such commissions established around the world. If these have taught us anything, it's that meaningful reconciliation is contingent upon acknowledging difference. Not the plurality of identities in a multicultural society, but the difference between victimizer and victim, oppressor and oppressed—while recognizing that even within the most repressive system, as within marginalized communities, these distinctions can become blurred.

We see this in *Hostage: The Bachar tapes (#17 and #31)_English version* (2000/1999). The eighteen-minute video claims to be a portrait of a Lebanese man named Souheil Bachar held hostage for ten years during the civil wars, and who for a few months in 1985 was kept with well-known Western hostages Terry Anderson, David Jacobsen, Martin Jenco, Thomas Sutherland, and Benjamin Weir. (Bachar is fictional, although there seems to have been an Arab hostage briefly held with the Western ones.[30]) When shown as part of a performance, the video allows Raad to discuss the geopolitics of the "Western hostage crisis" whereby the United States covertly sold arms to Iran in exchange for the release of hostages held in Lebanon, and used the profits to fund the Reagan administration's illegal support of the Contras in Nicaragua.[31]

The video focuses on Bachar's time with the Western hostages, culminating in a fairly graphic description of

their attraction to and repulsion by his physical body. Perhaps the least visually polished of Raad's work, the piece at times mimics the kind of videotaped statement a captive makes, complete with taped-up flag or piece of fabric on the back wall. After their release, the Western hostages had access to commercial publishers and movie producers eager to exploit their stories; Bachar had The Atlas Group, a cheap video camera, and an imaginary archive.

As in the horse race-based *Notebook volume 72*, Raad is very much interested in how histories are written; but in *Hostage*, he illuminates the power behind these narratives, whether the willful failures of Congressional committees investigating the Iran-Contra affair to engage with the larger ramifications of US foreign policy,[32] or the influence of the mainstream media over public discourse and memory.[33] As scholar of trauma literature Kalí Tal writes (at least five years before 9/11): "The battle over the meaning of a traumatic experience is fought in the arena of political discourse, popular culture, and scholarly debate. The outcome of this battle shapes the rhetoric of the dominant culture and influences future political action."[34] Yet Raad is not after the true story, or even a counter-story. The person who plays Bachar is a famous actor in Lebanon, which would instantly alert viewers there that they were watching a piece of sustained artifice—and satire (Raad's work has a morbid sense of humor, as conveyed in his titles, but it's rarely satirical). Moreover, there are various infelicities in the video's translation of Bachar's narrative into English. Bachar asks that this English voiceover be female, and, given the chance to tell his own version of events, Bachar is constantly interrupted by the editing and purposefully rudimentary technology. It's essential to try and give a voice to the politically and historically marginalized; but even this, Raad implies, is a complex, mediated, and difficult form of witnessing.

If truth doesn't necessarily lead to reconciliation, as Rustom Bharucha wrote alongside the 2002 Documenta in which Raad's work appeared and garnered international attention, then the artist's fictional devices might be understood as an alternative approach, one that approaches reconciliation outside a juridical economy of truth.

5. Caring for Violence

Thus other works by Raad have again moved backward in time from the postwar period to the war itself. *We decided to let them say, 'we are convinced,' twice* (2002/2006), a series of photographs produced from surviving but damaged negatives Raad shot as a teenager in 1982 during the Israeli invasion, features the most conventional war imagery he has produced: smoking buildings, fighter jets streaking across the sky, Israeli soldiers napping

The Atlas Group/Walid Raad, I might die before I get a rifle—Device II, 1998-2000. Archival inkjet prints on archival paper. Courtesy the artist and Sfeir-Semler Gallery, Hamburg/Beirut.

against their tanks in Christian East Beirut. In *Let's be honest, the weather helped*, Raad placed fluorescent-colored dots of different sizes on street-level photographs to indicate where he discovered stray bullets. In the photographic prints *Scratching on things I could disavow* (1992/2008)—another recycled title—cutouts of collected bullets, shrapnel, and small explosives are placed in neat rows next to short descriptive phrases, ranging from "trade with cousin" (for a new bullet) to "I am convinced that this did not kill anyone" (for a piece of shrapnel)—an odd moment of conviction in Raad's incessantly questioning art, and one that finds kinship with Baer's formulation that "photographs can capture the shrapnel of traumatic time."[35]

I might die before I get a rifle (1990/2008) purports to be twelve large color images printed from a CD-ROM made by a previous member of a Lebanese Communist militia whose job after the war required him to collect and photograph weapons and unused ordnances: grenades, artillery shells, plastic explosives, bullets. *I might die before I get a rifle* is among Raad's least visually mediated pieces, evoking the look of digital snapshot photography and involving very little of the cut, paste, and collage methodology of his other sets of photographic prints. Raad may be moving away from work that engages the psychology of trauma, but the weapons of war featured in each of the twelve photographs are treated and depicted as fetish objects par excellence. A striking 160 × 203 cm tightly cropped shot of a latex-gloved hand holding a 50 mm shell is as fastidiously presented as the miniature smoke plumes rendered in serial Minimalist fashion in *Oh, God, he said talking to a tree* (2006–08).

