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e-flux Journal is a monthly art publication featuring essays and contributions by some of the most engaged artists and thinkers working today. The journal is available online, in PDF format, and in print through a network of distributors.

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Editorial

Historically, more than any single institution, art publications have been primary sites for discourse surrounding the artistic field. And yet most recently, the discourse has seemingly moved elsewhere—away from the formal vocabulary used to explain art production, away from traditional art capitals, and away from the printed page. At times, new discursive practices even replace traditional forms of art production. Given the current climate of disciplinary reconfiguration and geographic dispersal, it has become apparent that the urgent task has now become to engage the new intellectual territories in a way that can revitalize the critical vocabulary of contemporary art. We see a fresh approach to the function of an art journal to be perhaps the most productive way of doing this.

With this first, inaugural issue of *e-flux journal*, we begin something of an experiment in developing both a discursive space and a site for actual art production, in which writers, artists, and thinkers are invited to write on topics of their choosing. While it is our hope that the contributions included here can begin to give a sense of how varied the concerns and urgencies being engaged today are, we also expect that certain consistencies and overarching issues will emerge through them, and help us shape the forthcoming issues of the journal.

For **Boris Groys**, the emancipatory promises of modernist design become problematic when, through rejection of ornament in hopes of revealing the true essence of things, the liberating capacity of design is replaced by an obligation to design one's own naked essence. In his words, "It could be said that modernism substituted the design of the corpse for the design of the soul."

For **Bilal Khbeiz**, meditating on the absence of public spaces in Los Angeles, it seems that the design of the city has been substituted by a similar design of the corpse—that of cinema. As in the case of Groys' self-design, a promise of autonomy as total and absolute quickly becomes a negotiation with the threat of death, that fundamental limit that just won't go away. Khbeiz finds in the emaciated, virtually nonexistent publics of LA, where the city "appears as a yawning retiree," that the possibility of re-imagining oneself, as well as a public, has been all but sublimated into the cinematic form. As a scrapyard of life from which cinema picks its props, Khbeiz's Los Angeles is conveyed in such lucidly poetic language that one finds it hard to believe that within such an oppressive space, other forms of engaging it are not possible.

Not everyone is so lucky with language. In *Stammer, Mumble, Sweat, Scrawl, and Tic*, **Raqs Media Collective** outline a cultural condition that could be described as a stammering one—as an inability, or refusal, to communicate adequately when the weight of real circumstances becomes too much, when translation becomes impossible. It is perhaps important to fully attend

to these limitations in which the inadequacy of representation creates an opaque wall.

Omer Fast confronts such limits in the inability to communicate the gravity of traumatic experience in a script for his recent two-channel video installation *Take a Deep Breath*. In the work, a group of actors and filmmakers are beset by a series of setbacks while attempting to create a film entitled "Regarding the Pain of Others." Faced with their own inability to relate to each other, the cast and crew of the film set are compelled to reconcile their guilt with their ambivalence, their sympathy with their remoteness, and the position of the actor in relation to both fiction and the reality of his own personal history.

Pelin Tan also engages the spaces that form between subjects when the specter of trauma hangs over. She suggests that a form of image-making in which "non-relationships" to public space and spaces of trauma might create a capacity for an image to assume a voice without passing through the interpretative membrane of a human subject. It is perhaps through a perpetual alienation from spaces and events, which she relates to a sense of the uncanny, that the image can discover new languages.

In the first of a three-part contribution from Marina Gržinić, Staš Kleindienst, and **Sebastjan Leban**, Leban begins their discussion by acknowledging the severe limitations to political expression put in place by the market economy through what he terms the "production of passivity." As a commodity culture—which includes the field of art—fueled by the market economy marginalizes groups on the basis of class and race, he calls for a flat rejection of the daily burden of passiveness experienced in civic life.

Not accepting to be passive by any means, but openly engaging a marginal position with regard to state and corporate bodies, in the Brazilian state of Acre **Marjetica Potrč** finds self-sustainability and autonomy to signify a community's very basic means of deciding its own destiny. Walls are important, and Potrč contends that the model of the gated community (among the most distinct models of neoliberal favor for private capital and withdrawal from the public sphere) to be a critical instrument for a marginal community to use to their advantage. The notion of protecting private capital is here absorbed into a notion of local knowledge and, similar to the use of a mask, Potrč outlines the necessity of a one-way barrier through which "we can see you, but you can't see us."

Perhaps this model of the gated community could be a useful one for public institutions as well. **Irit Rogoff**'s contribution looks at a renewed approach to the opacity of the institution's walls, in which the suspension of outside demands can create the possibility of "small ontological communities propelled by desire and curiosity." She sees something like another gated community in the institution that can perhaps only discover its agency in the public sphere by balancing an interaction with it against a certain withdrawal from it—a highly nuanced distinction similar to the one she draws between the flawed desires of institutions to be "accessible" (struggling to mimic public desires) and an idea that they can be places "to which we have access" (as semi-autonomous bodies engaged in their own interests, but whose doors remain open). To this end, she suggests that an academy "can actually become a model for 'being in the world.'"

And so it seems in issue #0 of *e-flux journal* that walls and limits must be recognized. If an emerging condition in art can be loosely defined by its geographic and disciplinary dispersal, then alongside its offerings of new forms of agency, it seems that the opportunity to re-imagine one's own circumstances also translates to a constant negotiation with some of its basic contingencies. As we are seeing in the current global financial crisis, if we are to invoke the promises of late capitalism—that borders, languages, finances can dissolve or converge—then it becomes important also to acknowledge that some things simply do not translate into free-flowing forms of universal consensus. War, trauma, culture, language will not slide over oiled tracks of communication, and some solids refuse to melt into air. But perhaps it is here, in the attempt at translation—in the open engagement with its uselessness through stammering, mumbling, scrawling attempts—that one might suggest that art can provide a means of discovering and negotiating with the nature of these basic contingencies.

—Julieta Aranda, Brian Kuan Wood, Anton Vidokle

X

Omer Fast

Take a Deep Breath

TAKE A DEEP BREATH by
Omer Fast

In the summer of 2002, Martin F. was standing outside a falafel
shop in Jerusalem when it exploded. A trained medic, he went in
and discovered the body of a young man on the floor. The young
man had lost both legs below the waist, as well as an arm, but
his eyes were open and focused. A few seconds passed while the
two looked at each other. Knowing it was probably in vain,
Martin F. decided to administer mouth-to-mouth resuscitation.
After a minute or two, the young man's eyes rolled up into his
head and he expired. As he walked out, Martin F. saw that a
group of people had gathered, including two policemen, who
wanted to know how many casualties were inside. When he
responded that there was only one, Martin F. realized the young
man he had just left inside was a suicide bomber.

In the following script, extracts recorded from a conversatio
with Martin F. in 2008 alternate with fictional scenes in which
a team of actors attempts to stage his ordeal for the camera.

There are two cameras shooting simultaneously.

Each shoots a different view.

1 I/E. FALAFEL SHOP IN JERUSALEM. DAY.

Off-screen sound of a muffled explosion.

CAMERA "A" AN EXPLODED FALAFEL SHOP ON A STREET IN JERUSALEM. THE
STORE WINDOW HAS BEEN BLOWN OUT. SMOKE IS COMING OUT. THE STREET IS
EMPTY. THERE IS SHATTERED GLASS AND BLOOD ON THE SIDEWALK, AS WELL
AS A SINGLE SEVERED HUMAN ARM.

CAMERA "B" PARALLEL SHOT, REVEALING MF FROM BEHIND, STANDING
FARTHER DOWN AND LOOKING TOWARDS THE EXPLODED FACADE.

MARTIN F. (V.O.)
Where do I start here? That morning I took off from work for an hour or so. I went with my wife out on a few chores. And when I came back I decided to go for lunch. I headed for my favorite falafel place on Prophets Street. And within fifteen seconds I heard this boom. Not as noisy as you'd really expect. And I see smoke emerging from the falafel place itself.

MF begins to walk towards facade.

BOTH CAMERAS MOVE TOWARDS THE BLASTED WINDOW.

MARTIN F. (V.O.)
The plate glass window is all shattered. There's complete silence. Maybe a few car alarms go off. There's glass on the sidewalk. And the first thing that really hits me is a human arm by the door.

MF pauses just in front of the facade.

MARTIN F. (V.O.)
But I am a medic. I was trained in the army to deal with casualties. So I headed over there. Not too fast, mind you. I was not in a rush. I was hoping that some magic ambulance was going to come out of nowhere; they'd do all the dirty work. They'd go in and I would be able to be on the outside looking in. But nobody was there, so I walk in.

MF walks through the open door into the shop.

CAMERA "A" TRACKS THROUGH BLASTED WINDOW INTO THE SHOP AS MF WALKS
IN THROUGH DOOR. IT CLOSES IN ON AN INJURED BODY LYING IN A PUDDLE
OF BLOOD. IT IS A YOUNG MAN, PRACTICALLY A TEENAGER. HE IS MISSING
BOTH LEGS AND AN ARM. THE GROIN AREA OF HIS PANTS DISPLAYS AN
AWKWARD TUMESCENCE.

CAMERA "B" OVERTAKES MF AS HE APPROACHES THE FACADE, CROSSING AND
FOLLOWING MF'S POV. AS IT APPROACHES THE BODY, IT TILTS UP TO
REVEAL CAMERA "A" AND THE CREW.

MARTIN F. (V.O.)
Glass all over the place. And blood, but... I see this one fellow lying on the floor. He had no legs. I leaned down and looked at him for a second or two.

CAMERA "A" ZOOMS IN; THE LEGLESS MAN SUDDENLY OPENS HIS EYES AND
LOOKS AT THE CAMERA.

2 INT. FALAFEL SHOP IN JERUSALEM. DAY.

OMER
Oh no, Cut...

Legless Man immediately closes his eyes.

ASSISTANT DIRECTOR
(Loudly)
Cut!

CAMERA "A": CUTS BRIEFLY.
CAMERA "B": STAYS ON THE CREW.

SOUNDMAN
Dude, that was perfect! What happened?

OMER
He opened his eyes.

CAMERA "A" BACK ON TO CLOSE-UP OF SOUNDMAN.
FROM NOW ON BOTH
CAMERAS CUT BETWEEN VARIOUS CREW MEMBERS AS THEY SPEAK.

SOUNDMAN
Who did?
OMER
I forgot his name. He looked right at the camera.

ASSISTANT DIRECTOR
Are you sure?

CAMERMAN
Eyes wide shut, Omar. It's like the third time he does that.

CAMERA "A" CU OF BOMBER. HIS EYES ARE CLOSED. HE DOESN'T MOVE.

CAMERMAN
Actually, there was another problem. I don't know how to put it but...

People look the Camerman questioningly.

CAMERMAN
(Smiling, embarrassed)
Um, he's got a lump in his pants.

ASSISTANT DIRECTOR
A lump? What are you talking about?

CAMERMAN
His pants. Um, look, there's a bump, a lump, it looks like...

OMER
A what?

Pause. Some people notice. Suppressed laughter. Bomber opens eyes.

SOUNDMAN
Whoa, dude, is that what I think it is?!

OMER
I don't get it. Am I missing something?

SOUNDMAN
(Laughs)
The guy's got a boner! For real! Hey, you're in the wrong film, man!

BOMBER
(Smiles)
What? Where?

Pause. Everyone notices. Bomber strains to look down at his crotch.

SOUNDMAN
(To Bomber)
You're not turned on by this whole thing, are you?

BOMBER
(Still smiling but less sure)
Come on, it's not me...

SOUNDMAN
Uh-huh...

ASSISTANT DIRECTOR
It's not him, you idiots. It's just a bump in his costume!

CAMERMAN
Man, I don't care what it is! If you look through the camera, it looks just like a hard on!

SOUNDMAN
I heard this shit happens when people are hanged...

BOMBER
(More concerned)
Seriously! It's not me!

SOUNDMAN
Hey, no worries, dude. It happens to everyone.

BOMBER
But this is all a prosthetic, remember? I'm actually under the platform.

OMER
Well, could we get the make-up guy in here?

CAMERMAN
And a bucket of ice!

Cameraman and Soundman high-five each other, laughing. FX guy runs in, reaches into Bomber's pants and starts fiddling. A PA runs in with ice and is shooed away. The crew loves it.

ASSISTANT DIRECTOR
(Disgusted)
Would you guys grow up already?!

FX guy finishes and runs off. Bomber relaxes.

ASSISTANT DIRECTOR
Ugh. All right. On to the next problem: Did you look at the camera?

BOMBER
(Shrugs)
I thought it already passed me.

OMER
OK, could we stop messing around and do it again? Just the last shot? The close-up?

ASSISTANT DIRECTOR
Just a second, Omer. I'm not sure he gets it. Hey look, the camera was not yet past you when you opened your eyes, OK? Just stay dead with your eyes closed until we're finished.

BOMBER
Well, how am I supposed to know where the camera is if my eyes are closed?

CAMERMAN
Listen Einstein, you're a suicide bomber! You're dead! You don't care about cameras!

BOMBER
(Points to Cam "A")
Not even this one?

ASSISTANT DIRECTOR
It's really simple. You close your eyes when we say "action." You open them when we say "cut." That's all there is to it. (to Omer) Has he ever acted before?

BOMBER
Isn't it better if I keep my eyes open?

Pause. Disbelief.

BOMBER
I mean, it's not a peaceful death, right? I just think that it'll look more real.

Pause. The entire crew stares at the Bomber.

BOMBER
Fine. I'll keep my eyes closed if that's what you want.

SOUNDMAN
(Seriously, to Omer)
Maybe we should try water-boarding?

OMER
(Ignores him)
No. He's right. Let's do it again. From the top. With his eyes opened.

CAMERMAN
What, the whole scene, Omar?

ASSISTANT DIRECTOR
I'm not sure that's such a good idea, Omer...

OMER
What can I say? He's right. It will look more realistic.

CAMERMAN
How's he know what's more realistic?

SOUNDMAN
Yeah, man, like have you died in a suicide bombing before?

BOMBER
Have you ever seen a dead body?

CAMERMAN
Have you?

BOMBER
Yes.

CAMERMAN
Where?

BOMBER
At home. Where I'm from... (Shrugs) I've seen many.

SOUNDMAN
What are you? Like an undertaker on weekends?

BOMBER
I'm a Kosovar.

SOUNDMAN
(Laughing)
A Crossover? What's that supposed to mean?

ASSISTANT DIRECTOR
He's from the Balkans, genius.

SOUNDMAN
Oh right! The Balkans. Now everything's clear. That's where Frodo's from, isn't it?

Someone laughs.

OMER
Ok, I think we should re-

CAMERMAN
(Cuts him off)
Nah, nah, hold on, Omar! I got to ask this guy a question...

Cameraman leans aggressively towards Bomber.

CAMERMAN (CONT'D)
Who died? Come on, man. Give me some names. Where was it? When did it happen?

Pause. Bomber closes his eyes and settles back into his pose.

CAMERMAN
(Laughs dismissively)
Just what I thought. This guy is pulling your leg, Omar...

ASSISTANT DIRECTOR
(To Omer)
Are you sure you want to do the whole thing all over again? We're an hour behind. All the extras are waiting...

Pause. Omer thinks.

SOUNDMAN
(To Camerman)
Did they have Arabs in Lord of the Rings?

CAMERMAN
He's not an Arab.

SOUNDMAN
What is he then?

CAMERMAN
He's a liar.

BOMBER
I'm an Albanian.

SOUNDMAN
Arabian, Albanian... (turns) Could somebody get us an atlas?

OMER
(Fumbles, taking out an iPhone)
Here. I can google it...

ASSISTANT DIRECTOR
Hey Omer? We really don't have time for this. If you're not happy with how things are going, I'd suggest we try one take without him.

BOMBER
(Opens his eyes)
Are you serious?

Omer looks up from the iPhone.

CAMERMAN
(Laughing)
But he's the suicide bomber! What am I going to shoot? A puddle of fake blood and some pieces of latex?

SOUNDMAN
You can shoot some falafel balls, man. Look, this stuff's got great texture!

ASSISTANT DIRECTOR
Why don't we break for lunch and talk about it?

OMER
But he's right; we can't just pretend the guy isn't here. I mean, he IS the suicide bomber. That's kind of a big part of the story!

ASSISTANT DIRECTOR
All right. Then let's get someone else. (takes out her own iPhone) I know this casting agency...

BOMBER
Wait a minute! I have a contract!

CAMERMAN
You had a contract.

Bomber tries to get up, struggling with the prosthetics.

OMER
(Runs towards Bomber)
Please just stay where you are! I promise:
Whatever we decide, you'll get paid for today...

BOMBER
(Still struggling)
I'm not doing this for money!

Bomber finally manages to get up. AD looks up from iPhone.

CAMERMAN
No? Then why are you doing this? To be famous? For your showreel?

SOUNDMAN
(Quietly)
For like the seventy virgins, man, I'd do it...

Bomber steps menacingly towards Cameraman. AD walks in to break
them up. Omer sits down in despair.

ASSISTANT DIRECTOR
OK, that's enough. Let's break for lunch everyone! Now! I mean it.

