e-flux journal

issue #56

06/2014

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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Editors

Editorial— “The End of the End of History?” Issue One

In the summer of 1989, Francis Fukuyama published his infamous essay declaring the global triumph of free-market liberal democracy over communism as the end of ideology as such. Not only that, but he also claimed the world was on the cusp of realizing what Fukuyama’s mentor Alexandre Kojève called the “universal homogenous state,” which would be the climax of a particular Western idealist tradition stretching back to Hegel. It would be the endpoint of a human consciousness based in accumulative historical progress that also grounded the thinking of Marx himself, who pegged his own philosophy to a conception of time and human advancement as a constant moving towards a projected endpoint. But seriously, regardless of whether this endpoint has been reached, how advanced do you really feel? How many artworks have you seen in recent years that even struck you as being relevant as art? And the insane proliferation of regressive ultranationalist and ethnic or sectarian violence hardly points to historical progress either. This phenomenon is spreading nearly everywhere, from the EU parliament elections, to India, Iraq, Hungary, Russia, Japan, and so forth. The list is endless.

Since Fukuyama wrote his essay, he has been considered primarily a free-market ideologist seizing an early chance to declare the dismantling of the Soviet Union as the definitive moral victory of Western capitalist democracy—a kind of master ideology to end all ideologies. But those who once disregarded him should now look more closely at his essay, because it is absolutely prophetic. Of course, Fukuyama was not only writing as an intellectual, but also as a senior policymaker at the US State Department and a former analyst at the RAND Corporation. And while his essay did not officially reflect the views of the American state, it was nevertheless written by a man who was not only close to power, but also possessed the means to implement his declarations. So if it comes across as prophetic, it wouldn’t be a coincidence. The essay now reads as a crystal-clear blueprint for a peculiarly murky apolitical nonideological condition that has proven to be incredibly difficult to work from—particularly for artists.

And yet what rescues Fukuyama’s intellectual integrity from those who prefer to set him up as a free-market huckster is how he so beautifully expresses reservations about the very posthistorical condition he professes. He closes the essay by writing:

> The end of history will be a very sad time. The struggle for recognition, the willingness to risk one’s life for a purely abstract goal, the worldwide ideological struggle that called forth daring, courage, imagination, and idealism, will be replaced by economic calculation, the endless solving of technical problems, environmental concerns, and the satisfaction of sophisticated consumer demands. In the

> post-historical period there will be neither art nor philosophy, just the perpetual caretaking of the museum of human history … Perhaps this very prospect of centuries of boredom at the end of history will serve to get history started once again.

History is coming back, but not in the way we understood it in the idealist tradition. If Kojève's universal homogenous state (which is probably also the EU) is characterized by unbearable boredom and stagnation, it starts to make sense that the only political horizon available to not only the wishy-washy centrists of electoral democracies, but also to the uprisings and Occupy movements of recent years, was liberal democracy in its present form. And yet we are increasingly bumping up against the utter failure of liberal democracy to account for the bankers and corrupt regimes who commit their worst crimes from within the logic of economic freedom and electoral democracy. So even as we feel the people around us becoming more comfortable making racist remarks, we also start to sense our political consciousness shifting, because it seems clear that the consolidation of free-market democracy is starting to buckle completely. It might be that we are only now seeing how it was a Ponzi scheme all along. History is not beginning again, because it never really ended. Rather, the idea of a homogenous system built on idealism has become unsustainable and has given way to the many identitarian battles that it has had to suppress in order to keep itself going. Only the end of history is ending.

Kojève proclaimed that art would disappear in the universal homogenous state, and it probably did. No wonder funding is being pulled and artists are concerned with strategic withdrawal—everyone is bored sick of the waves of inflationary and depressive episodes of large-scale, bombastic zombie exhibitions. And yet swaths of participating artists pull out after realizing their works are being produced by a weapons manufacturer or the security company managing internment camps. It seems art does not end only because it has flowed into life, but also because its conditions have become too contradictory to be contained any longer. On the one hand, we might wonder whether a Sunni or Shia militia commander would say something similar about the internal contradictions of a puppet regime he seeks to topple. But, on the other hand, it is now being reported that the Sunni Isis militia is partly financed by antiquities taken from archeological digs in the crumbling state of Syria, and we might also wonder whether Kojève's predicted disappearance of art was more of a preface to an entirely new kind of art dealer.