Many of Raad's works are accompanied by an explanatory text, whether they're presented in an exhibition or print

publication format. The one for *Oh, God, he said talking to a tree* is incorporated into the work as a separate print, the last of thirty-one. It states that the explosions are from the summer of 2006 war between Hezbollah and Israel, and emphasizes the absurdity in being forced to choose between the two opposing forces. (The text, a version of which appeared in the October 2006 issue of *Artforum*, doesn't mention that the photographs were appropriated from various media sources.[36] For Raad's on-the-ground reporting of the war—he was in Beirut with his family when fighting broke out—see his published dialogue with Silvia Kolbowski.[37]) This refusal of partisanism is crucial to Raad's work, while also distinct from neutrality. Despite his (imaginary) ordeals, Bachar never demands justice or retribution for his ten years in captivity, perhaps wary of the laws to which these notions are tied. Violence, as Benjamin argues, "is the origin of law," and frequently its result.[38] Or perhaps Bachar understands that, as Upendra Baxi has beautifully written, "constitutional decision or policy-makers present themselves as being just, even when not caring … It is notorious that constitutional cultures remain rights-bound, not care-bound."[39] A similar sense of care—even toward violence—can be found in Raad's work. At the very heart of its many fictions and prevarications is a sense that language and image don't do justice to the event. He stresses this point by quoting Toufic's book *Undeserving Lebanon* not once but twice in an interview with Seth Cameron in the *Brooklyn Rail* that coincided with Raad's MoMA retrospective: "Is trying to understand the event that happens to me (socio-economic, historical, political, etc.) enough? No. Is not understanding it but it in an intelligent and subtle way enough? No. Is trying to render justice enough? No, justice is never enough. We have to additionally feel that we merit the event that happened to us."[40]

Raad's work bypasses justice, truth, and reconciliation for expiation—a ghostly expiation, or, more precisely, an expiation of ghosts.

6. Between Past and the Future

Why is there so little of the present in Raad's art? Where are its human occupants? The few that are seen, as in the video *We can make rain but no one came to ask* (its very title an invocation of the past by the present), quickly disappear from the frame. Justice, truth, and reconciliation can exist without care, but there's no expiation without care. Along with being a textbook sign of the traumatic symptom, the constant repetitions in Raad's art are wedged between conflict and reconciliation. While at times they may resemble transcendence, they instead create the space (and time) for a different way of understanding guilt and expiation. In a powerful reading of Benjamin's "early aesthetics"—where the expressionless stands against retributive justice—in relation to his "Critique of Violence" essay, Judith Butler writes: "This power of obliteration constitutes a certain kind of violence, but it is important to understand that this is a violence mobilised against the conception of violence implied by retribution. Understood as 'a critical violence', it is mobilised *against* the logic of atonement and retribution alike."[41] In Raad's work, these historical and temporal caesuras—Toufic's "the withdrawal of tradition past a surpassing disaster"—just as readily induce moments of profound uncertainty in their

> movement away from a binary, sacrificial logic and any totalizing belief that a regulative ideal (such as justice) may be fully realized (a movement that is in my judgment desirable) toward a problematic condition of social emergency or crisis marked by the generalization of trauma as trope, arbitrary decision (or leaps of secular faith across antinomic or anomic abysses), extreme anxiety, and disorientation, if not panic.[42]

In this sense, it would be easier if Raad's art were about a counterhistory to the ones written by the victors. It would be easier if Raad's art were about the stutters and lacunae of traumatic expression. It would be easier if Raad's art were about the failures of historical representation. It would be easier if Raad's art were about indeterminacy countering dogmatism. It would be easier if Raad's art were about nonjudicial justice. All of these are engaged, but none are exhaustive.

There is an additional and inexorably dark force at work in Raad's art—a disaster of the sort about which Caruth, Toufic, Benjamin, and Maurice Blanchot[43] write—beyond understanding, naming, and that certainly cannot be seen, and which in its refusal to make the distinctions upon which retribution relies asks for a burdened history to begin again, perhaps even anew, in the gaps of its traumatic returning. Or if that's too much, too excessive, then maybe it's also possible to consider Raad's art as part of an ongoing transitional justice, both in Lebanon and among diverse global communities joined by the experience of historical trauma (and increasingly linked at another level by a globalized art world in which Raad's work circulates, and which *Scratching on things I could disavow* partly "documents"). Lodged between the past and the future with the law still in formation, transitional justice maintains a dialogue with both until the next histories are written. Raad interrupts history to create moments of possibility and spaces of productive uncertainty, like the paths walked by Raad's audience through his singular and endlessly generative labyrinth of work.