Pause. Cameraman and Bomber stare at each, huffing and puffing.
Cameraman struts off. Soundman bumbles after him. Bomber sits down
next to Omer, exhausted.

OMER
Listen, I'm really sorry about this. I didn't realize you had this - you know - history...

Bomber looks at Omer without responding.

OMER
Did you lose someone close?

Bomber and Omer look at each other.

ASSISTANT DIRECTOR
Omer? I think we should talk for a minute.

BOMBER
I need to make a phone call.

OMER
Sure.

BOMBER
I don't have a phone.

AD doesn't offer her iPhone. Reluctantly, Omer hands over his.

OMER
Here. Just be careful. (Smiles apologetically)
It's an iPhone...

Bomber quietly takes phone. He then reaches up and slowly peels off
his nose, it's a bumpy prosthetic.

BOMBER
(Gives nose to Omer)
Here. This is yours.

Bomber walks off.

ASSISTANT DIRECTOR
(Smiling)
All right. That's one casualty. Can I call the casting agency now?

Pause. Omer thinks. Assistant Director starts scrolling through
contacts again.

ASSISTANT DIRECTOR
Come on, Omer. He's just a day player. There's nothing special about him. Oh, and while we're at it, we should fire that burn victim chick.

OMER
But she's the only woman on our whole set!

ASSISTANT DIRECTOR
Yeah, but she's not in the original story, right? Plus she's a bad actress.

OMER
It's a small role. She's just a casualty!

ASSISTANT DIRECTOR
I'm not sure you were watching her face, Omer. She was vamping, not dying.

OMER
What is that supposed to mean?

ASSISTANT DIRECTOR
(Sighs, angry)
All right. Fine.
Why don't I just call them all back and do it over again? Eyes open, eyes closed, shirt on, shirt off. Whatever you want. Frankly, I think you're too caught up in details.

Pause. Omer looks around, unable to decide.

ASSISTANT DIRECTOR
Well? (Carefully) Omer?

BOTH CAMERAS CUT.

3 INT. FALAFEL SHOP IN JERUSALEM. DAY.
Everything is the same as at the beginning of Scene 2, except for
the Bomber. He's now played by an older, decidedly lighter-skinned,
blue-eyed man (Amputee).

CAMERA "A": MEDIUM CLOSE ON BOMBER.
CAMERA "B": SHOOTING ALONGSIDE, MEDIUM WIDE ON MF STAND-IN.

MARTIN F. (V.O.)
His eyes were open. He was a mess, but I don't remember any blood in or around his face.

MF approaches.

MARTIN F.
He was a mess. He was missing his legs. He was missing one arm. But he was focused on me.

MF leans down and carefully looks into the Amputee's face.

MARTIN F.
So I thought: "Maybe the medical crews will arrive? Some miracle will happen. I'm going to give him an extra few seconds..." So I started giving him mouth-to-mouth.

MF presses his lips to the Amputee's, breathing and then begins
administering CPR.

MARTIN F.
His eyes flashed on me for the first couple of seconds. After that I didn't really have eye contact with him. I would say that his body was in complete - what's it called? When you lose tonus... He was in bad shape. I said, "Everything's gonna be OK. Tinshom Amok," - breathe deeply.

MF continues the CPR. The Amputee starts to fade.

MARTIN F.
And then I saw one guy who was leaning in the doorway. His hands were on his hips. And he was kind of shaking his head from side to side, like, "The guy's a goner..."

MF looks up. The Amputee dies quietly.

MARTIN F.
He looked for some reason very authoritative to me. I stoppped the CPR. I got up and walked outside.

MF stands up slowly.

CAMERA "A" FOLLOWS MF AS HE STANDS UP.
CAMERA "B" CUTS TO THE TEAM AGAIN.

OMER
And...cut. Thanks a lot.

CAMERMAN
All right! What a difference!

CAMERA "A" CUTS.
CAMERA "B" CONTINUES.

Crew members clap, visibly relieved. FX guy and PA's walk in and
begin helping the Amputee up.

ASSISTANT DIRECTOR
(Sits near Amputee)
Didn't I tell you this guy would be great?

SOUNDMAN
Yeah man, great suicide bombing! Mazal Tov!

OMER
(Sits near Assistant Director)
I still think he's too old for the part. I mean, the real bomber was just a teenager...

ASSISTANT DIRECTOR
Who cares about the real bomber? At least this guy can act! The other one couldn't even play dead for one minute.

AMPUTEE
(Getting up)
If you think that was good, I can also roll over and fetch a ball...

Crew is having difficulties helping the Amputee up. Omer and
Assistant Director watch, uncomfortably. The Amputee is finally
extricated, getting up and brushing himself off.

AMPUTEE
I'm going to go for lunch.

Amputee stumbles off, still wearing a bloodied shirt and stump.

CAMERA "B" CUTS.

4 EXT. CATERING STAND. DAY.

A buffet of soft drinks and fast food. Several extras are milling
about. Amputee walks in and stands in line behind a young, pretty
woman, whose face is partly burned. Burned Woman picks through the
buffet, putting food on her plate. Amputee takes a plate and
follows.

Cameras are behind the table on a track, spaced apart but parallel
to each other. They shoot simultaneously.

AMPUTEE
So...How did you die?

BURNED WOMAN
You know what? I don't care.

AMPUTEE
Really? Most people do.

BURNED WOMAN
Do they? Well, like most people then, I guess it was the explosion.

AMPUTEE
So why don't you care?

BURNED WOMAN
Because I quit.

AMPUTEE
You died - and then you quit?

BURNED WOMAN
No. I quit before I died. I mean, I didn't die. I refused to.

AMPUTEE
Good for you. (Chews)
So why'd you quit?

BURNED WOMAN
Because they lied to me.

AMPUTEE

About your dying?

BURNED WOMAN
About how they wanted me to die: They wanted me to die with my shirt off!

Amputee shakes his head laughing. Burned Woman also smiles.

BURNED WOMAN (CONT'D)
Can you believe it? They never said anything about that in rehearsals and now it's supposed to be more realistic! Like the blast just ripped it off...

AMPUTEE
At least you got to rehearse.

Woman finally looks at him, holds out her hand. Amputee smiles,
unable to shake hands he gestures at his stump.

BURNED WOMAN
Oh sorry. I guess we haven't met. So what's your story?

AMPUTEE
Me? I'm the suicide bomber.

BURNED WOMAN
(Laughs)
No way, really? Aren't you a little old for the part?

AMPUTEE
Actually, I'm just doing this as a favor to my agent. They called her one hour ago. Totally desperate. Apparently the young guy I'm replacing couldn't follow directions.

BURNED WOMAN
Yeah, I heard he had problems. I didn't know they got rid of him too...

They continue loading their plates, moving down the lunch line
while nibbling.

AMPUTEE
It's a shame. There's some good people here. The real story is quite poignant. Unfortunately the director, what's his name, Omar something? He's more interested in gimmicks than storytelling.

BURNED WOMAN
You mean the explosion?

AMPUTEE
There was an explosion?

BURNED WOMAN
Real loud, a big fireball! I guess they wanted authentic reactions.

Amputee nods. Burned Woman pauses, angry.

BURNED WOMAN
It's totally irresponsible. You know, I bet they don't even have a permit for that! Jerks. Someone should report them.

Burned Woman looks around, losing interest in her food. Amputee
studies a tortilla chip.

AMPUTEE
Anyway, so I'm also wrapped for the day. Got any plans for the evening?

BURNED WOMAN
Taking a bath and cuddling with a good book.

AMPUTEE
Wow! That sounds good! (Reaches for another tortilla chip. Winks.) Like some company?

Pause. Burned Woman smiles.

BURNED WOMAN
I'm afraid not.

AMPUTEE
Why not?

BURNED WOMAN
It's against the rules.

AMPUTEE
What rules? It is a non-union shoot.

Bomber from Scene 1 enters, holding an iPhone.

BURNED WOMAN
Let's see, Rule Number One? (Taps his stump, smiling) Never go out with a victim.

BOMBER
So how do we get home? Do they even have a car? Is somebody driving us?

AMPUTEE
Is this your boyfriend?

BURNED WOMAN
(Laughs)
What him? Oh no!
(To Bomber)
Sorry, I can't even remember your name!

BOMBER
That's all right.

(To Amputee)
We were both fired.

Bomber throws the iPhone into a plate of tortilla chips. Amputee
looks on with amusement. Burned Woman looks embarrassed, possibly
hurt. Pause.

BURNED WOMAN
Hey, you know what? I know a good car service. (Reaching out for phone) Let me call one for you.

Burned Woman picks up the iPhone and starts dialing. Amputee and
Bomber are suddenly left facing each other.

BURNED WOMAN (CONT'D)
Hello? Could you please send a car to Melrose and Kenmore ASAP. (Listens) It's a storefront on Kenmore. I don't know the exact number but you can't miss it. There's been an explosion. (Listens) No, no, it's a film set, we don't need an ambulance. (Listens) My name? (Looks up at Bomber) Sorry, what was your name again?

BOMBER
Keith.

BURNED WOMAN
Keith, what?

BOMBER
Keith Richards.

Burned Woman stares at him for a moment before finally finishing
the call.
BURNED WOMAN
Just send someone quickly. A young guy called Keith will be waiting.

Hangs up and holds up the iPhone for Bomber.

BOMBER
That's OK. It's not mine. Keep it.

Pause. Burned Woman continues to hold out the iPhone.

AMPUTEE
So do you ever bend your rules? I mean, they're there to be broken, right?

BURNED WOMAN
Rule Number Two: Never go out with a beggar.

Burned Woman walks away, this time not smiling. She joins the
Bomber on the other side of the table. Amputee looks on.

AMPUTEE
(Approaches)
What if I told you my injury's real?

BURNED WOMAN
(Smiles)
Yeah, sure. You're crippled and he's Keith Richards.

AMPUTEE
I prefer differently-abled. But, yes, I'm a real amputee.

Burned Woman stops smiling. Bomber looks up with interest.

AMPUTEE (CONT'D)
Oh please don't stop smiling...

BURNED WOMAN
I don't think this is funny.

AMPUTEE
And don't lose your sense of humor! That's always the worst part!

Burned Woman moves away. Amputee pockets the iPhone, follows.

AMPUTEE (CONT'D)
I had a career. Nothing spectacular, mind you, never a Hamlet. Just a few supporting roles, a couple of features, theater, television...
(Looks at stump) Then this happened. I won't bore you. The details are dreary. Needless to say, my agent stopped taking my calls. I stopped getting callbacks. You know, with one arm you can't even work as a waiter!

BURNED WOMAN
Can you please leave me alone?

AMPUTEE
About one year ago, the phone started ringing again. It's a niche, sure, but it's growing. There's a lot more demand for amputees now, for various reasons.

BOMBER
Hey man, aren't you laying it kind of thick?

AMPUTEE
(turns to Bomber)
In the beginning, I also thought it was weird. But you know what? Times are changing. We're fighting two wars now. One hour ago, I was home, watching TV. Then my agent called. "Suicide Bomber? Sure! What could be easier?"

Burned Woman tries to walk off but Amputee steps in front of her.

AMPUTEE (CONT'D)
So I get lots of work. I can even start being selective. And best of all: since my arm's already gone, I don't have to spend hours in make-up!

BURNED WOMAN
Bravo. I'm all choked up. I get it.

BOMBER
This guy is putting you on!

BURNED WOMAN
Do I care? Does it matter?

AMPUTEE
It doesn't. (Moves to Bomber) And I'm not.

Amputee steps in front of Bomber. Bomber looks up at him slowly

. BOMBER
OK, so why don't you prove it? Come on (Taps at Amputee's stump) Come on, show us your moneymaker.

AMPUTEE
Don't touch me!

Amputee pushes Bomber away but he persists, touching, tugging more
forcefully at the stump.

BOMBER
Come on! Show us that money-maker!
(To Burned Woman) You wanna see it? You want to see his moneymaker?

The two start to struggle more intensely, the Amputee mainly trying
to protect his stump and the Bomber pushing him backwards. Finally,
the Amputee suddenly reaches out to slap at the Bomber with his
good hand. Bomber has just been waiting for this and expertly
throws him to the ground. Several extras break up the fight.
Bomber looks down with disdain and is escorted away. Amputee slowly
sits up, visibly shaken. He tries to tidy himself. Burned Woman
leans down next to him. A moment passes.

BURNED WOMAN
Are you all right?

Amputee does not answer. He looks quite shaken up.

BURNED WOMAN
Look, for whatever it's worth, I'm really sorry.

Pause. Burned Woman helps Amputee get up.

BURNED WOMAN (CONT'D)
So, is it really true?

AMPUTEE
(Mutters)
Well, there's only one way to find out, isn't there?

Burned Woman looks at him, a smile finally breaking her otherwise
concerned expression.

BURNED WOMAN
And what happens if you're not a real amputee?

A tense moment passes. Suddenly Burned Woman cannot suppress a
laugh.

VOICE 1
Cut.

VOICE 2
(Loudly)
Cut!

VOICE 3
Ok, that's a cut.

CAMERA "A" CUTS.

VOICE 2
What happened now?

VOICE 1
She laughed.

VOICE 2
Was she not supposed to?

VOICE 1
No. She wasn't.

BURNED WOMAN
(Still laughing)
Oh my God, Omer! I'm so sorry.

VOICE 1
Well that's great. But the scene was not over!

BURNED WOMAN
I'm so sorry! I know! It's just. (Laughs) My scars started peeling!

VOICE 2
Fuck. Could we get makeup in here?

AMPUTEE
They're not scars yet, darling. They're burns.

Pause. Burned Woman and Amputee walk away.

CAMERA "B" TURNS ON, FOLLOWING THE TWO ACTORS AND STOPPING SUDDENLY AT THE FACADE OF THE FALAFEL SHOP.

5 EXT. FALAFEL SHOP. DAY.

A small crowd of policemen and onlookers are standing around. A team of medics are inside the shop, sorting through the debris, collecting body parts, photographing.

CAMERA "A" SHOWS THE SCENE FROM OUTSIDE, SHOOTING THROUGH THE FROZEN CROWD.
CAMERA "B" SHOWS THE SCENE FROM INSIDE, FOLLOWING THE MEDICS WHO PERFORM THEIR ROLES IN A SERIES OF STILLS.

MARTIN F. (V.O.)
By this point, there was a whole scene outside the falafel place. I was shunted across the street by the police, and I joined the onlookers. And it was only then that it dawned on me: "When you have a suicide bombing and you only have one casualty - maybe I had just taken care of the suicide bomber..." And I remember a wave of nausea that rolled over me. And I don't think the nausea was because I had any moral reprehension at treating this guy. It was the shock of what had just happened. Plus I think there was the smell of blood in my mouth... I realized that I had to get the police to test this guy for diseases. So I went back to my office. The first thing I did was scrub my hands. I noticed some blood on my thumbs - in the cuticle area - and I was scrubbing at it and getting dish-soap, and soaping up my lips, inside and out... I wanted it out. Afterwards, of course, I was thinking: "What made you do this? Was it because you thought this was some polluted sub human?" No. It wasn't that at all. It was really very rational. People who had diseases had been recruited. They'd go into crowds with bombs filled with rat poison, in order to enhance the effects of the explosives... If anything, this was a real face-to-face confrontation with evil! On the other hand, maybe I'm building this up too much. Because at that point, I don't think I was thinking of him as evil. He was a human being I was trying to save. And he was seventeen-and-a-half, eighteen years old. Afterwards comes maybe all the editorializing and adding the little ethical finishing touches on things. For my own benefit, by the way, I never really looked into too much of his background. I didn't want to personalize him more than I had to.

BOTH CAMERAS BEGIN TO TRACK ACROSS THE SCENE OUTSIDE.

MARTIN F.
As it happens, a day and a half later, I did get a phone call. They finished the blood work on him and it turned out he proved positive for Hepatitis. So I don't think I was trying to scrub away the evil. It was more just, "There's something potentially very bad about this blood here..."

Two LAPD officers enter the scene and walk between the extras who are still frozen in their poses. They pause in center frame of CAM "A" looking towards the crew.

CAMERA "B" CONTINUES SHOOTING FROM BEHIND.

6 EXT. ON SET OUTSIDE OF FALAFEL SHOP. DAY.

ASSISTANT DIRECTOR
(Whispering)
Oh, shit!

SOUNDMAN
What? Not again!

CAMERMAN
Are these guys in the script? Should I cut?

ASSISTANT DIRECTOR
(Whispering)
Yes. I mean, no they're not in the script. Cut!!

The extras un-freeze. The two Cops approach CAM "A".

ASSISTANT DIRECTOR
Can we help you, Officer?

GOOD COP
You guys have a permit?

ASSISTANT DIRECTOR
Sure. The director has it. Where the hell is he?
(On walkie talkie)
Can someone get Omer?

BAD COP
(Peering into CAM "A")
Is that thing running? Let's shut it down, OK?

CAMERA "A" CUTS BRIEFLY.
CAMERA "B" CONTINUES CUTTING BETWEEN ACTORS.