In December 2010 and January 2011 we published a double issue (guest-edited by Paul Chan and Sven Lütticken) entitled "Idiot Wind," which took a strong political stance against the rise of right-wing movements in so many places in the world. What was clear from the issue was that the situation had become unbearable, and yet we were all surprised to find it coming out at the start of the Arab Spring. Now the picture looks a little different and it seems like a moment to step back and try to understand how history and notions of progress seem to be twisting back on themselves. Origin myths are proliferating while identitarian and sectarian movements guided by advances in communication technology might have more in common than we think with the private business interests that someone like Narendra Modi's ultranationalism in India answers to. Enjoy the World Cup.

—Anton Vidokle, Brian Kuan Wood, Julieta Aranda

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Julieta Aranda is an artist and an editor of *e-flux journal.*

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Nina Power

Rainy Fascism Island

How to characterize this period post-crash, or post-post-crash if we assume that the measures taken (austerity, the destruction of the welfare state) have largely been set in motion, if not completed?[1] The deliberate shifting of blame that saw the public sector punished for the crimes of the private allowed various other modes of the dis- or rather misplacement of resentment to be mobilized. The targets are the same as they ever were—migrants, the un- or underemployed, those in need of help or support—but, given that the structures that enabled help and support had largely been dismantled even before "austerity" measures were imposed, there seems little left to attack. Those outraged by people receiving benefits, or those telling people to just get a job, must know that what meager benefits there are do not support a life, and that in many places there simply are no jobs to get. But nevertheless, resentment remains, or at least, somehow, a fantasy version of it can be mobilized such that resentment acts as a kind of looping device, self-nourishing and ever-expanding. What should we call this state of affairs? How best to identify it, in order to redirect or dismantle its energies?

The first element of the post-post-crash could be described as a "post-political antipolitics." Both UKIP (the UK Independence Party who won the European elections) and Britain First (a British National Party splinter group who have almost half-a-million Facebook likes) are explicit in their opposition to politics and politicians as such: those in power are simultaneously elite, out of touch, corrupt, indifferent to the plight of the "British" person (not-so-veiled code for white, Christian, capitalist or entrepreneurial, property-owing, xenophobic). Existing politics on this model is complex (read Brussels "meddling" with rules and regulations), bureaucratic, hypocritical, and lethargic. It matters not at all that the opposition to this has no content at all—UKIP famously have no manifesto in the usual sense of the word, only their stated opposition to Europe and immigration fronted by a collection of members who invariably say something racist, sexist, ableist, or homophobic in public and promptly resign (or often not). Their leader, Nigel Farage, a former stockbroker who narrowly avoided death in a light aircraft crash during the 2010 elections, seems to have based his entire campaign on ensuring that there are hundreds of photographs of him drinking pints of ale in pubs whilst looking like he's just told an offensive joke to some creepy mates.

Thus institutions end up filled with those who want nothing more than to destroy them—the European Parliament a shell stuffed with people shouting about how pointless it all is and how the whole thing should just be abolished. It is consequently possible to imagine every existing institution occupied by those who most want it abolished—prisons are already such a place, or schools, perhaps—but the banks are not yet filled with anticapitalists. To imagine a world in which prisons, asylums, and holding centers were not run but destroyed

by those whom they seek to capture is to rethink the principle of institutions as such: Why *do* these places exist? In whose interest do they continue to exist? What would it take to negate them, forever?

The battle over space, or rather the false image of space peddled by those who seek to mobilize the energies of post-political antipolitics, is the second central element of this period. It is an old story—"we" are running out of room, there are too many people here already, resources are "scarce." This is not a position confined to the center-right and far right of course, as it is also the "logic" of all the major parties: immigration is a "worry" for all of them, because it is *supposed* to be a "public" worry. But beneath the continuities lie subtle shifts in rhetoric and policy that replace one public—that of a people who welcome immigration, who themselves migrated to Europe decades ago or more recently—with an imaginary public that is always against those it deems to be "other."