X

Alan Gilbert is the author of two books of poetry, *The Treatment of Monuments*(SplitLevel Texts, 2012) and *Late in the Antenna Fields*(Futurepoem, 2011), as well as a collection of essays, articles, and reviews entitled *Another Future: Poetry and Art in a Postmodern Twilight* (Wesleyan University Press, 2006). He lives in Brooklyn.

1
Cathy Caruth, "Trauma and Experience: Introduction," in *Trauma: Explorations in Memory* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1995), 4.

2
Walid Raad, in *The Atlas Group (1989–2004): A Project by Walid Raad* , eds. Kassandra Nakas and Britta Schmitz (Cologne: Verlag der Buchhandlung Walther Köning), 96.

3
Here, too, he summons Rosler's critiques of liberal humanist documentary traditions, not only in *The Bowery...* itself, but in her subsequent companion essay—Martha Rosler, "in, around, and afterthoughts (on documentary photography)," in *Decoys and Disruptions: Selected Writings, 1975–2001* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press), 151–206.

4
Jill Bennett, *Empathic Vision: Affect, Trauma, and Contemporary Art* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2005), 23–24. Dominick LaCapra makes a related distinction in *Writing History, Writing Trauma* between "historical trauma" and "structural trauma" (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2001), 76–78. This account also echoes Hal Foster's descriptions of archive-based work in "An Archival Impulse," *October* 110 (Fall 2004):5, n. 8.

5
Ibid., 151.

6
Ibid., 18; emphasis in original.

7
Amei Wallach, "The Fine Art of Car Bombings," *New York Times*, June 20, 2004 http://www.nytimes.com/2004/06/20/arts/art-the-fine-art-of-car-bombings.html?_r=0

8
See Robert Saliba, *Beirut City Center Recovery: The Foch-Allenby and Etoile Conservation Area* (Beirut: Solidere, 2004), 204–272.

9
André Lepecki, "'After All, This Terror Was Not Without Reason': Unfiled Notes on the Atlas Group Archive." *TDR*, vol. 50, no. 3 (Fall 2006): 97.

10
Walid Raad, "The Beirut Al-Hadath Archive," *Rethinking Marxism* , vol. 11, no. 1 (Spring 1999): 15–29; reproduced in Raad, *Scratching on Things I Could Disavow: Some Essays from The Atlas Group Project* (Lisbon: Culturgest; and Cologne: Verlag der Buchhandlung Walther Köning, 2007), 33–47.

11
Raad, "The Beirut Al-Hadath Archive," 19; Raad, *Scratching on Things I Could Disavow* , 37.

12
Ulrich Baer, *Spectral Evidence: The Photography of Trauma* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2002), 11.

13
Walid Raad, "Sweet Talk or Photographic Documents of Beirut," *Camera Austria* 80 (December 2002): 43–53. One of many examples of Raad's recycling of names, titles, files, and artworks, sometimes for the sake of expediency, and other times to further complicate the question of the document, the archive, and the artist as singular producer, this second *Sweet talk* should not to be confused with its initial incarnation as *Sweet talk or photographic documents of Beirut* (2002).

14
See, most succinctly, Jalal Toufic, "The Withdrawal of Tradition Past a Surpassing Disaster," in *Scratching on Things I Could Disavow: A History of Modern and Contemporary Art in the Arab World / Part I_Volume 1_Chapter_1 (Beirut: 1992–2005)* , eds. Clara Kim and Ryan Inouye (Los Angeles: California Institute of the Arts/REDCAT, 2009), 1–53.

15
Eduardo Cadava, *Words of Light: Theses on the Photography of History* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997), 71.

16
H. G. Masters, "Those Who Lack Imagination Cannot Imagine What Is Lacking," *ArtAsiaPacific* 65 (September/October 2009): 134.

17
Jacques Derrida, "Force of Law: The 'Mystical Foundation of Authority,'" *Cardozo Law Review* 11 (1990): 1044–1045.

18
In a gesture of (self-)institutional critique, one of the prints in *Appendix XVIII: Plates* elliptically records the gallery pushing for Raad and Bernard Khoury to be included in a proposed Lebanese national pavilion at the Venice Biennale.

19
Patrick Healy, "Face of War Pervades New Beirut Art Center," *New York Times* , July 7, 2009 http://www.nytimes.com/2009/07/07/arts/design/07center.html

20
Saree Makdisi, "Laying Claim to Beirut: Urban Narrative and Spatial Identity in the Age of Solidere," *Critical Inquiry*, vol. 23, no. 3 (Spring 1997): 672, 674.