ASSISTANT DIRECTOR
Is there a problem, Officer?

BAD COP
You bet there's a problem. We got calls. Complaints.

ASSISTANT DIRECTOR
Really? From whom? About what?

GOOD COP
People who live here. Someone complained about hearing explosions.

SOUNDMAN
What people? The homeless?

ASSISTANT DIRECTOR
(Whispering)
Shut up!

BAD COP
You being a wise guy? 'Cause we can do this in ten minutes or we can stay till our shift is over.

Omer stumbles in, breathless, walks up to Cops.

OMER
I'm really sorry, Officer. It's gonna be a little while until the permit can get here. Can somebody get you guys coffee or something?

GOOD COP
Are you in charge here?

OMER
(Unsure)
Yes.

GOOD COP
I'm gonna need to see some ID please.

ASSISTANT DIRECTOR
Oh boy.

(Loudly)
All right, break for five minutes everyone!

Omer hands the Good Cop his ID. The set starts to clear.

GOOD COP
So what's going on here? Are you making a film about terrorism?

Pause. No one answers. Good Cop looks up from the ID.

BAD COP
Well? Is it an action film or a thriller?

SOUNDMAN
It's a pastiche.

OMER
It's not!

ASSISTANT DIRECTOR
(Whispering to Soundman)
Be quiet.

CAMERMAN
(Laughs)
A pastiche? Where d'you pick that one up, Webster?

SOUNDMAN
You know, like a comedy.

OMER
It's not a pastiche!

CAMERMAN
It's a tragedy.

BAD COP
Hey, hey, hey! Hold on! What is this, the Three Stooges?

OMER
No, no. It's just hard to explain. We're trying to make a short film about filming a suicide bombing, which is based on an interview with a guy in Jerusalem. But it's shot as a series of stills. Like a wax museum. Or a frozen ballet...

Other crew members start looking uncomfortable

. OMER (CONT'D)
But with real people, not dummies. (Pauses. Unsure.) No one's supposed to be moving.

Indeed no one moves. Soundman guffaws. Good Cop hands back the ID.

GOOD COP
Here you go. My son's in Afghanistan.

Pause. No one knows what to say.

GOOD COP (CONT'D)
What's your movie called?

OMER
"Regarding the Pain of Others".

BAD COP
Recording the what?

ASSISTANT DIRECTOR
Not recording, regarding. Maybe you've heard of Susan Sontag?

BAD COP
I've heard of Susan Sarandon. (Smiles) Is she around? Can I get an autograph?

A PA gives the Good Cop a film permit. He looks at it.

GOOD COP
Have you been using explosives?

OMER
No sir.

GOOD COP
No pyrotechnics? No firearms?

SOUNDMAN
I got a lighter.

OMER
We have a smoke machine. But it keeps breaking down. Please, look around if you like.

GOOD COP
(Holding permit)
Because you do not have a permit for explosives. (Looks up) You guys know that?

ASSISTANT DIRECTOR
It's not a Hollywood film.

BAD COP
It sounds like a B movie.

GOOD COP
Is it a political film?

CAMERMAN
It's a tragedy.

ASSISTANT DIRECTOR
Like we said, it is a silent film. (To crew) No one's supposed to be talking.

BAD COP
So it's a silent film. Like Charlie Chaplin.

OMER
(Smiles)
No, no. It's nothing like that, Officer. (Thinks) Do you know what tableaux vivants are?

BAD COP
Yeah. Sure. (Winks) That's mineral water, no? French? Sparkling?

Burned Woman approaches.

BAD COP
Let me ask you a question: Are you guys faggots or something?

ASSISTANT DIRECTOR
Wait a second here!

GOOD COP
(Taking over)
Here's the problem: Someone in the area complained about hearing explosions. Now, I'm not accusing you guys of anything, but the call was specific and credible. We'd just like to get to the bottom of this. Is there a Keith around here?

BURNED WOMAN
I think I know what's going on, Officer.

Everyone looks at her.

BURNED WOMAN (CONT'D)
I think it was the suicide bomber, Keith Richards.

GOOD COP
The who?

SOUNDMAN
(Air guitar)
Not The Who, man! The Stones!

ASSISTANT DIRECTOR
(To Burned Woman)
What are you talking about?

BURNED WOMAN
Keith Richards! The young suicide bomber you fired!

No one believes her.

BURNED WOMAN (CONT'D)
He was on the phone during lunch. He said he was calling a taxi but I could swear he was lying!

OMER
Oh my God! (Frantically checking pockets) That guy stole my iPhone!

BURNED WOMAN
Anyway, he didn't know the address here so he put me on the phone. When I tried to give driving directions, the dispatcher said a police car was coming.

Pause. Soundman whistles.

GOOD COP
And why would he do this?

ASSISTANT DIRECTOR
(Shrugs)
Because we fired him. Because he was vengeful.

SOUNDMAN
Because he's a fucked up albino cross-dresser.

CAMERMAN
(Laughing)
Would you stop it already? The guy was a Kosovar.

BURNED WOMAN
Whatever he was, you should press charges against him. He also assaulted someone. What's his name? The amputee! The older guy who replaced him.

ASSISTANT DIRECTOR
What amputee??!

OMER
(To Assistant Director)
Was there an amputee in the cast?

The crew looks confused. The Cops look at each other.

ASSISTANT DIRECTOR
(Angry, to Burned Woman)
Hey, what are you doing here anyway? Didn't we fire you?

A tense staredown between the Assistant Director and Burned Woman.

BAD COP
(Laughing)
Man! You should all go on "Springer".

Burned Woman loses the staredown. She exits.

GOOD COP
(To Omer)
So this suicide bomber, Keith Richards, do you know what his real name was?

SOUNDMAN
Pete Townsend.

OMER
Actually, we don't know his name, Officer. But I can describe what he looks like.

Good Cop takes out a pad. Pause. Omer thinks.

OMER (CONT'D)
He had black hair. It was gelled. He was about this tall...

SOUNDMAN
No, no! He had brown hair and was much shorter! Oh, and he had this nose!

ASSISTANT DIRECTOR
The nose was fake! It was a prosthetic. We did it in make-up.

Pause. Bad Cop rolls his eyes and sighs.

OMER
Well, he had brown eyes. We can all agree on that.

CAMERMAN
His eyes were green, Omar! Don't you remember? He kept opening them. That's why you fired him!

OMER
All right, they were brown-green.

SOUNDMAN
They were hazel.

GOOD COP
Don't you guys take polaroids of your actors?

SOUNDMAN
You mean like a lie-detector test?

BAD COP
That's a polygraph.

OMER
Of course, we have headshots. But they're all on my iPhone and that guy stole it.

Pause. Good Cop puts his notepad back in his pocket.

GOOD COP
All right, here's my card. When you get your story straight, come down to the precinct.

The two Cops leave. The crew looks crestfallen.

CAMERMAN
(Slaps his forehead)
No! No! Wait a minute! We got him right here on camera!

Cameraman excitedly fiddles with CAM "A" while everyone watches him

without much enthusiasm. Camera rewinds. Cameraman peeps into
viewfinder excitedly and presses stop.

CAMERMAN
Look! Let me just play it back.

Soundman gets up. Assistant Director continues peering into her iPhone
and Omer peers into space.

CAMERMAN
(Triumphantly presses play)
Voila!

BOTH CAMERAS CUT BACK TO SCENE 1.

SOUNDMAN
A picture is worth everything man!

End/Loop to beginning

X

Omer Fast (Jerusalem, 1972) uses his films to explore the possibilities offered by the cinematic medium: possibilities for expressing emotions, concentrating on individuals, or placing their personal stories within a broader historical context. The borders of cinematic form begin to melt when Omer Fast links collective memory and the individual unconscious on the same layer of his medium.

Boris Groys

The Obligation to Self-Design

Design, as we know it today, is a twentieth-century phenomenon. Admittedly, concern for the appearance of things is not new. All cultures have been concerned with making clothes, everyday objects, interiors of various spaces, whether sacred spaces, spaces of power, or private spaces, "beautiful and impressive."

The history of the applied arts is indeed long. Yet modern design emerged precisely from the revolt against the tradition of the applied arts. Even more so than the transition from traditional art to modernist art, the transition from the traditional applied arts to modern design marked a break with tradition, a radical paradigm shift. This paradigm shift is, however, usually overlooked. The function of design has often enough been described using the old metaphysical opposition between appearance and essence. Design, in this view, is responsible only for the appearance of things, and thus it seems predestined to conceal the essence of things, to deceive the viewer's understanding of the true nature of reality. Thus design has been repeatedly interpreted as an epiphany of the omnipresent market, of exchange value, of fetishism of the commodity, of the society of the spectacle—as the creation of a seductive surface behind which things themselves not only become invisible, but disappear entirely.

Modern design, as it emerged at the beginning of the twentieth century, internalized this critique aimed at the traditional applied arts and set itself the task of revealing the hidden essence of things rather than designing their surfaces. Avant-garde design sought to eliminate and purify all that had accumulated on the surface of things through the practice of the applied arts over centuries in order to expose the true, undesigned nature of things. Modern design thus did not see its task as creating the surface, but rather as eliminating it—as negative design, antidesign. Genuine modern design is reductionist; it does not add, it subtracts. It is no longer about simply designing individual things to be offered to the gaze of viewers and consumers in order to seduce them. Rather, design seeks to shape the gaze of viewers in such a way that they become capable of discovering things themselves. A central feature of the paradigm shift from traditional applied arts to modern design was just this extension of the will to design from the world of things to that of human beings themselves—understood as one thing among many. The rise of modern design is profoundly linked to the project of redesigning the old man into the New Man. This project, which emerged at the beginning of the twentieth century and is often dismissed today as utopian, has never really been abandoned de facto. In a modified, commercialized form, this project continues to have an effect, and its initial utopian potential has been updated repeatedly. The design of things that present themselves to the gaze of the viewing subject is critical to an understanding of design. The ultimate form of design is, however, the design of the subject. The problems of design are only adequately addressed if the subject is

asked how it wants to manifest itself, what form it wants to give itself, and how it wants to present itself to the gaze of the Other.

This question was first raised with appropriate acuity in the early twentieth century—after Nietzsche diagnosed God's death. As long as God was alive, the design of the soul was more important to people than the design of the body. The human body, along with its environment, was understood from the perspective of faith as an outer shell that conceals the soul. God was thought to be the only viewer of the soul. To him the ethically correct, righteous soul was supposed to look beautiful—that is, simple, transparent, well constructed, proportional, and not disfigured by any vices or marked by any worldly passion. It is often overlooked that in the Christian tradition ethics has always been subordinated to aesthetics—that is, to the design of the soul. Ethical rules, like the rules of spiritual asceticism—of spiritual exercises, spiritual training—serve above all the objective of designing the soul in such a way that it would be acceptable in God's eyes, so that He would allow it into paradise. The design of one's own soul under God's gaze is a persistent theme of theological treatises, and its rules can be visualized with the help of medieval depictions of the soul waiting for the Last Judgment. The design of the soul which was destined for God's eyes was clearly distinct from the worldly applied arts: whereas the applied arts sought richness of materials, complex ornamentation, and outward radiance, the design of the soul focused on the essential, the plain, the natural, the reduced, and even the ascetic. The revolution in design that took place at the start of the twentieth century can best be characterized as the application of the rules for the design of the soul to the design of worldly objects.

The death of God signified the disappearance of the viewer of the soul, for whom its design was practiced for centuries. Thus the site of the design of the soul shifted. The soul became the sum of the relationships into which the human body in the world entered. Previously, the body was the prison of the soul; now the soul became the clothing of the body, its social, political, and aesthetic appearance. Suddenly the only possible manifestation of the soul became the look of the clothes in which human beings appear, the everyday things with which they surround themselves, the spaces they inhabit. With the death of God, design became the medium of the soul, the revelation of the subject hidden inside the human body. Thus design took on an ethical dimension it had not had previously. In design, ethics became aesthetics; it became form. Where religion once was, design has emerged. The modern subject now has a new obligation: the obligation to self-design, an aesthetic presentation as ethical subject. The ethically motivated polemic against design, launched repeatedly over the course of the twentieth century and formulated in ethical and political terms, can only be understood on the basis of this new definition of design; such a polemic would be entirely incongruous if directed at the traditional applied arts. Adolf Loos' famous essay "Ornament and Crime" is an early example of this turn.

From the outset, Loos postulated in his essay a unity between the aesthetic and the ethical. Loos condemned every decoration, every ornament, as a sign of depravity, of vices. Loos judged a person's appearance, to the extent it represents a consciously designed exterior, to be an immediate expression of his or her ethical stance. For example, he believed he had demonstrated that only criminals, primitives, heathens, or degenerates ornament themselves by tattooing their skin. Ornament was thus an expression either of amorality or of crime: "The Papuan covers his skin with tattoos, his boat, his oars, in short everything he can lay his hands on. He is no criminal. The modern person who tattoos himself is either a criminal or a degenerate."[1] Particularly striking in this quotation is the fact that Loos makes no distinction between tattooing one's own skin and decorating a boat or an oar. Just as the modern human being is expected to present him or herself to the gaze of the Other as an honest, plain, unornamented, "undesigned" object, so should all the other things with which this person has to deal be presented as honest, plain, unornamented, undesigned things. Only then do they demonstrate that the soul of the person using them is pure, virtuous, and unspoiled. According to Loos, the function of design is not to pack, decorate, and ornament things differently each time, that is, to constantly design a supplementary outside so that an inside, the true nature of things, remains hidden. Rather, the real function of the modern design is to prevent people from wanting to design things at all. Thus Loos describes his attempts to convince a shoemaker from whom he had ordered shoes not to ornament them.[2] For Loos, it was enough that the shoemaker use the best materials and work them with care. The quality of the material and the honesty and precision of the work, and not their external appearance, determine the quality of the shoes. The criminal thing about ornamenting shoes is that this ornament does not reveal the shoemaker's honesty, that is, the ethical dimension of the shoes. The ethically dissatisfactory aspects of the product are concealed by ornament and the ethically impeccable are made unrecognizable by it. For Loos, true design is the struggle against design—against the criminal will to conceal the ethical essence of things behind their aesthetic surface. Yet paradoxically, only the creation of another, revelatory layer of ornament—that is, of design—guarantees the unity of the ethical and the aesthetic that Loos sought.

The messianic, apocalyptic features of the struggle against applied art that Loos was engaged in are unmistakable. For example, Loos wrote: "Do not weep. Do you not see the greatness of our age resides in our very inability to create new ornament? We have gone beyond ornament, we have achieved plain, undecorated simplicity. Behold, the time is at hand, fulfillment awaits us. Soon the streets of the cities will shine like white walls! Like Zion, the Holy City, Heaven's capital. Then fulfillment will be

ours."[3] The struggle against the applied arts is the final struggle before the arrival of God's Kingdom on Earth. Loos wanted to bring heaven down to earth; he wanted to see things as they are, without ornament. Thus Loos wanted to appropriate the divine gaze. But not only that, he wanted to make everyone else capable of seeing the things as they are revealed in God's gaze. Modern design wants the apocalypse now, the apocalypse that unveils things, strips them of their ornament, and causes them to be seen as they truly are. Without this claim that design manifests the truth of things, it would be impossible to understand many of the discussions among designers, artists, and art theorists over the course of the twentieth century. Such artists and designers as Donald Judd or architects such as Herzog & de Meuron, to name only a few, do not argue aesthetically when they want to justify their artistic practices but rather ethically, and in doing so they appeal to the truth of things as such. The modern designer does not wait for the apocalypse to remove the external shell of things and show them to people as they are. The designer wants here and now the apocalyptic vision that makes everyone New Men. The body takes on the form of the soul. The soul becomes the body. All things become heavenly. Heaven becomes earthly, material. Modernism becomes absolute.

Loos' essay is, famously, not an isolated phenomenon. Rather, it reflects the mood of the entire artistic avant-garde of the twentieth century, which sought a synthesis of art and life. This synthesis was supposed to be achieved by removing the things that looked too arty both from art and from life. Both were supposed to reach the zero point of the artistic in order to achieve a unity. The conventionally artistic was understood to be the "human, all too human" that obstructed the gaze to perceive the true inner form of things. Hence the traditional painting was seen as something that prevents the gaze of a spectator to recognize it as a combination of shapes and colors on canvas. And shoes made in the traditional way were understood to be a thing that prevented the gaze of a consumer to recognize the essence, function, and true composition of the shoe. The gaze of the New Man had to be freed of all such obstructions by the force of (anti)design.