"Public interest" and the "public good" in the legal sense particularly used in immigration law has seen a worrying alteration in its usage. Prior to 2007, a foreign national convicted of an offence could challenge deportation on the grounds that banishment would not be conducive to the public good, where the public good is imagined as a collective whole where someone has a role or a relation, to labor or family or community. Since the UK Borders Act of 2007, however, if someone is convicted of an offence and has served at least twelve months, their deportation is "automatically deemed to be conducive to the public good and the Secretary of State for the Home Department is obliged to make a deportation order." Thus the UK public becomes a direct proxy for the state, rather than a space where the population resides. A friend of mine was recently polled regarding her political preferences. Asked whether she was interested in immigration, she said "yes" before quickly realizing that this would mean immigration would be registered as a "concern," rather than something she actively supports: thus public interest in immigration is simply seen as the interest in reducing or eliminating immigration. There is no room for any other "public" response to the question. Immigrants and asylum seekers themselves simply do not count as the "public" in such a world, either spatially, temporally, or politically, hence their ostracism as nonpersons in internment camps, and their silencing as residents. Antipolitics vies with politics to compete over who can come up with the most restrictive policies, who can claim to have stopped the most people, or who will act the "toughest" in the near future.

The possessive relation to space—"Britain's too small!"—represents the bizarre position of speaking on behalf of the land, as if the land was something that had some kind of central tie to identity, as opposed to something owned and divided by private interests. This land isn't your land, and if it were you certainly wouldn't need to speak on behalf of it. One of the many implications of the Occupy movement was the way in which it sharply revealed the absence of public space: there was nowhere to go, nowhere in fact to "occupy," no matter how many tents were put down. Meanwhile, libraries are closed, rents skyrocket, and no new social housing is built. Those responsible for landgrabs are ignored in favor of blaming those who have the least relation to space of any kind.

There is nothing really new about much of this, apart from the rapidity with which the directed and stage-managed misplacement of resentment happens. Those who are the most privileged believe that they, above everyone else, are the true victims, suffering from a lack of sovereignty, a lack of enjoyment: the last people who should be begrudged are the first to be hated by those who have the most. The aesthetics, too, are the same as they always were: Britain First, who seek to "lobby, cajole, expose, demonstrate, and organize on behalf of our beleaguered people" against the supposed threat of "militant Islam," are covered in lions, flags, soldiers with stupid hats. UKIP is all pound signs, Churchill, pints, and Cadbury's chocolate purple. Animals are always being cruelly slaughtered by religious others, rather than being killed in a nice British way, one supposes. It is the aesthetics of the rural pub, where Farage feels most at home, of the "Keep the Pound!" sign in a field somewhere in a shire. It is the fantasy that Britain is primarily rural—UKIP's election video features an angry sheep farmer—despite the fact that more than 80 percent live in urban areas and agriculture contributes 0.5 percent to GDP. It is Britain imagined through the lens of feudalism, with modernity disappearing under the muddy crunch of Wellington boots marching to a brass band on the way to church, or perhaps to see the Queen flap her wrist about. It is the Britain of secret courts, of unpopular wars, of mass surveillance, of wiretaps and undercover police officers, of complete unaccountability for deaths in custody, of political prosecutions and the violent crushing of protest, of institutional sexism and racism, of "British values," of private schools, of food banks, of passport checking and "routine" stop and search, of security guards and processions for the war dead, of the mawkish worship of children and animals, of money flowing through the city but never from it to anywhere else.

The feudal shire that is Britain, or rather England, has never gone away. The financial class governs as it always did, just with fancier technology, like *Lords of the Rings* meets Fruit Ninja, an app that the prime minister, David Cameron, according to one aide, spends a "crazy, scary" amount of time playing. All these people go to the same schools, the same universities, have the same slave-owning, land-pilfering ancestors. They all know each other and visit each other's country homes, where they hang out with journalists and celebrities to reassure each other that the world belongs to them. The shire is home, where money and power begin and end. To abolish Britain would be to abolish the shire and everything that follows from it.

The fatalism of this feudal financialization—the idea that

Harold Edgerton, Bullet Through Banana, 1984. Dye transfer photograph, Wilson Endowment Purchase.

however inoperative, destructive, and untenable the continued reduction of all value to economic exchangeability might be, it is the only way—fuses all too easily with the regressive antimodern sentiments of ultranationalists everywhere, where money meets malice and patriotism meets the property market. In the era of post-political antipolitics, where the Futurists' dream that libraries would perish is speeding up, it is resentment that congeals and sticks. Time and space didn't die, as the Futurists imagined. They were merely sold off. Banks live on as if in some perpetual present, propped up eternally by the state, less zombie than Zimmer-frame capitalism. All else can perish, if it can no longer be asset-stripped or mined for the antipathy of a public made cruel by the myth that it is the one who suffers at the hands of those who have no weapons.