21
Walid Raad, "Let's Be Honest, the Rain Helped: Excerpts from an Interview with The Atlas Group," in *Review of Photographic Memory* , ed. Jalal Toufic (Beirut: Arab Image Foundation, 2004), 44.

22
Raad, in *The Atlas Group (1989–2004)* , 104.

23
Walid Raad, "Miraculous Beginnings," *Public* 16 (1997): 44–53; reproduced in Raad, *Scratching on Things I Could Disavow* , 6–15.

24
Miriam Cooke, "Beirut Reborn: The Political Aesthetics of Auto-Destruction," *Yale Journal of Criticism* , vol. 15, no. 2 (Fall 2002): 400.

25
Henri Lefebvre, *The Production of Space* , trans. Donald Nicholson-Smith (Oxford: Blackwell, 1991), 33, 59.

26
Sarah Rogers, "Forging History, Performing Memory: Walid Ra'ad's *The Atlas Project*," *Parachute* 108 (October/November/December 2002): 77. Psychoanalysis, along with Marxism, formed a heavy component of Raad's graduate school studies.

27
See Kaelen Wilson-Goldie, "The Atlas Group Opens its Archives," *Bidoun* , vol. 1, no. 2 (Fall 2004): 24.

28
See Toufic, "The Withdrawal of Tradition Past a Surpassing Disaster," 53, n. 64.

29
Walter Benjamin, quoted in Judith Butler, "Beyond Seduction and Morality: Benjamin's Early Aesthetics," in *The Life and Death of Images: Ethics and Aesthetics* , eds. Diarmuid Costello and Dominic Willsdon (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2008), 73–74.

30
Vered Maimon, "The Third Citizen: On Models of Criticality in Contemporary Artistic Practices," *October* 129 (Summer 2009): 101.

31
Hostage (in print) also offers an expanded geopolitical context for the piece, drawn from research Raad conducted for his PhD dissertation in the Graduate Program in Visual and Cultural Studies at the University of Rochester. This version appeared in the catalogue for Catherine David's traveling group exhibition "Contemporary Arab Representations," which helped introduce Raad and other cultural producers from the Middle East to the larger art world. See Walid Raad, "Civilizationally, We Do Not Dig Holes to Bury Ourselves: Excerpts from an Interview with Souheil Bachar Conducted by Walid Raad of The Atlas Group," in *Tamáss: Contemporary Arab Representations* , ed. Catherine David (Barcelona: Fundació Antoni Tàpies, Barcelona, 2002), 122–137. See also Walid Raad, *Beirut ... a la folie: A Cultural Analysis of the Abduction of Westerners in Lebanon in the 1980s* , PhD dissertation, University of Rochester, 1996.

32
Raad, "Civilizationally, We Do Not Dig Holes to Bury Ourselves," 128–129; Raad, *Scratching on Things I Could Disavow* , 58–59.

33
Raad, "Civilizationally, We Do Not Dig Holes to Bury Ourselves," 130; Raad, *Scratching on Things I Could Disavow* , 60.

34
Kalí Tal, *Worlds of Hurt: Reading the Literatures of Trauma* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 7.

35
Baer, *Spectral Evidence*, 7.

36
Walid Raad, "'Oh God,' He Said, Talking to a Tree: A Fresh-Off-the-Boat, Throat-Clearing Preamble about the Recent Events in Lebanon: And a Question to Walid Sadek," *Artforum* , vol. 45, no. 2 (October

2006): 242–244.

37
Silvia Kolbowski and Walid Raad, *Between Artists: Silvia Kolbowski and Walid Raad* (New York: A.R.T. Press, 2006).

38
Walter Benjamin, "Critique of Violence," in *Reflections: Essays, Aphorisms, Autobiographical Writings* , ed. Peter Demetz, trans. Edmund Jephcott (New York: Schocken Books, 1978), 286.

39
Upendra Baxi, quoted in Rustom Bharucha, "Between Truth and Reconciliation: Experiments in Theatre and Public Culture," *Economic and Political Weekly* , vol. 36, no. 39 (September–October, 2001), 3765.

40
Walid Raad, "In Conversation: Walid Raad with Seth Cameron," *Brooklyn Rail* (December 2015/January 2016): 17. Jalal Toufic, *Undeserving Lebanon* (Beirut: Forthcoming Books, 2007).

41
Butler, "Beyond Seduction and Morality, 75.

42
LaCapra, *Writing History, Writing Trauma* , 31.

43
Maurice Blanchot, *The Writing of the Disaster* , trans. Ann Smock (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1986).