Whereas Loos still formulated his argument in rather bourgeois terms and wanted to reveal the value of certain materials, craftsmanship, and individual honesty, the will to absolute design reached its climax in Russian Constructivism, with its "proletarian" ideal of the collective soul, which is manifested in industrially organized work. For the Russian Constructivists, the path to virtuous, genuinely proletarian objects also passed through the elimination of everything that was merely artistic. The Russian Constructivists called for the objects of everyday communist life to show themselves as what they are: as functional things whose forms serve only to make their ethics visible. Ethics as understood here was given an additional political dimension, since the collective soul had to be organized politically in order to act properly in accordance with ethical terms. The collective soul was manifested in the political organization that embraced both people and things. The function of "proletarian" design—at the time, admittedly, people spoke rather of "proletarian art"—must therefore be to make this total political organization visible. The experience of the October Revolution of 1917 was crucial for the Russian Constructivists. They understood the revolution to be a radical act of purifying society of every form of ornament: the finest example of modern design, which eliminates all traditional social customs, rituals, conventions, and forms of representation in order for the essence of the political organization to emerge. Thus the Russian Constructivists called for the abolition of all autonomous art. Art should rather be placed entirely at the service of the design of utilitarian objects. In essence, it was a call to completely subsume art to design.

At the same time, the project of Russian Constructivism was a total project: it wanted to design life as a whole. Only for that reason—and only at that price—was Russian Constructivism prepared to exchange autonomous art for utilitarian art: just as the traditional artist designed the whole of the artwork, so the Constructivist artist wanted to design the whole of society. In a certain sense, the Soviet artists had no choice at the time other than to forward such a total claim. The market, including the art market, was eliminated by the Communists. Artists were no longer faced with private consumers and their private and aesthetic preferences, but with the state as a whole. Necessarily, it was all or nothing for artists. This situation is clearly reflected in the manifestos of Russian Constructivism. For example, in his programmatic text entitled "Constructivism," Alexei Gan wrote: "Not to reflect, not to represent and not to interpret reality, but to really build and express the systematic tasks of the new class, the proletariat... Especially now, when the proletarian revolution has been victorious, and its destructive, creative movement is progressing along the iron rails into culture, which is organized according to a grand plan of social production, everyone—the master of color and line, the builder of space-volume forms and the organizer of mass productions—must all become constructors in the general work of the arming and moving of the many-millioned human masses."[4] For Gan, the goal of Constructivist design was not to impose a new form on everyday life under socialism but rather to remain loyal to radical, revolutionary reduction and to avoid making new ornaments for new things. Hence Nikolai Tarabukin asserted in his then-famous essay "From the Easel to the Machine" that the Constructivist artist could not play a formative role in the process of actual social production. His role was rather that of a propagandist who defends and praises the beauty of industrial production and opens the public's eyes to this beauty. [5] The artist, as described by Tarabukin, is someone who looks at the entirety of socialist production as a ready-made—a kind of socialist Duchamp who exhibits socialist industry as a whole as

something good and beautiful.

The modern designer, whether bourgeois or proletarian, calls for the other, divine vision: for the metanoia that enables people to see the true form of things. In the Platonic and Christian traditions, undergoing a metanoia means making the transition from a worldly perspective to an otherworldly perspective, from a perspective of the mortal body to a perspective of the immortal soul. Since the death of God, of course, we can no longer believe that there is something like the soul that is distinguished from the body in the sense that it is made independent of the body and can be separated from it. However, that does not by any means suggest that a metanoia is no longer possible. Modern design is the attempt to bring about such a metanoia—an effort to see one's own body and one's own surroundings as purified of everything earthly, arbitrary, and subjected to a particular aesthetic taste. In a sense, it could be said that modernism substituted the design of the corpse for the design of the soul.

This funeral aspect of modern design was recognized by Loos even before he wrote "Ornament and Crime." In his text "The Poor Little Rich Man," Loos tells of the imagined fate of a rich Viennese man who decided to have his entire house designed by an artist. This man totally subjected his everyday life to the dictates of the designer (Loos speaks, admittedly, of the architect), for as soon as his thoroughly designed house is finished, the man can no longer change anything in it without the designer's permission. Everything that this man would later buy and do must fit into the overall design of the house, not just literally but also aesthetically. In a world of total design, the man himself has become a designed thing, a kind of museum object, a mummy, a publicly exhibited corpse. Loos concludes his description of the fate of the poor rich man as follows: "He was shut out of future life and its strivings, its developments, and its desires. He felt: Now is the time to learn to walk about with one's own corpse. Indeed! He is finished! He is complete!"[6] In his essay "Design and Crime," whose title was inspired by Loos', Hal Foster interpreted this passage as an implicit call for "running room," for breaking out of the prison of total design.[7] It is obvious, however, that Loos' text should not be understood as a protest against the total dominance of design. Loos protests against design as ornament in the name of another, "true" design, in the name of an antidesign that frees the consumer from dependence on the taste of the professional designer. As the aforementioned example of the shoes demonstrates, under the regime of avant-garde antidesign, consumers take responsibility for their own appearance and for the design of their daily lives. Consumers do so by asserting their own, modern taste, which tolerates no ornament and hence no additional artistic or craft labor. By taking ethical and aesthetic responsibility for the image they offer the outside world, however, consumers become prisoners of total design to a much larger degree than ever before, inasmuch as they can no longer delegate their aesthetic decisions to others. Modern consumers present the world the image of their own personality—purified of all outside influence and ornamentation. But this purification of their own image is potentially just as infinite a process as the purification of the soul before God. In the white city, in the heavenly Zion, as Loos imagines it, design is truly total for the first time. Nothing can be changed there either: nothing colorful, no ornament can be smuggled in. The difference is simply that in the white city of the future, everyone is the author of his own corpse—everyone becomes an artist-designer who has ethical, political, and aesthetic responsibility for his or her environment.

One can claim, of course, that the original pathos of avant-garde antidesign has long since faded, that avant-garde design has become a certain designer style among other possible styles. That is why many people view our entire society today—the society of commercial design, of the spectacle—as a game with simulacra behind which there is only a void. That is indeed how this society presents itself, but only if one takes a purely contemplative position, sitting in the lodge and watching the spectacle of society. But this position overlooks the fact that design today has become total—and hence it no longer admits of a contemplative position from the perspective of an outsider. The turn that Loos announced in his day has proven to be irreversible: every citizen of the contemporary world still has to take ethical, aesthetic, and political responsibility for his or her self-design. In a society in which design has taken over the function of religion, self-design becomes a creed. By designing one's self and one's environment in a certain way, one declares one's faith in certain values, attitudes, programs, and ideologies. In accordance with this creed, one is judged by society, and this judgment can certainly be negative and even threaten the life and well-being of the person concerned.

Hence modern design belongs not so much in an economic context as in a political one. Modern design has transformed the whole of social space into an exhibition space for an absent divine visitor, in which individuals appear both as artists and as self-produced works of art. In the gaze of the modern viewer, however, the aesthetic composition of artworks inevitably betrays the political convictions of their authors—and it is primarily on that basis that they are judged. The debate over headscarves demonstrates the political force of design. In order to understand that this is primarily a debate about design, it suffices to imagine that Prada or Gucci has begun to design headscarves. In such a case, deciding between the headscarf as a symbol of Islamic convictions and the headscarf as a commercial brand becomes an extremely difficult aesthetic and political task. Design cannot therefore be analyzed exclusively within the context of the economy of commodities. One could just as soon speak of suicide design—for example, in the case of suicide attacks, which are well known to be staged according to strict aesthetic rules. One can speak about the design of

power but also about the design of resistance or the design of alternative political movements. In these instances design is practiced as a production of differences—differences that often take on a political semantics at the same time. We often hear laments that politics today is concerned only with a superficial image—and that so-called content loses its relevance in the process. This is thought to be the fundamental malaise of politics today. More and more, there are calls to turn away from political design and image making and return to content. Such laments ignore the fact that under the regime of modern design, it is precisely the visual positioning of politicians in the field of the mass media that makes the crucial statement concerning their politics—or even constitutes their politics. Content, by contrast, is completely irrelevant, because it changes constantly. Hence the general public is by no means wrong to judge its politicians according to their appearance—that is, according to their basic aesthetic and political creed, and not according to arbitrarily changing programs and contents that they support or formulate.

Thus modern design evades Kant's famous distinction between disinterested aesthetic contemplation and the use of things guided by interests. For a long time after Kant, disinterested contemplation was considered superior to a practical attitude: a higher, if not the highest, manifestation of the human spirit. But already by the end of the nineteenth century, a reevaluation of values had taken place: the *vita contemplativa* was thoroughly discredited, and the *vita activa* was elevated to the true task of humankind. Hence today design is accused of seducing people into weakening their activity, vitality, and energy—of making them passive consumers who lack will, who are manipulated by omnipresent advertising and thus become victims of capital. The apparent cure for this lulling into sleep by the society of the spectacle is a shocklike encounter with the "real" that is supposed to rescue people from their contemplative passivity and move them to action, which is the only thing that promises an experience of truth as living intensity. The debate now is only over the question whether such an encounter with the real is still possible or whether the real has definitively disappeared behind its designed surface.

Now, however, we can no longer speak of disinterested contemplation when it is a matter of self-manifestation, self-design, and self-positioning in the aesthetic field, since the subject of such self-contemplation clearly has a vital interest in the image he or she offers to the outside world. Once people had an interest in how their souls appeared to God; today they have an interest in how their bodies appear to their political surroundings. This interest certainly points to the real. The real, however, emerges here not as a shocklike interruption of the designed surface but as a question of the technique and practice of self-design—a question no one can escape anymore. In his day, Beuys said that everyone had the right to see him- or herself as an artist. What was then understood as a right has now become an obligation. In the meantime we have been condemned to being the designers of our selves.

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Translated from the German by Steven Lindberg.

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Bilal Khbeiz

Los Angeles: The Invention of Public Weather

As will be obvious to the reader, the writer of this portrait for the city of Los Angeles is a stranger, a recent addition to this city. The many ideas and remarks which follow, notwithstanding their accuracy, should be regarded first as the nodes along a line of thinking particular to newcomers, one which is best described as an education in anger which besets newcomers persistently hailed by the new city with the question: who are you?

Crawford Macpherson notes that the rights of private property are founded on the twin activities of permitting and prohibiting: parking here is prohibited, do not block this entryway, no dogs allowed, so on and so forth.[1] Accordingly, the assumption is that ownership provides one with the right to withhold service and prohibit use. A guest may be invited to rest on a couch or be asked not to do so. These same twin activities apply to what are generally known as public spaces. Macpherson adds that in their struggle to win their civil rights, blacks had to argue long and hard against the owners of whites-only establishments, who countered that they had the right, as private owners, to withhold service from anyone. Equally relevant are women's struggles against the many exclusive men's clubs in England. Yet it is noticeable that such struggles are no longer occurring today. An exclusive men's club or a whites-only establishment is not targeted as long as they do not threaten the already-acquired civic rights of women and blacks. In fact, opening a club for white men that caters to the sexual fantasies of non-white women would be a perfectly acceptable business endeavor. Today, exclusive clubs are prevalent: some are tailored for black women, others for Latinas, the elderly, or the obese.

These preceding remarks on the spirit and letter of the law are directly tied to the significance of building and sustaining public spaces at a time when such spaces are unavoidably governed by the laws of private property. In Los Angeles, the deciding factors which direct the use of public spaces are born of the general temperament of the residents, of their moral and political inclinations and, more importantly, of their racial or ethnic backgrounds—factors which narrow the function of public spaces and direct them away from promoting open-ended conversations. For if a conversation were to take place in such a space, it would inevitably be preoccupied by a number of fixed givens—national, racial, ethnic or other more reductive bonds. This is of course not particular to any one city. In Beirut, where once I lived, a conversation is always determined by various axioms. Yet what is worth pursuing is whether the construction of little cities within the administrative space of the larger city is unavoidable. Matters of tourism aside, a Little Italy or Little India, found in almost every major metropolis, is indicative of the

limited paths open to conversation between the different races and ethnicities.

The Freedom to Be

Relations between the central authority and these little ethnic cities are defined by a simple but dangerous equation: the former resides in a well-guarded and closed fortress while the inhabitants of the latter attempt, on a daily basis, to avoid any encounter with the apparatus of authority. It is an equation by which one is allowed to live freely under the law. But upon whom is this freedom bestowed? In America, one can live as an Armenian, an Iranian, an Arab, or a Jew without ever rubbing against the American way of life, which is kept hidden well within official quarters. Accordingly, civil rights activists have not accomplished the integration they fought so hard for. Even if any one person has now the right to live in the Mexican neighborhoods of Los Angeles, he or she must bow to and observe a number of rules and constraints ranging from conditions born of deep-seated interethnic fears to basic issues such as finding alternative foods to those prevalent for the dominant ethnicity. In consequence, this offers the police an immense moral authority to exact punishment. In itself, that exceeds the tasks and role of the law, or at least transposes the law onto the forcefulness of the police. It is common to find that the brutal repression of one particular ethnicity by the police is looked upon favorably by other ethnicities. Accordingly, the police are always admired and defended by one ethnicity or another, but never at any one moment by all. The social make-up of the city effectively turns into a spread of horizontal segregation tied together only by the brute force of the police.[2]

At this level, Los Angeles is not unique among metropolises. Yet unlike other cities, it is expansive, stretching over large superficies. Although many consider it a car city, residents spend much of their time at home and leave only to go to work. Moreover, if we note that companies, banks, and department stores prefer to employ locals, Los Angeles then appears as a stretched city composed of smaller localities, separated by invisible borders and inhabited by one dominant ethnicity and/or race. To speak of leaving the privately owned space for the American public space, for work or leisure, is in fact meaningless. One lives with one's own and marries within established ethnic or racial bounds. In traveling between localities, the car becomes an extension of one's privately owned space and renders any encounter with others unlikely.

Los Angeles is not a city of coincidences. Even Pierre Bourdieu's theory of social domains which delimit the circles in which residents live and define the attributes which distinguish them from one another is not applicable to Los Angeles.[3] Judges here do not live with other members of the legal profession, nor do doctors, intellectuals, or university professors. Only film stars have gathered on one side of the city. But that is a fact which does not challenge the general make-up and subdivision of the city. Again, what is foregrounded in Los Angeles is ethnicity—most obviously through the proliferation of languages and dialects on storefronts and road signs in parallel with English, which is still assumed to be the language of all definitive remarks. In such a forest of signs, the strangeness a newcomer experiences is twofold: first as a tourist with a legal passport and visa in his pocket, and second as an illegal visitor without either visa or passport entering the enclave of ethnicities. In looking at these many other languages, one feels that to become American, English and naturalized status are insufficient. In fact, one has to belong to a single ethnic group and live below the state and to the side of the English language in which policies are argued and decided.

A City for the Memories of Cities

In Los Angeles, people often say that their city dreams of emulating New York and that New York dreams of Paris. It may be no more than a current saying, but something said nonetheless, and it invites one to discover Los Angeles' purloined letter. This city, for both outsiders and inhabitants, is the city of American cinema par excellence, a cinema which is already an economy on its own producing unprecedented profits. Yet the significance of cinema lies elsewhere: it is as if Los Angeles is a late city. It was founded, built, and then inhabited when other American cities had already established a history and a collective memory, and when they had already become material for stories and novels. Los Angeles lived major events on screen in order to know what happened "once upon a time in America." [4] Events occurred in Detroit, Chicago, and New York and then were reenacted here in Los Angeles. Roland Barthes is known for having stated that events in Racine's theatre do not happen onstage.[5] In Los Angeles, events also happen in a cinematic aside. Moreover, and in contrast with Racine's theatre, events here leave no traces. Events watched here happen elsewhere. And so Los Angeles sleeps assured because the traces and consequences of events will always fall on other cities. All it has to do is tell the story during one of its many leisurely afternoons. It is in accordance with this that the question of public spaces in Los Angeles gains its urgency. For when events do not stamp a city, they become merely transient. In other words, events here end with the conclusion of their reenactment, and as such, are always belated with respect to the actual consequences, which occurred elsewhere and long ago. These transient reenactments take place after mourning concludes elsewhere and long after emotions of anger or elation have subsided. Simply said, Los Angeles will never punish a murder in Chicago, for what happened in Chicago is bygone, and further, no law allows for a culprit be punished twice. What takes place after these reenactments is similar to a conversation between an American and an Australian concerning which driving

regulations are best. Regardless of the conclusion of such a conversation, the laws will remain the same, and the whole matter turns into an inconsequential pastime.[6]

It is common knowledge that television is material for conversation. Also common is the inclusion of science fiction novels and films in our personal imagination. Yet we cannot deny that it is all a sort of play with time and that talk of love and death in films is unreliable. A murder takes place in the Chicago of the 1920s and in the 1990s we are moved by it! What does Drew Barrymore have to tell us about the killings in Chicago? Probably nothing. Once done with acting in the violent scenes, she returns to what she was. She has nothing to say about Iraq or the current financial crisis. This is in no way an attempt at insult. Rather, as an actress, she has never been exposed to events, never been scorched by the sun of Baghdad. What of death, hunger, thirst, fatigue, and arousal she conveys is nothing short of poor imagining. Yet it must be said that such are the kinds of imaginings that nourish the cinematic imagination: extreme—even excessive—and quite unlike those that govern the living, whether it be the coincidence of birth or the inevitability of death. Rather, cinema always lives in what can be termed the Shakespearean literary moment, namely that which aims to rearticulate and redefine all of what makes a human life. Everything that rots in cinema will smell of Denmark as every lover is a Romeo or a Juliette.