A video of a fox hunt played backwards would show the fox chasing the hounds arse-forwards, with posh people on horses running for their lives. I hope they do.

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Design MA at the RCA. She is the author of many articles about philosophy and politics.

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The phrase that serves as the title of this piece, coined (most likely) by someone on Twitter in 2010, possibly Huw Lemmey or whoever @piss_wizard is, perfectly describes contemporary Great Britain.

Franco “Bifo” Berardi, Onder Ozengi, and Pelin Tan

Running Along the Disaster: A Conversation with Franco “Bifo” Berardi

Önder Özengi & Pelin Tan (LaborinArt): You wanted to speak about the European crisis, especially its effect on the Mediterranean, the Near East, and the Middle East. What does the collapse of social welfare mean for these territories and countries?

Franco “Bifo” Berardi (FBB): After May 25, we must be able to say that the “European experiment” is over. The impressive result that the National Front will have in the French elections is going to add the word “end” to this expression. The European Union was based on the alliance between France and Germany, after two centuries of war. Now the alliance is over. After incredible suffering and bloodshed, the French won WWI and WWII against the Germans. Why should they accept German domination now? This horrible result has been imposed by financial capitalism, and its politics is the prevailing sentiment of the French people. The majority of the French do not feel Europe to be their home. This is a geopolitical catastrophe and, more importantly, a social catastrophe.

The financial system has pushed the EU into the abyss, provoking the resurgence of French nationalism: the EU is now a dead man walking. The majority of British people have declared that they want to leave the corpse of the EU, and in different ways the Danish, the Greeks, and the Austrians have declared the same thing. Only the Pravy Sektor (Right Sector) Party in Ukraine seems to be enthusiastic about the future of Europe, and this means that the future of Europe is Yugoslavia circa 1992. Did the global financial system consciously plan this unspeakable catastrophe, whose consequences might be misery, fascism, and civil war? Or is this only a by-product, a sort of side effect, of the war against social welfare and workers’ rights? My answer is the following: in the history of the war between workers and capital, the EU was the last bastion of welfare and workers’ power. This was thanks to the legacy of its colonial privilege, but also to the peculiar history of the European workers’ movement. The EU was the last example of democracy for the workers of the world. Destroying the EU was the last act of the worldwide neoliberal aggression against democracy. Now this aggression has fulfilled its goal. The EU is dead.

LiA: Europe is heterogeneously filled with migrant workers and refugee labor economies. Parallel to this phenomenon, local movements and networks focused on commoning in urban areas are increasingly active, especially in the southern Mediterranean. Networks such as Encounter Athens and Mataora, among others in Madrid, Lisbon, and Rome, embody a fundamental criticism of Europe’s ideology and unity.

Istubalz, Untitled, 2014.

FBB: In general, European politics is now polarized between financial capitalism and the resurgence of nationalism. These are the two actors of the history of the next decade: financial *Ü bermensch*-ism on one side, and identitarian aggressiveness on the other side—that is, financial abstraction and the aggressive comeback of the identitarian body.

Society has been crushed, precarized, impoverished. The only shelter that the social body can find against financial aggression is nationalist identification—just look at the proliferation of micronationalisms everywhere. The Occupy movement was an attempt to reassert democracy, but Occupy has been unable to go beyond the social uprising of precarious cognitive workers. It has been unable to start a process of self-organizing the general intellect.

Hewsel, Diyarbakır, March 2014. Photo: Pelin Tan.

LiA: Are there new forms of resistance coming out of these new movements?

FBB: Resistance is futile, as the mutation is transforming everything in the deep fabric of subjectivity. Obviously, people will struggle for survival, and you can call it resistance. Small islands of temporary social autonomy will resist, but the conditions for social solidarity have been cancelled by the pervading precarity. We should stop deceiving ourselves: the only resistance to global financial capitalism for the time being is the identitarian force of localism, identity, and fascism.

LiA: Recently, we talked about larger movements and their impact on a global scale, rather than local organizations that try create alternative modes of production and new forms of coexistence. Does it matter if those movements are big or not? It is important to consider the kinds of noncapitalist production and labor conditions they offer.

FBB: No, it is not a question of size. Financial capitalism has destroyed the legacy of modern social civilization and is cancelling the conditions for any process of collective autonomous subjectivation. At the same time, it is submitting cognitive activity to techno-linguistic automatisms.