Arseny Zhilyaev

Factories of Resurrection: Interview with Anton Vidokle

Arseny Zhilyaev: Your recent films, which deal with the problematic of Russian cosmism, may come across as strange or even exotic. I know that your initial encounter with this topic was rather unusual. How did you start to work with this subject?

Anton Vidokle: About ten years ago Boris Groys told me about a very strange movement in Russia around the time of the Revolution. His description of it sounded so macabre and vampiric that I thought he had invented it. The story was too good to be real: the resurrection of the dead on spaceships, blood transfusions to suspend aging, and so on. It sounded like a science fiction novel. He said he had published a book on this in Germany, but unfortunately I do not speak German, so I did not pursue it. Then a few years ago I was doing an interview with Ilya Kabakov when he started talking about the same thing. I suddenly realized that it was not just Groys's invention, so looked it up.

What I found was Fedorov's book *The Common Task*, which was so intensely beautiful that it hooked me immediately. Also useful was *The Russian Cosmists: The Esoteric Futurism of Nikolai Fedorov and His Followers*, a history by George Young, who has been researching this topic since the late Seventies. I slowly discovered that this is actually a very massive layer of Russian and Soviet culture that I knew nothing about, and which seemed to explain certain inexplicable things about the motives and thoughts of the avant-garde, which has always interested me.

AZ: Can you tell me more about the origins of your film *The Communist Revolution Was Caused By the Sun*? Where did the idea come from? How did you develop the work? You chose to shoot the film in Karaganda, Kazakhstan, a rather unusual location. The landscape, with its Soviet industrial architecture and Muslim cemeteries, looks very weird even to Russians .

AV: At first, my plan was to make one feature-length film about cosmism. But as I started doing research, then filming and editing material, I realized that a single feature film would be impossible: the topic is just too vast, because there are so many different dimensions to this movement, from art to literature, poetry, theater, film, architecture, design, science and technology, medicine, philosophy, politics, social organization, and so forth.

So I decided to make a series of shorter films, about half an hour each. The first film, *This Is Cosmos*, dealt with the general ethos of cosmism: a collage of ideas from the

Anton Vidokle, Film still from The Communist Revolution Was Caused By the Sun, 2015. HD video, color, sound. 33:36. Courtesy the artist.

movement's diverse protagonists. In a sense it's a kind of an introduction, with subsequent films addressing specific manifestations and ideas in depth.

The second film, *The Communist Revolution Was Caused By the Sun,* is based on the work and ideas of Alexander Chizhevsky, a biophysicist who was exiled to Karaganda, which was a city populated primarily by political prisoners who were released from camps and prisons, but who were not allowed to return to Moscow or other central cities.

Kazakhstan was the site of a very large network of labor camps known as *Karlag*, similar to the better-known *Gulag*. It was also the key site of the Soviet space program, with most of the rockets launching from Baikonur and landing in the steppe surrounding Karaganda. Sort of like the American city of Houston, in Texas, the city was both an enormous prison and one of the first spaceports. Architecturally, it is dominated by vast coal mines, most of which are now shut down, as well as enormous cemeteries which evolved a very particular architectural style that I have not seen elsewhere: they look like miniature cities full of manifold mausoleum structures quoting various Islamic traditional styles, albeit all made from cheap, Soviet-era materials. It's a very unusual place.

AZ: Did you ever come across Chizhevsky's ionizer lamps when you were growing up in Moscow? I seem to remember that even in the Nineties, hospitals and schools always had them installed. These days they are not produced in their classical, Soviet version, though there are many other commercial types of ionizers available. However, I heard that they do not seem to have the therapeutic effect that the device designed by Chizhevsky was supposed to have. The device in the film is probably one of the few authentic ones that exist. What will happen to it? Will it be used for treatment?

AV: I have some vague memories of something like these ionizer lamps. I was sickly as a child and my mother used to try various remedies to improve my health—for example, *mumiyo*, which is a black, tar-like substance from Altai, which apparently is petrified honey. You drink it with hot milk. Its tastes disgusting, but it's supposed to cure all sorts of ailments. From that time, I also remember something about the benefits of negatively charged ions of oxygen. But it's a very vague memory: I'm not really sure if I ever actually saw these devices.

Ionizer lamps were very popular in the Seventies and later. Many types have been produced: from things that look like Constructivist sculptures to devices disguised as painted porcelain vases or artificial palm trees, to blend better with the décor of your home. Most of these do not work, because they are not made according to Chizhevsky's original designs. Basically, it's a fairly simple device that

Arseny Zhilyaev, Cradle of Humankind, 2015. Installation view in the context of the exhibition "Future Histories," Venice Biennale. Photo: Alex Maguire. Courtesy of the V-a-C Foundation and the artist.

creates an electric field, which changes the charge of particles in the air from positive to negative. It also cleans the air. This, in turn, helps the circulation of blood, which is supposed to produce rejuvenating effects in humans and animals. In nature, this happens on mountaintops, by the sea, and in forests. This phenomenon is related to the effect of solar particles on the ionosphere of our planet. Chizhevsky basically created a device that would reproduce this process indoors.