Dreaming of Water

It happens that the sun in Los Angeles is bright, like that of Baghdad and Rio de Janeiro all wrapped in one. And yet it isn't quite the same. Nature here is still, tempered, and unlike harsh and uncaring virgin nature. Here one can find myriad gardens and forested lands that exceed some of those in Europe in their superficies. And yet all of it remains a garden and no one thinks of calling it a forest.

Obsessed with water, with trees aplenty standing for unmistakable symptoms, Los Angeles expands laterally. Unlike the spread of Baghdad which scans the desert in search of food and water, Los Angeles stretches to colonize the sand with water networks and well-tended trees. It must be a desert-phobia which prods the city to manufacture what can be termed a shared and public weather. To say that the city plants trees in the desert is incorrect. Los Angeles was never a desert, but it holds the desert as its resident nightmare. Still, with such a threatening other, residents are rarely willing to settle here. One stays in wait, ever-ready for the onslaught of the nightmare. In its diligent lateral spread, it abandons its center and turns it into a place for taking pictures worthy of postcards. Life here is not to be found in the center, rather it occurs on the edges where residents resemble frontier guards.

What is coherent in Los Angeles is the weather. It is as shared as the obsession with water, and is most probably a substitute for public space. But in being the only thing that is shared, one notices the diversity in languages and dialects. Conversation is thus difficult. In fact, this city is for families, and it isolates individuals like the mad once were on ships of fools. [7] To seem normal here, one ought to shop in large department stores and act as if he or she is in a hurry to be home with the children.

Death in Public Spaces

This resident desert-nightmare spreads in the folds of the city as a fear of desiccation. People here are afraid for their bodies and faces. They fear dry skin. All that is sold in this city speaks of softness. Skin here is besieged and avoids all that could intimate dryness. And so people buy soft sheets, soft clothes, soft furniture. Life here is performed with soft untarnished skins. A life acted, without an inside, like an emptied mummy with nothing to show but a soft, un-textured skin. For cinema leaves no traces on the body and insides of the city. Cinema happens in the open air and is a maker of voyeurs. It takes place where everyone can see and anyone can reenact. Life under cinema becomes spectacle. This is why residents here act as if streets are extensions of their private bedrooms. Streets are used as one uses a private space. The city accordingly appears like a yawning retiree. There is little contact on the streets, and consequently little violence. Yet when violence does happen, it appears as if it is made for the camera—soft, calculated, and certainly not deadly.

Death here is weighty, probably because cinema so arrogantly appropriates all of life. If conversations do begin, they do so from tale-bearing and tattling: Janet Jackson has gained a few pounds, pictures inside! Such are the covers of magazines, and this is how conversations are initiated. Where did Cameron Diaz dine? Are Brad and Angelina still in love? This is a sample of what is talked about by retirees—those who are mostly concerned with waiting for death and leaving it for another day. Tattling for them is how they spend their time, even if all agree that what is happening in Iraq is more important than the love lives of film stars. But the former, unlike the latter, is inadequate for tattling. Right now, this city has no solutions to offer Iraq. Better to talk of what is topical in cinema until Hollywood decides to tell the story of Iraq, that is, after the warm blood of war cools and dries. Only then will cinema tell the story and archive it on the shelves of memory.

Public spaces in Los Angeles seem reserved for what will happen outside the city. Once finished, those events will be acted out here: here a stage set for the battle of Tora Bora, there another for the swamps of Al Ahwaz and over there a little Wall Street. But not until the event has passed will it be ready to be filmed and unpacked. Because it is reserved, all that happens now in public spaces is a reenactment of past events without any suggestion that

people can use these spaces. Events are malleable because of the past, while the living are not. Only cinema can recall the past, but in order to do so, the living must be cast aside. The stage set must not be disturbed by the contingencies brought along by the living. No living being is allowed to have contact with a star, in whose presence one must act as if one is invisible. This is how this city, built as it is on the memories of other places, succeeds in pre-empting public space. For what could there be in such a space, if the city lives daily on recounting the stories of other cities? Public spaces thrive on the present without which only brute and excessive death remains—death which could have been avoided had the city tried to live in the present.

There are no public spaces in Los Angeles. People share little. The city does not meet around its open spaces as Athena once did. Rather, the city is regulated through its highways. There, residents meet at a precise hour and have their daily event. To know these highways is to know the city well. Moreover, there the law becomes less stringent and sometimes nonexistent—no traffic lights, no speed limits, and no pedestrians. Once on a highway, a driver feels liberated from innumerable regulations, but only to enter another set of rules. Cars seem careful not to transgress the distances separating one from another. This is not done out of courtesy, but rather from fear of death. On the highway, people live in their defensive cocoons, avoiding all contact. To not maintain that distance would lead to a death caused by one of three states: distraction, daydreaming, or inattention—three states which are cinema's main axioms, without which it cannot survive.

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Translated from the Arabic by Walid Sadek.

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

1
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2
For more on this issue see Mike Davis, *City of Quartz* (New York: Vintage, 1992).

3
Pierre Bourdieu, *Practical Reason: On the Theory of Action* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1998).

4
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Karl R. Popper, *The Myth of the Framework: In Defence of Science and Rationality* , ed. M. A. Notturno (London and New York: Routledge, 1996).

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Sebastjan Leban

Conditioned Contemporaneity (Reartikulacija, Part 1 of 3)

If we pause for a moment to examine strategies of the contemporary market economy, we discover that in a large variety of social fields a common pattern applies, namely the production of profit and passivity. Due to its expansionist logic, capital is constantly forced to upgrade and change its strategies in order to hypercommodify discourse. Neoliberal logic has further employed the market to transform goods from commodity to hypercommodity, rendering useless goods irreplaceable in our daily lives. Hypercommodification has become the basic means through which the system exercises control over all social structures.

Marx wrote that the fetishism of commodities originates in the peculiar social character of the labor that produces them.[1] According to Marx, articles of utility become commodities only as products of the labor of private individuals or groups working independently of each other. In the contemporary world, however, the transformation described by Marx is no longer possible. Today, articles of utility already function as commodities in the very initial stages of their production. Along with processes of selling and distribution, the very existence of goods is determined by the logic of the market rather than a particular social character.

This logic uses commercials, slogans, political and party speeches, elections, and so on to constantly upgrade and propagate realities which coerce society into a general state of passivity. Passivity here does not only imply a passive role with regard to global events, but a non-reaction to anything falling outside a sphere of individual subjectivity. What we now face is a condition of collective non-reaction that allows for the hegemony of capital to continue without regard for the dramatic escalation of social discrimination on the basis of race and class, xenophobia, and the marginalization of different gender and ethnic groups that accompanies it. It is also important, when speaking about passivity, to be keenly aware of the fact that the system has developed a parallel strategy through which processes of de-politicization, de-theorization, and de-radicalization are introduced through apparently political, theoretical, and radical discourses. As a result, not only are borders between real criticism and its mere illustration blurred, but so also is the subversive power of radical and critical analysis gradually abolished. The question that arises from this situation concerns how to initiate a process of re-activation that can engage the collective (society) as well as the subject (individual) in a fight against the hegemony of capital.

Fame, glory and luxury appear to be the most important values within the contemporary sphere of life. Propagated and branded on a daily basis by the media, these values have totally replaced the so-proclaimed democratic values of freedom and equality. It is interesting to see here how neoliberal ideology attempts to convince us that the market economy is the best possible system at the moment, to which there is no alternative, and to which we

should be devoted in order to find fulfillment. Such mediation aims to convince the viewer/consumer that if one stands at the threshold of survival, without social security or prospects, that it is one's own fault for not taking sufficient risks to improve one's life. What is the reality hidden behind this false mediation, and what is the real purpose of it? Its intention is no doubt to intensify the dependence of the lower classes on the workings of the system in such a way as to benefit those in power. As described by Richard Keiser in an article entitled "Stadiums Put Corporate Guests First...," there has lately been a significant increase in class discrimination.[2] He argues that the elites have begun to build new sports arenas with restricted VIP lodges specifically in order to provide spaces for the wealthy to distinguish themselves from the lower class. This is, by all means, a sign of pure class segregation and discrimination—something that becomes ever more present in other social spheres.

If we compare the above with Anibal Quijano's analysis of how racial classification became the main criterion for placing people into hierarchies, it appears that the pattern used throughout the centuries to establish the dominant position of the white race over others applies to the establishment of class hierarchies as well. Quijano states that "racial classification has been the most effective and long-lasting instrument of universal social domination since the sixteenth century, because the much older principle—gender or intersexual domination—was encroached upon by the inferior/superior racial classifications."[3]

The politics of classification, discrimination, and segregation are the cornerstone of the contemporary world and will remain so unless the collective (society) and the subject (individual) do away with passivity and engage in the fight against the hegemony of capital and the contemporary valorization structure.

And what has art to do with all this? Art has forever been a commodity, produced to please as an object of fascination and value, having forever gone hand-in-hand with systems of power and expansionism. David Harvey's analysis of monopoly rent, in which he compares the wine market to the art market, clearly shows how both markets exploit concepts of authenticity, originality, and uniqueness. Through the symbolic value of these concepts, the market system implements "the continuing monopoly privileges of private property" that serve to maintain the fictitious commodity values that allow vast profits to be gained from a product (or work of art).[4]

With the valorization of contemporary art today so closely tied to the circulation of capital and private property, it joins an industry of artificially produced needs, behind which lies the influence of multinational corporations and the elite class. Given the pretense of globalization and the unification of the art market and scenes under joint ventures such as that of the *Grand Tour 2007*, *Tres Bienn* and now *Art Compass*, a fictive process of democratization within the art system comes about with its sole purpose being to increase the value of investments and recreate a field for the elite class in the service of the disproportionate accumulation of capital, power, and control.

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→ Continued in issue #1: *Between Resistance and Commodity (Reartikulacija, Part 2 of 3)*, by Staš Kleindienst

"Reartikulacija" is an art project by a group consisting of Marina Gržinić, Staš Kleindienst, Sebastjan Leban, and Tanja Passoni. The group also publishes **Reartikulacija**, a journal for politics, art, and theory, edited by Gržinić and Leban.

Sebastjan Leban (1976, Sempeter pri Novi Gorici) is an artist and theoretician from Ljubljana. He is currently enrolled in a post-graduate program at the Academy of Fine Arts and Design in Ljubljana. His artistic practice involves collaboration with Staš Kleindienst, and with the group Trie. He has exhibited in numerous national and international exhibitions, delivered many lectures, and is the author of several publications.

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Marjetica Potrč

New Territories in Acre and Why They Matter

The Croa River community consists of approximately four hundred families spread out across eighty thousand hectares of Amazonian forest. They aspire to see the land they inhabit become an extraction reserve, and in fact, it is in the process of becoming precisely this: one of the new territories in Acre. As such, it is a good example of the current trend toward territorialization in the Brazilian state. It is also a good example of what territories stand for: self-organization, sustainable growth, and local knowledge.

Territorialization of Acre State (1988, 1999, 2006), Courtesy the artist

The Croa community's land is located a few hours' drive and a short boat ride from Cruzeiro do Sul. A small city, Cruzeiro do Sul is a major center for the western part of Acre and the region around the Jurua River. There are daily flights from Rio Branco, and the town is accessible by road from Rio Branco six months of the year and by the Jurua River throughout the year. From Cruzeiro do Sul it takes two to three weeks to travel by boat to Manaus. In short, the Croa community is nestled in the western corner of Brazil's Amazonian forest and, from the perspective of São Paulo, seems a remote and isolated place—something that, in our world of excessive connectivity, is considered a negative. But from the perspective of the people who live there, relative isolation can be a bonus. The communities I saw, including the Croa community, draw strength from their cultural identity and a sustainable economy. Not all these communities are strong, but they understand clearly that both these conditions are necessary if they are to thrive. The communities are well connected among themselves and, beyond Acre, with the world—strangely enough, many of the things that concern them are, in fact, more closely related to world issues than to specifically Brazilian ones.

When such communities reach out to others, they want to do it on their own terms. They want to interact in a positive way with others and at the same time remain separate. By reaffirming their own territories, they are actively participating in the creation of twenty-first-century models of coexistence, where the melting pot of global cities is balanced by centers where people voluntarily segregate themselves. After all, one of the most successful and sought-after models of living together today is the gated community—the small-scale residential entity. But unlike gated communities, which represent static strategies of retreat and self-enclosure, the new territories in Acre are dynamic and proactive: they reach out to others.

Left: Ashanika Indian, Acre. Photo by Mauro Almeida. Right: Marjetica Potrč, Drawing No.1/7: Pattern Protects, 2007, 7 drawings. Courtesy the artist and Galerie Nordenhake, Berlin.

Statement #1: The world must be pixelized! Democracy is particles!

Over the past two decades, Acre has been pixelizing itself into new territories, such as extraction reserves and Indian territories, along with sustainable urban territories. The government supports the territorialization of the state. These new territories are the result of collaboration between the government and local communities. The communities are self-organized entities and, basically, bottom-up initiatives. Their focus is on empowering their own people (education is a primary concern); practicing the sustainable extraction of forest-based resources; and developing a small-scale economy as both a tool for their communities' survival (several communities have been successfully selling their goods on the global market) and as a counter-model to the globalized economy created by multinational companies and organizations. The Acrean communities have a particular approach to land ownership. In the new territories, the emphasis is not on the individual owning land and extracting resources from it solely for his own benefit, but on the collective ownership and sustainable management of natural resources for the benefit of the whole community. Here, the existence of an individual is understood essentially as coexistence. Being always means "being with," and "I" does not take precedence over "we."[1] In short, the new territories suggest forms of living together that go beyond neoliberalism and its understanding of individualism, liberal democracy, and market capitalism.

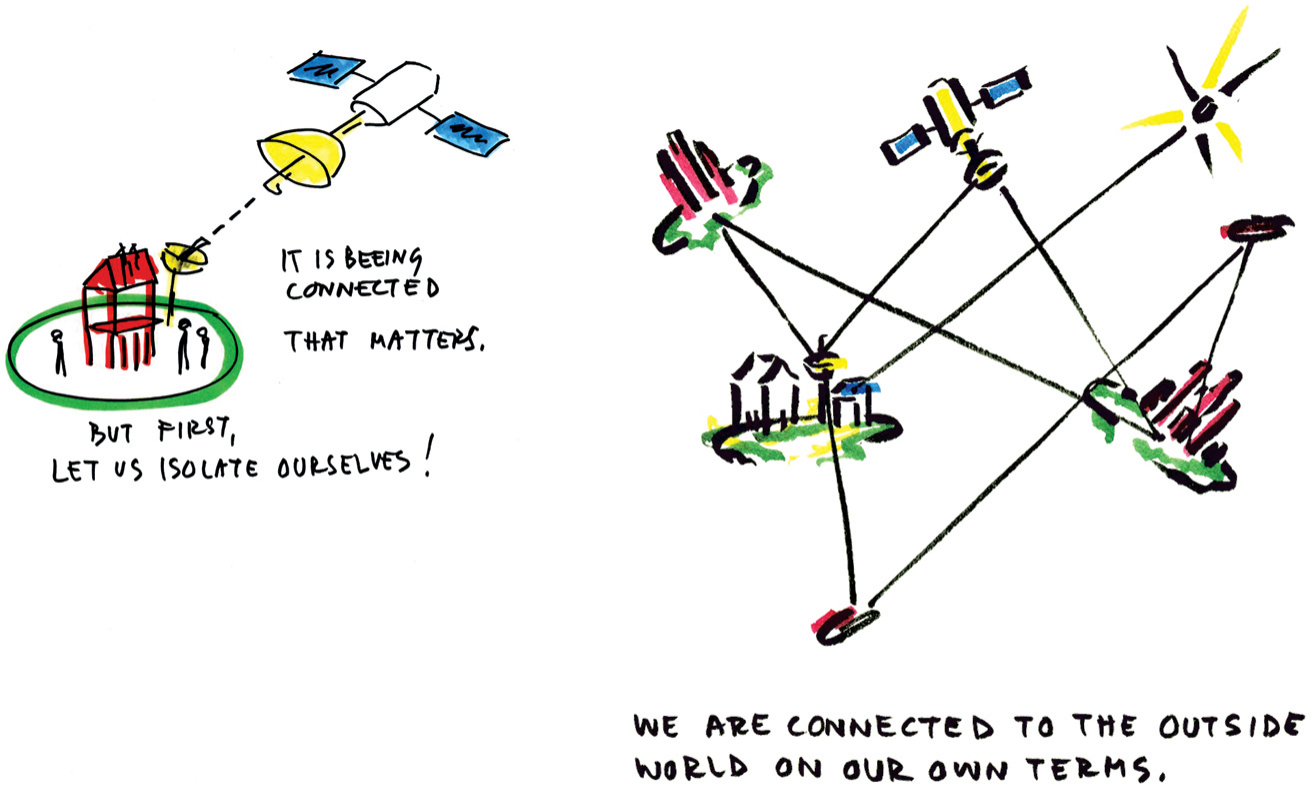
Notice that the new territories of Acre represent a social and economic alternative to China's new territories, which are characterized by fast-growing, large-scale economies and an ideology of progress. The territories of Acre, by contrast, are grounded in a small-scale economy; the people who live there feel a personal responsibility both toward their own communities and toward the world community.