Ionizers are rather common these days. Many Japanese air conditioners include an ionization function, but the type Chizhevsky invented is hard to find. So for the film we had to build one ourselves. By incredible luck or coincidence we actually found the only industrial manufacturer who has worked with these devices, in Karaganda. It's a small experimental factory, which developed original designs and modified them to be used as air purification machines for factory chimneys. Apparently, this works to remove nearly all the carbon from polluted air and to release pure oxygen into the atmosphere.

The owner of the company is hoping that these devices will be adopted by all carbon-producing factories on the planet, because they are very economical and consume hardly any energy. According to him, this would drastically reduce the amount of carbon in the atmosphere and return Earth to the climate conditions that existed before the effects of human activity. As a result, he thinks that the climate will improve and plants that have been extinct for many millennia will return, and Earth will become the Garden of Eden again: people will not need clothing anymore and we will all walk around naked, prehistoric plants and trees will grow plentiful fruit and we will not have to work for food, and so forth. So he is lobbying the office of the president of Kazakhstan, Nazarbayev, to include this device in the World Fair that will take place in the capital city, Astana, next year.

He was excited we were making a film about Chizhevsky and built a giant version of this lamp, which we then installed and tested at a local cemetery. After filming we donated it to the local museum of science and technology. They wanted it as a kind of an alternative monument to Chizhevsky: a functional monument. Hopefully it has been reinstalled there by now.

Anton Vidokle, Film still from The Communist Revolution Was Caused By the Sun, 2015. HD video, color, sound. 33:36. Courtesy the artist.

AZ: In the first two films in this trilogy you use elements associated with psychotherapy. You speak of the effect of color on the human body, and use strategies of hypnosis. This emphasis on the utilitarian aspect of art, simultaneously sincere and critical, tests the limits of our belief in the transformative power of art. At the same time I feel as though you genuinely prefer utility over aesthesis or poesis. Most often, utility in art brings to mind certain socially engaged practices, which refer to politics or relational aesthetics in one way or another. It seems to me that you are trying to approach this on an entirely different level: through a direct, material influence—material determinism. The notion of the Communist Revolution—a complex social phenomenon—as an event that could have been produced by the purely material, physical influence of the sun dovetails with this thinking. Tell me about your relationship to utility in art and to materialism in the context of your projects.

AV: Utility in art is something that probably needs to be described carefully right now: it seems to me that there is a tendency these days to put a lot of emphasis on the "usefulness" of some types of artistic projects. It still remains to be seen if these works are really useful or are merely an expression of insecurity about the elusive nature and value of art, or of a reluctance on the part of some public institutions to fund activities that do not appear to have immediate and direct benefits for their constituencies, that are difficult to understand or appreciate. What I have been observing is that over the past few years, cuts in cultural funding are slowly forcing art organizations and some artists to adopt a certain stance that makes it easier to rationalize or justify their activities to government officials, sponsors, patrons, and politicians, and utility or usefulness are very instrumental terms here. While I do not believe that art should or could be completely autonomous from society, I do find this tendency simplistic.

With my films I want to come a little bit closer to the ethos behind cosmism, which is basically the desire to contribute directly and literally to the impossibly difficult project of immortality and resurrection for all, by any means possible, including art. It's interesting that many cosmists saw medicine as a field where the project of immortality, in the sense of the prolongation of life, could be most immediately deployed. Its not an accident that someone like Chizhevsky, who was really a physicist and not a physician, did most of his research in areas that could immediately improve human health, cure ailments, and in this way postpone death. Alexander Bogdanov was also a doctor—a psychiatrist, by education—and one of his most interesting projects was research into blood transfusion, through which he hoped to slow down aging and delay death.

So when I was editing the first film, it occurred to me that I did not want to make a mere documentary about the

history of cosmism, and that in order to transmit its ideas more accurately, I needed to somehow express its central desire, which is simply to prolong life. Essentially, film is light, color, and sound, and all of these means can produce a therapeutic effect on the human organism. We all know about light therapy for children and people who live in places lacking in sunlight. Color therapy has been practiced since the time of the ancient Egyptians. Sound also appears to have various medical uses. So basically the structural elements that make up a film can also be used for preventative or other types of treatment.

In the first film in the series, I used red screens because of a red light treatment system developed by NASA to speed up the healing of skin wounds. They discovered this accidentally, while looking for a way to heal cuts and abrasions in conditions of zero gravity, where the body heals very slowly. They found that red LED light, of a certain frequency, accelerates healing. At the same time, video projectors these days often use an LED light source, and the usage of HD LED screens is becoming more affordable and common each year. So I hope that in the near future, when this film is screened on an LED screen at some museum, it can be calibrated to also produce prophylactic and therapeutic effect on the viewer. Even if you don't like the film, it can have a positive effect on your body, on your cells and organs.

Similarly, the second film uses elements of clinical hypnosis that are commonly employed to break addictions. I try to use a hypnosis script at the beginning and the end of the film to break the addiction to mortality—the death drive. In the next film I plan to use a sound technique that has been used clinically to alter memory, which appears to be one of the reasons for drug and alcohol addictions and other self-destructive behavior. This is not to say that the main value of my work is medical. That would be charlatanism. But I use these techniques to express the desire implicit in cosmism to rejuvenate, cure, heal, improve health, and delay death for as long as possible and by any means possible.

AZ: In your films there are many references to works by members of the Moscow conceptual school. In one way or another Ilya Kabakov, Boris Groys, and Andrei Monastyrski with Collective Actions Group are all present in these films. Can you tell me more about your relationship to this tradition? Do you think of yourself as belonging to it artistically?

AV: Well, this project was largely started through a conversation with Kabakov. However, Ilya has a very negative relationship to cosmism; for him it's as "evil" as communism, which he despises. Basically, his take on it is that it reduces humanity to a speck in the vastness of the cosmos, and in this way human existence becomes very marginal. He illustrates this idea very literally in some of his paintings, where tiny human figures form a kind of a thin border around the edges of the canvas, while the center is filled with a giant white void. I love these paintings, although I suspect that he misreads cosmism entirely. It seems to me that Ilya is very much a humanist, and while humanism never totally leaves the project of cosmism, it is a very hybrid version of humanism, which probably makes Ilya uncomfortable.

Andrei Monastyrski is a very different figure. When I started working on this project, I asked one of the researchers who was helping me gather material, a young artist named Anastasia Ryabova, to ask Andrei about Fedorov and cosmism. At the time, he said that it had nothing to do with his work. But just a couple of months ago, I spoke with him again and this time around he told me that he was actually reading Fedorov in the late Seventies, and that some of the ideas did influence him.

I refer to both Ilya's and Andrei's work in the first film, and will actually restage a version of one of Monastyrski's actions from 1979 in the next film in the series, with his consent. I admire these artists, but I really do not think that I belong to the Moscow conceptual tradition in any way. Most of it is rather hermetic and based on post-structuralism, the analysis of language and systems, and so forth. I think I come from something else artistically, although I am not exactly sure what that is.

AZ: You may have heard that during the past couple of years there has been quite a public discussion of cosmism in Russia. This started when the entire editorial team of an independent political web journal, *Russian Planet*, was fired, having been accused rather facetiously of being "weak cosmists." Subsequently, the label "weak cosmist" went viral, and is now usually used as a derogatory term. I have heard numerous sarcastic remarks about cosmism, mainly from the liberal intelligensia, regarding the Soviet space program as well as the philosophy of Nikolai Fedorov and his followers. For them, cosmism is synonymous with obscurantism and charlatanism. On the other hand, there is clearly a renewed interest in the cosmos as evidenced both by statements from the Russian government and by Russian culture at large. For example, the most successful Russian cartoon of the last few years, which has been nominated for an Oscar this year, is called *We Can't Live Without Cosmos*. I guess this is not only a Russian phenomenon, as the success of movies like *Interstellar* suggests. I am curious about how your projects on the cosmos and Russian cosmism are perceived in a more international context.

AV: I have not encountered anything particularly dismissive or hostile yet. Just perhaps a bit of disbelief. Like: this story is too strange to be true.

Detail of Arseny Zhilyaev's Cradle of Humankind (2015). Photo: Anton Kisilev. Courtesy of the V-a-C Foundation and the artist.

This view of the Chizhevsky Museum, Kaluga, Russia displays a series of the scientist's ionizing lamps, including a camouflaged palm tree version in the upper-left corner. Photo: Arseny Zhilyaev.

Immortality and resurrection are very ancient topics and have always provoked controversy. It seems that it's very ingrained in almost all cultures that the desire for immortality is a sin, a transgression against nature, god, the essence of humanity, and so forth. So people are often ambivalent about this. And the cosmos is also something that most people view with a bit of fear. Just think of all the popular movies about something horrible coming from outer space to destroy Earth and humanity: all sorts of meteorites, monsters, aliens, and so forth. Furthermore, there is a certain degree of suspicion of things that are Russian. In Europe and America, where I spend most of my time, leftists dislike Russia because they think it ruined the possibility of communism, while people on the Right suspect that all things Russian are still secretly Communist. There isn't really all that much sympathy from either ideological camp, and the current political situation in the world does not help this.