In fact, in their dynamics of deregulation and strategies of transition, Acre's new territories suggest a different comparison: with the European Union as it is today. As a geopolitical entity, Europe is constantly expanding. It is a body in flux. Within its shifting boundaries, the consequences of the gradual dissolution of the social state and the ideology of multiculturalism can be seen in territories consolidated around ethnic groups and other kinds of communities. As last year's rejection of the EU constitution by French and Dutch voters indicates, people want to live in a more localized European Union; similarly, the EU explores a paradigm in which regional entities serve as a counterbalance to the nation-state. An emphasis on the local means that more decisions are taken at the local level and bottom-up initiatives are on the increase. The state of "transition" is accepted as a working model, and there is a civil society in the making that is quite different not only from the society of twentieth-century modernism, which feared any threat to unity, but also from the present-day ideology of globalization. As regionalism and localism gain ground, new models of coexistence emerge, such as urban villages and urban villas, new typologies of residential architecture. In the heyday of the modernist national state, a residential community could mean some ten thousand people. Today, an urban village means two thousand people—a dramatic shrinkage from the earlier model. Another important distinction is that today's urban villages are, again, bottom-up initiatives, while the modernist residential community was organized from the top down. The question is: just how far is it possible to "downscale" the world community?

The territories in Acre are the result of "degrowth," the process by which society fragments and pixelizes itself down to the level of the local community, and sometimes even further, to the level of the individual.[2] Age-old wisdom tells us that when individuals take responsibility for building their own lives, they also build their communities, and beyond that, the world community: "When I build my life, I build the world." As the Acrean territories show, communities see the consequences of such practices very clearly: they see "upscaling"—the scaling down of the economy and the pixelation of territories produce a new kind of connectedness: "upgrowth." In Acre, particles and group identities are forces of democracy.

Statement #2: We must grow up strong together!

A precondition for communities in the new territories to thrive is that they draw strength from a sustainable economy, local experience—a loose notion that embraces the importance of cultural identity—and education. The

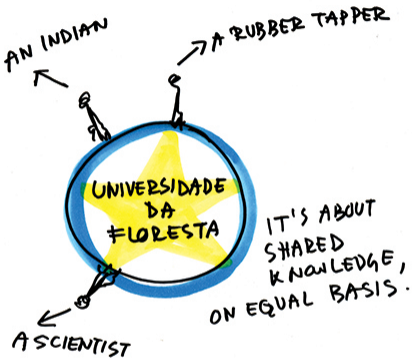


Isolation and Connectivity, Left: Marjetica Potrč, drawing for project The Struggle for Spatial Justice (A luta por justiça espacial) for 27a. Bienal de São Paulo. Right: Marjetica Potrč, Drawing No.5/12, Florestania, 2006, 12 drawings. Courtesy the artist and Max Protetch Gallery, New York.

communities believe that territories which are strong in these areas have the best chance to prosper. Although the emphasis is clearly on the local (they see rural communities as guaranteeing greater dignity, in contrast to the kind of life migrants to urban centers experience), they do not romanticize localness. They see themselves as players in the contemporary world: they had to overcome both the colonial past and the dominant globalizing pressures of the present. Theirs is a post-colonial, post-neoliberal practice. From where they stand, they see the future as their present.

Practice #1: We are growing up together strong; we are connected! But first, let's isolate ourselves. Only then we will be able to connect on our own terms.

The new territories of Acre are, indeed, strong and well aware of the benefits that come from being connected. Clearly, local emphasis, self-esteem, and connectedness make a perfect match, not a contradiction. I am thinking in particular of an ongoing initiative by Indian tribes to connect their remote areas via satellite through solar-powered communication centers. Representatives from the tribes are traveling all the time—at least this was the impression I received from encountering them on the streets of Rio Branco and at airports, or, for that matter, not seeing them because they were in São Paulo while I was in Rio Branco, or in Rio Branco when I was in Cruzeiro do Sul. Indeed, I had the feeling that they traveled more than Paulistas. An Acrean can with justice say to a Paulista: "I know you, but you don't know me." The general feeling one gets in São Paulo is that Acre is very far away, an unknown, isolated region, not well connected at all. This perspective of the center toward the periphery is overturned in Acre, where territories are understood as centers that want to connect on their own terms. Acreans don't see themselves as being too isolated. They like their degree of isolation. They draw on the wisdom of the forest: the "center" is a place in the forest where the "game"—the chance to make a good life for oneself thanks to the proximity of natural resources and community infrastructure—is strong and multiple connections to the outside world are not necessarily a bonus; the "periphery," meanwhile, is along the river, where a person may be



Universidade da Floresta (University of the Forest), Acre. Left: video still by Garret Linn, in Marjetica Potrč, Florestania: A New Citizenship, video, 2006. Courtesy the artist and Max Protetch Gallery, New York. Right: Marjetica Potrč, drawing for project The Struggle for Spatial Justice (A luta por justiça espacial) for 27a. Bienal de São Paulo.

more connected to the world outside but the "game" is not so strong. As always—and as common wisdom tells us—the center is what's most important.

School Bus, Croa Community, Acre. Left: video still by Garret Linn, in Marjetica Potrč, Florestania: A New Citizenship, video, 2006. Courtesy the artist and Max Protetch Gallery, New York. Right: Marjetica Potrč, drawing for project The Struggle for Spatial Justice (A luta por justiça espacial) for 27a. Bienal de São Paulo.

Practice #2: We marry local experience with hi-tech knowledge!

The new territories of Acre are strong "centers" with rich local experience; they balance connectedness and isolation well. In a way, these territories are perfect islands: you can reach anyone from here but not everyone can reach you. The next most important thing is their practice of self-sustainable management—the result of blending local experience and hi-tech knowledge. Hi-tech sustainable solutions help them upgrade their living conditions, and allow them to communicate and trade from remote locations with little or no energy infrastructure. Advanced technology (such as solar-powered satellite dishes) means that at last, in the twenty-first century, the remote territories of Acre can themselves become centers, no less than other places, by using self-generated energy, which in turn gives them greater freedom in communicating. Without a doubt, the combination of local experience (from the territories) with hi-tech knowledge (from Brazil) is potentially a geopolitical advantage. But can it really work without the support of the state?

Practice #3: Happiness is: growing in small steps! Ours is a dignified life! We are accountable for ourselves and to others!

Those who manage the sustainable extraction of forest-based resources see the small-scale economy both as a tool for their own survival as well as a new economic

model that is necessary for the survival of the planet and society at large. In Acre, clichés acquire real meaning: "The survival of the rain forest is the survival of the earth; the rain forest is the final frontier; the world is one community." It feels as if Acre's government and its people are on a mission. Does the future of the world depend on locally managed territories and small-scale economies providing a balance to the globalizing forces of multinational companies and organizations? The people I spoke with in Acre are convinced of this. But there's a Catch-22, an obvious contradiction that resides in the very notion of sustainability. While any nonsustainable extraction of forest resources would have dire consequences not only to these communities but also to the entire world, efforts to achieve self-sustainable management of the forest through a small-scale economy present important challenges. Can the territories really survive and even thrive on this? Apart from natural resources, how well does local knowledge trade on the global market?

Practice #4: We protect what belongs to us! Cupuaçu is ours!

The new territories of Acre are strong centers and well connected; they practice self-sustainability and self-protection. The protection of the new territories is a must, not only because of the long history of their cultures being abused—which means self-protection comes naturally to those who live here—but also because of the ongoing threat of bio-piracy. The unlawful theft of natural resources in a region whose greatest wealth is biodiversity ranges from famous incidents involving the theft of rubber tree seeds (which led to the collapse of the region's rubber extraction economy), to recent cases of a Japanese company, among others, attempting to patent the indigenous fruit known as cupuaçu (the Japanese patent has recently been revoked). So it's no surprise, really, that Acre's efforts to protect the territories from outsiders may seem excessive. The remoteness of their location does not guarantee sufficient protection for the Indian territories. If visitors to an extraction reserve are viewed with healthy suspicion because of fears that they might be involved with bio-piracy, a visit to an Indian tribe is extremely difficult to arrange. The main reason for this is to shield indigenous cultures. In theory, all would-be visitors to an Indian tribe must state their reasons for wanting to travel there, and visits must then be approved by the community. In this way, the territories remind us of the fortified city-states of Renaissance Italy or today's contested territories in the West Bank. Indeed, the Acrean practice of planting trees as border protection in defense of one's territory mirrors practices by Palestinians and Jewish settlers before the erection of the Israeli Barrier Wall halted negotiations between the two communities. A major difference, however, is that, while the Acrean territories may recall walled cities, they are not closed off. Today, the borders of these fragile and contested territories are porous. They permit and even welcome negotiations. And as for any precise demarcation of these territories' borders, this remains in flux for the simple reason that rivers change their course and villages relocate themselves in the search for natural resources. And here is a contradiction: these strong territories are in fact fragile territories. To be able to exist and prosper, they need to be constantly communicating with the world and negotiating with their neighbors.

Practice #5: We are not objects of study! We want to share our knowledge on equal terms! In a horizontal world, education must be horizontal! To each group, their own education! We are unique!

Education—learning and sharing knowledge—is a crucial issue for the new territories, but the same may be said for the whole of Brazil and beyond. We have learned that the riches of education, though seemingly immaterial, are what guarantee the material wealth of nations. Today, the richest countries are those with the strongest educational systems. This awareness is even more important in the context of Brazil, ranked first in the world in the gap between rich and poor—which also means there is an immense gap where education is concerned. The new territories of Acre, although wealthy in both natural and intellectual resources, cannot hope to provide the kind of high-quality education the rich world demands. But being so inventive, the people of Acre organize things differently. The goal is to customize education for particular groups in the community. Established hierarchies are put in question, and education is organized in a way that makes sense for the community. Schools and local knowledge are cherished and protected—just as the territories themselves are. It struck me that the demands that shape education are, in a way, similar to those that shape the territories. Both exist for their people and both are necessary for people's prosperity and aspirations, framing the life of the community.

Two collaborations are under way in Acre that I find especially inspiring. One involves the building of schools in remote areas for primary education; this is a collaboration between the local communities and the government. A typical school of this sort is equipped with extensive solar paneling and a satellite dish—in other words, an energy supply and a means of communication with the world. The second collaboration concerns higher education. This is the University of the Forest, whose goal is to bring together the knowledge of rubber-tappers, Indians, academics, and scientists so as to marry local experience with Western science. This makes sense. Brazil, after all, is a hi-tech country where the knowledge of those who live in the forest is not taught in the classroom but

experienced directly. Indians and rubber-tappers, the caretakers of the forest, don't want to be objects of research. They want to contribute to our shared knowledge on an equal basis. They want to trade their knowledge as they see fit. I see the University of the Forest as a new and important model for higher education.

Statement #3: The people of the '60s were thinkers; we are doers!

My aim in writing this was to make sense of what I experienced during my stay in Acre in March and April 2006. I know that my assessment of the situation is far from thorough, but so be it. For me, it all comes down to the question: "What does it mean to live a dignified and responsible life today?" I realize that the community structures in Acre are not intended as models for other communities. The things I have mentioned here are simply their practice—the practice of sustainable existence. For me, their strategies recall other twenty-first-century experiences, such as the new states of the Western Balkans, which were formed when the region collapsed in the wars in the 1990s; like Acre, this region, too, has become pixelized into small territories—territories that are rejuvenating themselves by implementing practices and pursuing aspirations similar to those of the people of Acre. In both cases, downscaling is producing a scaling up: these particles and group identities are not static and self-enclosed, but dynamic and open to the world. I believe that faster and slower worlds can exist simultaneously in parallel realities, and the Western Balkans and Acre seem to me to be fast worlds, in some ways ahead of the rest. So it's possible for us to learn from their practices.

I loved what I saw in Acre. It would be nice to think that the proposals of Constant and Yona Friedman, as well as other thinkers of the 1960s, such as Hélio Oiticica and Lygia Clark, who dreamed of a world community, provided inspiration for the people who are today forging Acre's new territories, but I know that the Acreans have very likely never heard of them. Still, it's beautiful to see that the doers of today are materializing the ideas of the thinkers of the '60s. I thought it was fantastic how everyone we talked with in Acre saw clearly the benefits of their practices, for both themselves and the world community, and understood how to implement them. The new Acrean territories make me hopeful for our future coexistence. Their success is evidence that humanity can function as an intelligent organism. As it reaches critical mass, the world community, combined with a free-market economy, is generating alternative approaches to today's neoliberalism, whether this means an emphasis on small-scale economies or a society based on local communities. Most importantly, those who live in the Acrean territories understand themselves as particles in, and contributors to, the world community.

Rural School "Luiz Placido Fernandes," Acre. Left: Courtesy of Seplands and Prodeem, the State of Acre, Brazil. Right: Marjetica Potrč, drawing for project The Struggle for Spatial Justice (A luta por justiça espacial) for 27a. Bienal de São Paulo.

For sharing their vision and experience, I am particularly grateful to Camila Sposati, who provided me with a superb introduction to Acre and its people, to Sergio de Carvalho e Souza, who was an incredible guide for understanding the new territories, to members of the Croa community (Gean Carlos de Oliveira and Silvana Rossi), to representatives of the Indians (Luiz Waldenir Silva de Souza and Mutsa Katukina), the extraction reserves, and the government (Chico Genu and Marcus Vinicius), as well as to Manuela Carneiro da Cunha, co-author of the *Enciclopédia da Floresta* and a key figure in the University of the Forest, and many others besides.

X

Marjetica Potrč (Ljubljana, 1953) is an artist and architect based in Ljubljana, Slovenia. Her work has been exhibited extensively throughout Europe and the Americas. Her many on-site installations include *Dry Toilet* (Caracas, 2003). She has taught at several well-known institutions in Europe and North America, including MIT (2005), and has published a number of essays on contemporary urban architecture. She is the recipient of numerous grants and awards, most notably the Hugo Boss Prize (2000) and the Vera List Center for Arts and Politics Fellowship at The New School in New York (2007). In 2008, she was nominated for the Curry Stone Design Prize.

1
See Jean-Luc Nancy, *Being Singular Plural* , trans. Robert D. Richardson and Anne E. O'Byrne (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2000).

2
See Serge Latouche, "Why less should be so much more: Degrowth economies," *Le Monde diplomatique* , November 2004 (accessed 9 June 2006), https://mondediplo.com/2004/11/14latouche .

Raqs Media Collective

Stammer, Mumble, Sweat, Scrawl, and Tic

To be legible is to be readable. To be legible is to be an entry in a ledger—one with a name, place, origin, time, entry, exit, purpose, and perhaps a number. To be legible is to be coded and contained. Often, when asked an uncomfortable question, or faced with an unsettling reality, the rattled respondent ducks and dives with a stammer, a mumble, a sweat, a scrawl, or a nervous tic. The respondent may not be lying, but neither may he be interested in offering a captive legible truth either to the interrogator or to his circumstances.

An insistence on legibility produces its own shadow, the illegible. Between the bare-faced lie and the naked truth lies the zone of illegibility—the only domain where the act of interpretation retains a certain ontological and epistemic significance.

We read each other for signs, not because we are opaque, or necessarily wish for opacity, but because our desires, fears, and experiences still require the life-giving breath of translation. The transparency that brooks no translation also requires no engagement.

The tree of life, and therefore of art, would be barren were it not for the fruit of occasional misunderstandings.

1. Stammer

Two performers, Mahmood Farooqui and Danish Husain, tell stories in Delhi as part of an attempt to revive a traditional narrative form called Dastangoi (story-speech).[1]

Among the stories they tell are accounts of people, incidents, places, and facts frozen as notes and jottings in the archives related to the Indian Subcontinent's partition in 1947. In telling these stories, they attempt to work through what it means to be poised on the hyphen between the terms "Indian" and "Muslim," in whichever order the two are read, when they are read together. Sometimes this exercise takes the form of a meditation on the conflict between life and the ledger.

The partition of India was meant to give rise to a new "homeland"—Pakistan—for "Muslim-Indians," who, of course, would cease to be so the moment they moved to Pakistan. The new Indian state, however, maintained that India was the only proper homeland for "Indian-Muslims," who were Indians as much as they were Muslim. In this tug of war over how the "Indian-Muslim" or the "Muslim-Indian" could be made legible as present or future subjects of two states, some strange things were bound to happen.

A person who had been a "Muslim-Indian" before partition ceased to be an "Indian-Muslim" the moment he became a Pakistani. And if he became a Pakistani, then he could no longer easily revert to being an Indian. To the Indian state, Pakistan was an enemy, and all Pakistanis, who had once

been Indians, were actual or potential antagonists.

On the other hand, after a certain date, the state of Pakistan, the homeland of those who hitherto had been "Muslim-Indians," was no longer willing to accept any more "Indian-Muslim" emigrants from India. They were beginning to be seen as a burden, as outsiders, and at worst as potential fifth columnists from India in the new Pakistan.

This meant that those "Indian-Muslims" who had crossed over to Pakistan but subsequently wanted to return to India could not do so, while those "Muslim-Indians" who had stayed on in India, but subsequently wanted to cross over to Pakistan could not do so either. India would not let the first kind return, and Pakistan would not let the second kind enter. Both of these desires became obstacles to those who governed the two new states. The "Indian-Muslim" and the "Muslim-Indian" came unstuck between the powers who claimed the terms at either ends of the hyphens that joined them. Their lives, and the claims that their lives made on history, were no longer seen as valid. The legibility of the law that classified people as either "Indian" and "Pakistani" now produced its own illegible shadow—of the movements of people who did not quite fit into either category, and who, by their actions and by the articulation of their desires, refused to "fit" into either India or Pakistan, but stayed on as the stubbornly illegible marginalia of the unfolding of two grand narratives of new nationhood.

Farooqui and Husain's performance, which takes off from the investigations of historians like Vazira Fazila-Yacoobali Zamindar, comes to a head with the story of someone we like to think of as the "uncontainable man." Here is his story.[2]

There was once an uncontainable man. Let us call him Ghulam Ali. That is how he is named in the files and the correspondence that surround his strange but unremarkable story.

In the aftermath of the Partition of India, in 1947, this man, like thousands of others, could not offer a clear, concise reading of his self. He had not yet learned to be legible to himself as a citizen of either nation. Neither India nor Pakistan could hold him in place.

This uncontainable man wanted to stay on in India, but went to look for a missing relative in Pakistan. His decisions were sound; his timing was awry. Straying to search for someone, and then staying to search for someone—falling sick, tarrying, confusion—all this meant that in a few months' time he became a Pakistani. People were still figuring out how to spell Pakistan, and how to tell it apart from India. Ghulam Ali read himself with a stammer. The book that became his passport had already told a new story.

Caught between petitions, jottings, and files, Ghulam Ali tried to read himself—sometimes as an Indian, at other times as a Pakistani. But all he could say with confidence was that he had learnt to play the Kettle Drum in the British Indian Army Band. Kettle Drumming is not a legible nationality. You can't just rat-a-tat-a-tat your way through two new warring nations as if it were a parade. Not if you are an ordinary decommissioned soldier with nothing to your name but a quest for a missing relative. Your petitions may travel, but you stay where you are written into history. Over time, even the inscription in the file, overwritten many times over, becomes as illegible as the acts of travel that it sought to contain. Legibility, when it eats its own tail, digests itself into illegibility.

2. Mumble

In Ritwik Ghatak's Jukti, Takko aar Gappo (Arguments, Reasons, Stories), a Bengali film set against the backdrop of the first wave of Maoist rebellion in the India of the late sixties and early seventies, an old man, Nachiketa, played by Ghatak himself, falls in with a group of "underground" Maoist insurgents in the course of his eccentric picaresque adventures.

His conversations with one of his indulgent hosts, which cover a large historical remit, inevitably end in his admission, "I am confused, young man, I do not understand anymore." He travels with the band of rebels, and yet, it is they who are all conformists in comparison to his awkwardly exhibitionist display of ambiguity. Caught in the "crossfire" between the certainties of the state and the insurgents, Nachiketa (with a name that packs in a throwback to Nachiketa, the death defying practitioner of the "via negativa"—neti, neti, neti/not this, not that, not the other—of the Katha Upanishad), is a celebrant of the mumbled doubt.

Nachiketa's insistence on inhabiting his confusion has other ramifications as well. In addition to its awkward evasion of definitive articulation, it also outlines a position based on a refusal to be an informant. The owning-up to not being able to "understand" is as much an assertion of a stance of deliberate reticence as it is a tacit admission of ignorance. Often, in the course of cultural transactions, a demand is placed on the artist, curator, and critic to be a model "interpreter." This demand is usually underwritten by the assumption that the place, biography, history, predicament, relationship, or situation that the "interpreter" is being asked to translate is available to him as a transparent template. Nachiketa, by holding on to his confusion, questions the imperative of transparency.

Nachiketa's prevarication offers neither redemption nor rejection. Rather, it holds out hesitant incomprehensibility as a reason to keep going. Nachiketa "keeps going" until he is finally undone by the assurance of gunfire in one of Indian cinema's first depictions of the now commonplace

"encounter," a form of contact between the state and its more recalcitrant subjects which takes place through the medium of a well-placed bullet lodged in an insurgent head. A doubting body is an uncomfortable sprawl of questions. A dead body is a legible statistic in a police ledger. The transformation of the doubting body into the dead body is another kind of translation. It happens far too often, and though forensics is one way of looking at the dead body, especially in search of well-writ answers, it has not as yet yielded its own hermeneutic science, or the kind of interpretation that stays on the ball with the questions that continue to haunt the record, much like the confused ghost of a confused man.

3. Sweat

A judge in the western Indian city of Pune recently convicted a woman for murder based on the results of a Brain Electrical Oscillations Signature (BEOS) test.[3] This technique, developed by a Bangalore-based neuroscientist, claims to act as an efficient instrument for determining culpability in crime through brain mapping.[4] The accused, who is said to have poisoned her fiancé with arsenic at a local McDonald's, was subjected to an electroencephalogram. Thirty-two electrodes were placed on her skull while she sat in silence and listened to a series of statements read out mainly in the first person, some of which were neutral, such as "The Sky is Blue" while others made assertions which could be connected to the crime, such as "I bought arsenic" or "I went to McDonald's."

Unlike other neural investigation and prognostic techniques used in forensic psychology, BEOS does not rely on an evaluation of skin texture (as in a lie detector) or brain images (as in Narco Analysis) associated with the making of "true" or "false" statements by the suspect in response to a set of questions, often fielded while the accused is made suggestible through strong pharmacological intervention. BEOS does not rely on the accused having recourse to speech, but on what is supposed to be revealed by the colors of her silence. It "maps" what happens in the accused person's brain while she "listens" rather than when she speaks. This silent cartography of the brain divides the cerebral cortex into areas corresponding to "concepts" and "experiences." In this theory, should the area of the brain devoted to the storage of "experiential" data light up in response to stimuli pertaining to the scene or particulars of a crime, the suspect is taken to be someone who has actually participated in the unfolding of the events in question. The brain is taken to preserve within it a legible impression of the crime, much as a roll of film contains an emulsion on which a scene may be imprinted through the action of light.

The question is: is a dream, an act of the imagination, a response to a murder in a film, an "experience" or a "concept"? If the life of the imagination is rendered indistinct from the life of actions then all of us are criminals, or have been, at least some of the time. We have all experienced the fear and rush of violence, in dreams, in recollections, or through recounting.

What if we did not commit a murder, but obsessed about it instead? What if we went over, again and again, the real or imagined details of a conspiracy in our minds? Would we then be conspirators or witnesses, or both—in turns, and all together?

Would it then make sense to say that if you are not an eligible victim, you must be a legible perpetrator? What would it make better sense to be?

4. Scrawl

In looking at traditional land deeds and documents that encode customary titles, one is struck by the scrawls that thicken the task of reading. The research of Solomon Benjamin, a scholar of urbanism based in Bangalore, involves looking at the changing ways of registering legal and customary claims to land.[5]

Benjamin's work takes the form of a series of digressions into the meanings of signatures and countersignatures. To him, the story of a land deed or other such documents, is told by the marks and annotations that overlay each other on paper to form a palimpsest of claims—here reinforcing, there overruling exclusive rights—erecting, dismantling, and shifting the boundaries between enclosures. Claims touch claims, infect claims, mate, proliferate. Relationships to land become both more and less than being simply about "property." The rights of ownership are read against the claims of custody. Usage, usufruct, usury, uxoriality, estates, and estovers all shade off into discussions about different kinds of entitlement. Habits and habitation yield to each other, and the thin fabric of legal legibility often buckles under the overlay of ink on ink on ink on paper.

Jane Caplan, historian of information processes and identification techniques, takes a close interest in the evolution of the signature. To her, the signature is an "equivocal artifact deeply mired within the terrain of legibility/illegibility."[6] Citing historians who claimed that an illegible hand was seen as a mark of gentility in the 16th century, Caplan points out that "legibility" and the penmanship that produced it was closely tied to what was once seen as the "vulgar" commercial activity of accountancy. This view reversed itself in 19th century Britain and its empire, when good handwriting came to be associated with gentility.

The signature, however, remains an exception to the cult of legibility. Even now, legal opinion customarily holds that a "normal" signature is an "illegible" signature, i.e., that

illegibility is a defining feature of the signature, "which is not a piece of writing intended to convey a meaning, but a graphic, symbol, or device."[7]

Illegibility, in other words, is the hallmark of individuality. Children learning to write their name legibly soon realize that growing up involves the transformation of a readable name into an illegible scrawl. The consistency of this illegible scrawl through time then becomes the identifier of a well-formed adult's ability to represent him or herself on paper.

How can the knots and scrawls of human relationships, especially as they get entangled over generations, be read in anything other than their illegibility? What does an "illegible" reading amount to? Would hearing such a reading amount to listening to the rustling glossolalia of aging paper? In such situations of universally diminished legibility, disputes over land would often end in long, drawn-out negotiations that in their durability acted as tacit instruments of compromise. So someone owned, someone ploughed, someone grazed, someone camped and someone lived, and all of them quarreled and all felt that they were as much in the right as they were in the wrong.

Today, however, property claims are hard-coded with digital signatures. Barcodes don't scrawl into each other the way that inked inscriptions could. A patch of land is no longer a field of interpretation, guarded by a picket fence with many gaps and holes. As land becomes transacted on a global scale, and as traditional claims and claimants are erased in neat satellite-imaged cadastral records, information—not habitation—becomes the key to property. A right to land is no longer a dispute to be settled by reading a layer of ink under another layer of ink. It is instead a piece of information protected by a firewall, amenable to entrance only on the pronouncement of a password, and only legible to its owner.

5. Tic

The jagged peaks of stock market fluctuations are legible, apparently, to sharp punters on good days. The nervous tics on the faces in the crowds that gaze with rapt attention at the scrolling news of the day's highs and lows on the electronic murals that wrap themselves around the glass facades of the citadels of finance are eloquent testimonies to the affective intensity of capital.

It is possible, some say, to read despair, skepticism, hope, and euphoria in the glyphs formed by these crests and troughs. If so, then news of investment is as sentimental as the chapters of a pulp romance. The promise of romance and the hope of eventual recompense on risky bids are the eventual trophies for which both speculators and sweethearts vie. Yet each lover, and each stockbroker, is a prisoner of a private language. Every man (and woman) who has laid a wager on the possibility of a return in love or money has done so knowing that the object of their attentions may not even hear, let alone care for, the intensity of their longing. How many have squandered their dreams on Freddie Mac and Fannie Mae, and to what little avail?

Sentimental poets declaim that "to love is to lose." Addicted market players see the losses of some as the opportunities for a win on the "rebound." And so, victory and defeat, pursuit and being pursued, blur into each other such that it begins to be difficult to tell losses from gains. If the legibility of loss lies in recognizing the state of being bereft, then it becomes equally necessary to know that bereavement can render us speechless. Within silence lies another, keener illegibility. And who would dare edit the lexicon of a wordless language with a million entries for only two sets of meanings: intangible hope and opaque despair?

X

Raqs Media Collective (Monica Narula, Jeebesh Bagchi, Shuddhabrata Sengupta) has been variously described as artists, media practitioners, curators, researchers, editors, and catalysts of cultural processes. Their work, which has been exhibited widely in major international spaces and events, locates them squarely along the intersections of contemporary art, historical inquiry, philosophical speculation, research and theory—often taking the form of installations, online and offline media objects, performances and encounters. They live and work in Delhi, based at Sarai, Centre for the Study of Developing Societies, an initiative they co-founded in 2000. They are members of the editorial collective of the *Sarai Reader* series, and have curated "The Rest of Now" and co-curated "Scenarios" for Manifesta 7.

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2
See Vazira Fazila-Yacoobali Zamindar, *The Long Partition and the Making of Modern South Asia: Refugees, Boundaries, Histories* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2007).

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Anand Giridharadas, "India's use of brain scans in courts dismays critics," *International Herald Tribune* , September 15, 2008 https://www.nytimes.com/2008/09/15/world/asia/15iht-15brainscan.16148673.html .

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Solomon Benjamin, "Occupancy Urbanism: Ten Theses", Frontier, Sarai Reader 07, 2007.

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Sensor-Census-Censor, Investigating Circuits of Information, Registering Changes of State, 2007.

7
ibid.

Irit Rogoff

Turning

We have recently heard much about the "educational turn in curating" among several other "educational turns" affecting cultural practices around us.[1] Having participated in several of the projects emerging from this perceived "turn," it seems pertinent to ask whether this umbrella is actually descriptive of the drives that have propelled this desired transition.[2]

My questions here firstly concern what constitutes a "turn" to begin with? Are we talking about a "reading strategy" or an interpretative model, as was the understanding of the "linguistic turn" in the 1970s, with its intimations of an underlying structure that could be read across numerous cultural practices and utterances? Are we talking about reading one system—a pedagogical one—across another system—one of display, exhibition, and manifestation—so that they nudge one another in ways that might open them up to other ways of being? Or, are we talking instead about an active movement—a generative moment in which a new horizon emerges in the process—leaving behind the practice that was its originating point?

Secondly, it seems pertinent to ask to what extent the hardening of a "turn" into a series of generic or stylistic tropes can be seen as capable of resolving the urgencies that underwrote it in the first place? In other words, does an "educational turn in curating" address education or curating at precisely the points at which it urgently needs to be shaken up and made uncomfortable?

Delving into these questions is made more difficult by the degree of slippage that currently takes place between notions of "knowledge production," "research," "education," "open-ended production," and "self-organized pedagogies," when all these approaches seem to have converged into a set of parameters for some renewed facet of production.[3] Although quite different in their genesis, methodology, and protocols, it appears that some perceived proximity to "knowledge economies" has rendered all of these terms part and parcel of a certain liberalizing shift within the world of contemporary art practices.

Concerned that these initiatives are in danger of being cut off from their original impetus and threaten to harden into a recognizable "style," I would like to invoke, towards the end of this discussion, Foucault's notion of "parrhesia"—free, blatant public speech—as perhaps a better model through which to understand some kind of "educational turn" in art.

Education

It might be easiest to enter the fray of education via what were for me the two projects which best reflected my own engagement with "education" within the arenas of display and of gathering.

The first of these was the *Academy* project (2006) at the Van Abbemuseum in Eindhoven.[4] Part of a series of exhibitions, projects, and events that took place between a number of institutions, this installment in the Netherlands was a collaboration between 22 participants and the staff of the museum. The project as a whole posed the question, "What can we learn from the museum?" and referred to a form of learning that could take place beyond that which the museum sets out to show or teach.

Our initial question concerned whether an idea of an "academy" (as a moment of learning within the safe space of an academic institution) was a metaphor for a moment of speculation, expansion, and reflexivity without the constant demand for proven results. If this was a space of experimentation and exploration, then how might we extract these vital principles and apply them to the rest of our lives? How might we also perhaps apply them to our institutions? Born of a belief that the institutions we inhabit can potentially be so much more than they are, these questions ask how the museum, the university, the art school, can surpass their current functions.

Of course, we touched on this problematic at the very moment a heated debate regarding the Bologna Accord—the European so-called reform of education—was erupting all around us. Instead of hanging our heads and lamenting the awfulness of these reforms, with their emphasis on quantifiable and comparable outcomes, we thought it might be productive to see if this unexpected politicization of the discussion around education might be an opportunity to see how the principles we cherish in the education process might be applied across a broader range of institutional activities. This could be a way of saying to the politicians: "You want to politicize education? Let's really politicize education. Let's make it a principle of actualization that really does touch the institutions of culture—not by producing perfectly trained, efficient, and informed workers for the cultural sector, but by thinking of the cultural sector as a market economy, and bringing the principles of education there to operate as forms of actualization."

When we say that these institutions of ours could be so much more than they are, we don't imply that they should be larger, or more efficient, or more progressive, or more fun (though they certainly should be more fun). Instead, we wish to say that their reach could be wider, that they might provide sites for doing so much more than they ever thought they could.

In asking what we can learn from the museum beyond what it sets out to teach us, we were not focused on the museum's expertise, what it owns and how it displays it, conserves it, historicizes it. Our interests were in the possibilities for the museum to open a place for people to engage ideas differently—ideas from outside its own walls. So the museum in our thinking was the site of possibility, the site of potentiality.

Academy wanted to stimulate reflections on this potentiality within society. It situated itself in the speculative tension between the question of what one needs to know and that of what one aspires to. Academies often focus on what it is that people need to know in order to start thinking and acting, but we chose to approach the academy as a space that generates vital principles and activities—activities and principles you can take with you and which can be applied beyond its walls to become a mode of life-long learning. As such, *Academy* aimed to develop a counterpoint to the professionalization, technocratization, and privatization of academies that result from the Bologna reforms and to the monitoring and outcome-based culture that characterize higher education in Europe today.