But I do feel that many people respond to the kind of poetry and wild imaginative power that permeates Fedorov's ideas and cosmism in general. So there is quite a bit of curiosity.

AZ: Your films about cosmism make me think of Situationist experiments and the French New Wave. Firstly, this is because of the collage-like structure of the content of your films, and the emphasis you put on research. It's also because of your rejection of mimetic acting, your use of estrangement in the Brechtian sense and the direct address to the audience. And finally, it's because of the way you combine nearly abstract images (for example, landscapes shot from a great height) with a rather complex narrative about theoretical and scientific questions. On the other hand, having watched Russian television in the Eighties and Nineties, as well as Soviet science fiction films, I can't avoid mentioning works by Pavel Klushantsev in the context of your films. Klushantsev was one of the first directors to make films about the exploration of space. Many people think that his film *Path to the Stars* influenced Stanley Kubrick and George Lucas. Another one of his films, *The Stormy Planet*, went on to become an international hit under different titles—*The Planet of Prehistoric Women* and *Voyage to the Prehistoric Planet*—and without mention of its original author. Apparently, Klushantsev was the first director to use special effects in cinema, and some of the techniques he invented are still used in contemporary cinema, in a more technologically advanced way. Unfortunately, as was often the case in the USSR, his international success backfired and he was banned from making feature films; he was only allowed to make educational documentaries. But he went on to make more than one hundred film essays about the cosmos and various scientific problems, which, despite the ban, still feel more artistic than educational or documentary. I feel there is a similarity between your films and these documentary films by Klushantsev. Can you tell me more about who you feel affinity with in terms of the history of cinema? Who did you learn from?

AV: I think the films I make accidentally fall into the genre that used to be called "scientific-popular films," something unique to the Soviet film industry, which does not quite have a parallel in American or European cinema. These films were a bit different from the sci-fi genre, which was really embraced and highly developed in the USSR. Similar to what you say about Klushantsev, these scientific/educational films for mass audiences were a kind of a refuge for certain filmmakers who could not get permission or support to develop their ideas within the feature film studios, like Mosfilm or Lenfilm, but were able to work at special studios set up for the production of this type of educational material. Perhaps because this was perceived as a lesser genre, it was not subject to the same kind of scrutiny from the censors as feature films. So certain filmmakers, like Sobolev for example, were able to make wildly experimental, expressionistic essay films, which would have never been allowed otherwise.

To be honest, I actually do not really remember seeing them when I was growing up in the Soviet Union, and I only discovered them recently because certain colleagues said that they have similarities with my work. So I looked

Anton Vidokle, Film still from The Communist Revolution Was Caused By the Sun, 2015. HD video, color, sound. 33:36. Courtesy the artist.

them up. None of them are really "great" films in the sense of the history of cinema, and they do not compare to Pasolini or Godard or Tarkovsky, but they are remarkably imaginative and really interesting to watch. What is particularly interesting for me is that these films do not fall within the documentary or journalistic genre, while at the same time they are not fiction. They are a little bit of both. A lot of times, these films address a theoretical or philosophical topic that is difficult to reduce to the kind of story one needs for a narrative film, yet they are narrative and communicate very interesting, complex, abstract ideas. Usually, they are not feature length, but short—twenty to thirty minutes. In this sense, the format of these films is actually very suitable for the kind of films that work well within art exhibitions.

AZ: One last question about the future. If I understand correctly, you are planning to shoot the next film in this series in Moscow, and it will be about museums. Is that true?

AV: Yes, the next film will be shot in Moscow, at the Museum of the Revolution, the Museum of Zoology, and the modern collection of the Tretyakov Gallery. The film will be called *Immortality and Resurrection For All*, and it is based on passages from Fedorov's essay about museums. For Fedorov, the museum is a key institution in society, unique insofar as it's the only place that does not produce progress (which for him implies an erasure of the past), but rather cares for the past. He felt that museums needed to be radicalized such that they would not merely collect and preserve artifacts and images, but also preserve and recover life itself—resurrect the past. In this sense, museums should become factories of resurrection.

Anton Vidokle, Film still from The Communist Revolution Was Caused By the Sun, 2015. HD video, color, sound. 33:36. Courtesy the artist.

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Arseny Zhilyaev is an artist who lives and works in Moscow. With his recent projects, the artist casts a revisionist lens on the heritage of Soviet museology and the meaning of the museum in Russian cosmism. Zhilyaev is the editor of the book *Avant-Garde Museology* (e-flux with V-a-c Press and University of Minnesota Press, 2015).

Anton Vidokle is an artist and editor of *e-flux journal*.