In considering what we might have at our disposal to counter such official assessments of how learning can be evaluated and appreciated, we focused on two terms: *potentiality* and *actualization*.

By "potentiality" we meant a possibility to act that is not limited to an ability. Since acting can never be understood as being enabled simply by a set of skills or opportunities, it must be dependent on a will and a drive. More importantly, it must always include within it an element of fallibility—the possibility that acting will end in failure. The other term we wanted to mobilize in conjunction with "academy" was that of "actualization," which implies that certain meanings and possibilities embedded within objects, situations, actors, and spaces carry a potential to be "liberated," as it were. This points to a condition in which we all function in a complex system of embeddedness—one in which social processes, bodies of learning, individual subjectivities cannot be separated and distinguished from one another.

Both these terms seem important for mobilizing any re-evaluation of education, as they allow us to expand the spaces and activities that house such processes. Similarly, they allow us to think of "learning" as taking place in situations or sites that don't necessarily intend or prescribe such activity.

At Van Abbe, we envisaged an exhibition project that brought together five teams of different cultural practitioners who had access to every aspect of the museum's collection, staff, and activities. Each of these teams pursued a line of inquiry into what we could learn from the museum beyond the objects on display and its educational practices.

The access that was given was not aimed at producing institutional critique or exposing the true realities of the institution. Instead, it aimed at eliciting the unseen and unmarked possibilities that already exist within these spaces—the people who are already working there and who bring together unexpected life experiences and connections, the visitors whose interactions with the place

are not gauged, the collection which could be read in a variety of ways far beyond splendid examples of key art-historical moments, the paths outward which extend beyond the museum, the spaces and navigational vectors which are unexpectedly plotted within it.

There were many questions circulating in our spaces in the exhibition, with each room and each group producing their own questions in relation to the central one: "What can we learn from the museum?"

There were questions regarding who produces questioning: What are legitimate questions, and under what conditions are they produced? The seminar class, the think tank, the government department, the statistician's bureau are sites for the production of questions, but we were suggesting others born of fleeting, arbitrary conversations between strangers, of convivial loitering and of unexpected lines of flight in and out of the museum as in the *Ambulator* project (Susan Kelly, Janna Graham, Valeria Graziano).

There were questions regarding the relations between expertise and hope and expertise and governance, knowledge that is used to bolster hopeful fantasies and knowledge that is used to impose dominant concerns, such as in the *Think Tank* project (John Palmesino and Anselm Franke).

There were questions regarding what kind of modes of attention are paid in a context such as a museum or a library. What could these modes of attention be liberated for? Could they be made use of in some other ways? Could they become an instrument of liberation, as in the *Inverted Research Tool* (Edgar Schmitz and Liam Gillick)?

There were questions regarding the very nature of ownership of an image or an idea. How does a simple object come to stand in for an entire complex network of knowing, legitimating, conserving, and "anointing with cultural status" (all of which operate under the aegis of ownership)? *Imaginary Property* (Florian Schneider and Multitude e.V.) asked, "What does it mean to own an image?"

There were questions regarding cultural difference that asked whether a museum really is an institution of representation, meant to represent those outside its systems and privileged audiences. If it is not, then maybe those "outsiders" are not outside at all, but can be recognized as already here and part of us, but only if we listen—really listen to ourselves, as in *Sounding Difference* (Irit Rogoff, Deepa Naik).

And there were other questions about the museum's knowledge vs. our own knowledge, and about open forums for learning at the edges of that which is acknowledged, as in *I Like That* (Rob Stone and Jean-Paul Martinon).

Summit

That initial project within the spaces and parameters set by the museum led several of us to think about taking those questions into a less regulated and prescribed space, one in which institutional practices could encounter self-organized, activist initiatives. This led to *SUMMIT Non-Aligned Initiatives in Education Culture* (**www.summit.kein.org**), a forum which took place in Berlin in May 2007.[5]

In a sense, we came together in the name of "weak education," a discourse on education that is non-reactive, and does not seek to engage in everything that we know fully well to be wrong with education—its constant commoditization, its over-bureaucratization, its ever-increasing emphasis on predictable outcomes, etc. If education is forever reacting to the woes of the world, we hoped to posit that education is in and of the world—not a response to crisis, but part of its ongoing complexity, not reacting to realities, but producing them. Often these practices end up being low-key, uncategorizable, non-heroic, and certainly not uplifting, but nevertheless immensely creative.

Why education and why at that particular moment?

This focus on education provided a way to counter the eternal lament of how bad things are—how bureaucratized, how homogenized, how understaffed and underfunded, how awful the demands of the Bologna Accord are with its homogenizing drives, how sad the loss of local traditions is, etc. Though not without its justifications, this voice of endless complaint serves to box education into the confines of a small community of students and education professionals. How, then, to paraphrase Roger Buergel, can education become more? How can it be more than the site of shrinkage and disappointment?

And why at this particular moment? Because, with Bologna and all its discontents, this moment is also seeing an unprecedented number of self-organized forums emerging outside institutions, as well as self-empowered departures inside institutions. Propelled from within rather than boxed in from outside, education here becomes the site of a coming-together of the odd and unexpected—shared curiosities, shared subjectivities, shared sufferings, and shared passions congregate around the promise of a subject, an insight, a creative possibility. Education is by definition processual—involving a low-key transformative process, it embodies duration and the development of a contested common ground.

Here was perhaps one of the most important leaps from *Academy* to *Summit*—an understanding of "education" as a platform that could signal a politics, a platform that could bring together unexpected and momentary

conjunctions of academics, art world citizens, union organizers, activists, and many others in such a way that they could see themselves and their activities reflected within the broadly defined field of "education."

At its best, education forms collectivities—many fleeting collectivities that ebb and flow, converge and fall apart. These are small ontological communities propelled by desire and curiosity, cemented together by the kind of empowerment that comes from intellectual challenge. The whole point in coming together out of curiosity is to not have to come together out of identity: *we* the readers of J. L. Nancy encounter *we* the migrant or *we* the culturally displaced or *we* the sexually dissenting—all of these being one and the same *we*. So at this moment in which we are so preoccupied with how to participate and how to take part in the limited space that remains open, education signals rich possibilities of coming together and participating in an arena not yet signaled.

Having liberated myself from the arena of strong, redemptive, missionary education, I would like to furnish the field with the following terms:

Notions of **potentiality** and **actualization** offer a capacity to replace the reorganization of education with ideas concerning distribution and dissemination. This speaks to an idea that there might be endless possibilities within us that we might never be able to bring to successful fruition. "Academy" becomes the site of this duality, of an understanding of "I can" as always, already yoked to an eternal "I can't." If this duality is not paralyzing, which I do not think it is, then it has possibilities for an understanding of what it is about an "academy" that can actually become a model for "being in the world." Perhaps there is an excitement in shifting our perception of a place of education or training to one which is not pure preparation, pure resolution. "Academy" might instead encompass fallibility, which can be understood as a form of knowledge production rather than one of disappointment.

Equally, I would suggest education to be the site of a shift away from a culture of **emergency** to one of **urgency**. Emergency is always reactive to a set of state imperatives that produce an endless chain of crises, mostly of our own making. So many of us have taken part in miserable panels about "the crisis in education." A notion of urgency presents the possibility of producing an understanding of what the crucial issues are, so that they may become driving forces. The morning after George W. Bush was re-elected president, my classroom moved swiftly from amazement to a discussion about why electoral forums were not the arena of political participation, and what they might actually represent instead—a move from an emergency to an urgency.

Perhaps most importantly, I want to think about education not through the endless demands that are foisted on both culture and education to be **accessible**, to provide a simple entry point to complex ideas. The Tate Modern comes to mind as an example of how a museum can function as an entertainment machine that celebrates "critique lite." Instead, I want to think of education in terms of the places to which we have **access**. I understand this access as the ability to formulate one's own questions, as opposed to simply answering those that are posed to you in the name of an open and participatory democratic process. After all, it is very clear that those who formulate the questions produce the playing field.

Finally, I would like to think of education as the arena in which **challenge** is written into our daily activity, where we learn and perform critically informed challenges that don't aim at undermining or overtaking. When political parties, courts of law, or any other authority challenges a position, it is done with the aim of delegitimizing with a better one, of establishing absolute rights and wrongs. In education, when we challenge an idea, we suggest that there is room for imagining another way of thinking. By doing so in a way that does not overcome the original idea, we don't expend energy forming opposition, but reserve it for imagining alternatives. At a conference I attended, Jaad Isaac, a Palestinian geographer, produced transportation maps of the Israeli occupation of the West Bank that had an almost mind-blowing clarity to them. It made me think of what gargantuan energies had to be put into turning the evil chaos of that occupation into the crystalline clarity of those maps—energies that were needed in order to invent Palestine. In their pristine clarity, the maps performed a challenge to the expenditure of energies as a response to an awful situation. If education can release our energies from what needs to be opposed to what can be imagined, or at least perform some kind of negotiation of that, then perhaps we have an education that is more.

Turn

Quite a long time ago, when I had just finished my Ph.D. and was embarking on a postdoc and a radical change of path towards critical theory, I ran across my very first Art History professor on the street. This was unexpected—my being in a different country and city with the promise of another life on the horizon were not conducive at that moment to knowing how to deal elegantly with that which I had left behind. Having asked me what I was up to, he listened patiently as I prattled away, full of all the new ideas and possibilities that had just opened up to me. My professor was a kind, humane, and generous scholar of the old school. He may have been somewhat patrician, but he had an intuitive grasp of changes shaping the world around him. At the end of my excited recitative he looked at me and said, "I do not agree with what you are doing and I certainly don't agree with how you are going about it, but I am very proud of you for doing this." It is hard now to imagine my confusion at hearing this, yet I realize with hindsight that he was recognizing a "turn" in the making,

rather than expressing concern or hostility for what it was rejecting or espousing. Clearly this man, who had been a genuinely great teacher of things I could no longer be excited by, saw learning as a series of turns.

In a "turn," we shift *away* from something or *towards* or *around* something, and it is *we* who are in movement, rather than *it*. Something is activated in us, perhaps even actualized, as we move. And so I am tempted to turn away from the various emulations of an aesthetics of pedagogy that have taken place in so many forums and platforms around us in recent years, and towards the very drive to *turn.*

So my question here is twofold, concerning on the one hand the capacity for artistic and curatorial practices to capture the dynamics of a turn, and on the other, the kind of drive being released in the process.

In the first instance, this might require that we break somewhat with an equating logic that claims that process-based work and open-ended experimentation creates the speculation, unpredictability, self-organization, and criticality that characterize the understanding of education within the art world. Many of us have worked with this understanding quite consistently, and while some of its premises have been quite productive for much of our work, it nevertheless lends itself far too easily to emulating the institutions of art education, with its archives, libraries, and research-based practices as primary representational strategies. On the one hand, moving these principles into sites of contemporary art display signaled a shift away from the structures of objects and markets and dominant aesthetics towards an insistence on the unchartable, processual nature of any creative enterprise. Yet on the other hand, it has led all too easily into the emergence of a mode of "pedagogical aesthetics" in which a table in the middle of the room, a set of empty bookshelves, a growing archive of assembled bits and pieces, a classroom or lecture scenario, or the promise of a conversation have taken away the burden to rethink and dislodge daily those dominant burdens ourselves.[6] Having myself generated several of these modes, I am not sure that I want to completely dispense with them, because the drive that they made manifest—to force these spaces to be more active, more questioning, less insular, and more challenging—is one to which I would like to stay faithful. In particular, I would not wish to give up the notion of "conversation," which to my mind has been the most significant shift within the art world over the past decade.

In the wake of Documenta X and Documenta XI, it became clear that one of the most significant contributions that the art world had made to the culture at large has been the emergence of a conversational mode hosted by it.[7] In part, this has had to do with the fact that there already exists a certain amount of infrastructure within the art world, where there are available spaces, small budgets, existing publicity machines, recognizable formats such as exhibitions, gatherings, lecture series, interviews, as well as a constant interested audience made up of art students, cultural activists, etc.[8] As a result, a new set of conversations between artists, scientists, philosophers, critics, economists, architects, planners, and so on, came into being and engaged the issues of the day through a set of highly attenuated prisms. By not being subject to the twin authorities of governing institutions or authoritative academic knowledge, these conversations could in effect be opened up to a speculative mode, and to the invention of subjects as they emerged and were recognized.

And so the art world became the site of extensive talking—talking emerged as a practice, as a mode of gathering, as a way of getting access to some knowledge and to some questions, as networking and organizing and articulating some necessary questions. But did we put any value on what was actually being said? Or, did we privilege the coming-together of people in space and trust that formats and substances would emerge from these?

Increasingly, it seems to me that the "turn" we are talking about must result not only in new formats, but also in another way of recognizing when and why something important is being said.

Foucault, in a lecture he once gave at Berkeley, embarked upon a discussion of the word "parrhesia," a common term in Greco-Roman culture.[9] He stated that it is generally perceived as free speech, and that those who practice it are perceived to be those who speak the truth. The active components of parrhesia, according to Foucault, are frankness ("to say everything"), truth ("to tell the truth because he knows it is true"), danger ("only if there is a risk of danger in his telling the truth"), criticism ("not to demonstrate the truth to someone else, but as the function of criticism") and duty ("telling the truth is regarded as a duty"). In parrhesia, Foucault tells us, we have "a verbal activity in which the speaker expresses his personal relation to truth, and risks his life because he recognizes truth-telling as a duty to improve or help other people (as well as himself). In parrhesia, the speaker uses his freedom and chooses frankness instead of persuasion, truth instead of falsehood or silence, the risk of death instead of life and security, criticism instead of flattery and moral duty instead of self-interest and moral apathy." [10]

It is hard to imagine a more romantic or idealistic agenda for invoking "turns" in the educational field. And yet, I am drawn to these with less embarrassment than you might think one would have as a self-conscious critical theorist working within the field of contemporary art. Perhaps because nowhere in this analysis are we told *which truth,* or *to what ends* it is being deployed. Truth, it would seem, is not a position, but a drive.

To add an even more active dimension to Foucault's discussion of parrhesia, we can also establish that in

Aramaic the term is invoked in relation to such speech when it is stated “openly, blatantly, in public.” So this truth, which is in no one’s particular interest or to any particular end, must be spoken in public, must have an audience, and must take the form of an address.

Foucault called this “fearless speech,” and at the end of his lecture series he says, “I would say that the problematization of truth has two sides, two major aspects.... One side is concerned with ensuring that the process of reasoning is correct in ensuring if a statement is true. And the other side is concerned with the question: what is the importance for the individual and for the society of telling the truth, of knowing the truth, of having people who tell the truth, as well as knowing how to recognize them?”[11]

Increasingly, I think “education” and the “educational turn” might be just that: the moment when we attend to the production and articulation of truths—not truth as correct, as provable, as fact, but truth as that which collects around it subjectivities that are neither gathered nor reflected by other utterances. Stating truths in relation to the great arguments, issues, and great institutions of the day is relatively easy, for these dictate the terms by which such truths are both arrived at and articulated. Telling truths in the marginal and barely-formed spaces in which the curious gather—this is another project altogether: one’s personal relation to truth.

X

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4
Initiated by Angelika Nollert, then at the Siemens Art Fund, A.C.A.D.E.M.Y was a collective project between Hamburg Kunstverein, MuKHA Antwerp, Van Abbemuseum Eindhoven, and the Department of Visual Cultures, Goldsmiths, London University. It took place in three cities throughout 2006 and was accompanied by a book published by Revolver - Archiv für aktuelle Kunst and edited by A. Nollert and I. Rogoff et al., https://vanabbemuseum.nl/en/programme/programme/academy-1/ .

5
The project was organized by a collective – Irit Rogoff (London), Florian Schneider (Munich), Nora Sternfeld (Vienna), Susanne Lang (Berlin), Nicolas Siepen (Berlin), Kodwo Eshun (London) – and in collaboration with the HAU theatres, Unitednationsplaza, Bootlab, and the Bundeskulturstifung, all in Berlin.

6
I say all this with a certain awkwardness, in light of my own involvement with so many of these initiatives. Exhibitions, self-organized forums within the art world, numerous conversation platforms: all shared the belief that turning to "education" as an operating model would allow us to reinvigorate the spaces of display as sites of genuine transformation.

7
I refer to the discussion forum "100 days – 100 guests" at Documenta X (1997, curated by Catherine David), which hosted 100 talks during the exhibition, and to the four Documenta discussion platforms across the globe prior to the opening of Documenta XI (2002, curated by Okwui Enwezor et al.). See *Documenta XI* , exhibition catalogue (Ostfildern-Ruit, Germany: Hatje Kantz, 2002).

8
Another key example is unitednationsplaza, a project in Berlin in 2006-2007 (the exhibition as art school), now continued in New York as nightschool and in this reincarnation connected to Mårten Spångberg's project of "Evening Classes" at the YourSpace.com section of A.C.A.D.E.M.Y exhibition.

9
Michel Foucault, *Fearless Speech*, ed. Joseph Pearson (New York: Semiotext(e), 2001).

10
Fearless Speech , 19-20

11
Fearless Speech , 170