Encampment at Gezi Park, Istanbul, June, 2013. Photo: Pelin Tan

LiA: How would you describe Occupy in light of these recent conditions?

FBB: Occupy has been an exceptional process of reactivation of the social body, fragmented by financial abstraction and the deterritorialization of networked labor. However, Occupy has proved unable to turn this process into one of long-lasting social recomposition. Look at the Egyptian catastrophe. Look at the Syrian tragedy. Look at the wave of cynicism and depression in London after the sudden explosion of Occupy in 2010. The Occupy wave is over. In Ukraine, the dynamics of Occupy have resulted in an outburst of nationalism and have opened the way to civil war.

LiA: How can we read the Occupy experience in Kyiv?

FBB: The political background of Kyiv is certainly different from the other places where Occupy has developed, but the dynamics it has unleashed are similar. The movement has also initiated a process of the reactivation of the physical body of the city, yet financial capitalism and resurgent nationalism have crushed this social movement. Although Occupy has opened a space, cognitive precarious workers have been unable to transform it into a permanent autonomous zone. The same problem was experienced in Istanbul. The Gezi Park movement has been an exceptional opportunity for the reactivation of the social sphere of communication and organization, but the physical occupation of the city has not enabled the movement to stop the process of exploitation and create a model for autonomous subjectivation. The movement has changed the political horizon and daily life for a social minority, but it has failed to change the *rapport de force* between capital and society.

LiA: What about examples like WikiLeaks or Snowden and their opposition to financial capitalism?

FBB: Actually, only Assange and Snowden have managed to provoke a crisis in this totalitarian semiosphere. Judging solely from the effects, hacking is proving to be more effective than Occupy. Nevertheless, there is something disquieting in cyberactivism. Anonymous's actions develop in a nonphysical sphere of relation, somehow internalizing the effects of the abstraction and financialization of life and the dephysicalization of the sphere of communication.

LiA: What remains after a park occupation? Friendship, the experience of the other's body, unconditional relations of labor production, bodies in action beyond voluntary labor, clashes of forms of solidarity, and new forms of communal relations. When we speak of production, even alternative forms of production, we always ontologically refer back to capitalism. We often feel conflicted about this. It is a dilemma. Are there local, engaged, alternative forms of production in which resistance is possible? Possibly a transversal practice of sorts?

FBB: Let's look back at five decades of social movements, starting in 1964, when the Free Speech Movement in California launched the long history of worldwide uprisings that would occur in '68. This student movement was the first uprising of cognitive labor. The ambiguity of technology in the relationship between knowledge and power was already emerging. Fifty years after the Free Speech Movement at Berkeley, we now see that the self-organization of the general intellect is the only prospect for the decades to come. The year 1968 inaugurated an age of conflict, decomposition, and fragmentation in the internal life of the general intellect. But it also inaugurated an age of autonomous cooperation.

Encampment at Gezi Park, Istambul, June, 2013. Photo: Pelin Tan

Aspects of the good life were created in the cultural underground, as well as in some spheres of the larger cultural landscape.

Autonomous cooperation always has to be seen in light of its rich ambiguity. On the one hand, it offers the possibility of exiting the capitalist form. On the other hand, it experiments with new forms of production that capital will exploit tomorrow. Autonomy is not about achieving purity. It is absolute contamination; it is the motor of development and the critique of this development itself. We run on the dynamic of disaster in many ways: from the point of view of the environmental catastrophe, the point of view of the proliferation of wars, of the dramatic impoverishment of daily life, and so on. But autonomy is always running on the dynamic of disaster. And is always trying to create possibilities for escaping.

LiA: Escaping. Modes of escaping.

FBB: In many places around the world, Occupy has opened the way to disastrous scenarios. Think of Egypt, think of Syria. But also in a different sense, think of London. After UK Uncut and the four nights of rage in August 2011, a long wave of depression and cynicism followed. The blockbuster *Hunger Games* portrays the zeitgeist of the post-Occupy generation. Financial abstraction takes over the imagination, but at the borders you can see the profile of the emerging identitarian counter-abstraction, that is, the return of the aggressive identitarian body. The next move is escape. But we are not just escaping from the capitalist trap. We are simultaneously taking part in the evolution of the brain. The new game will be the fight for the autonomy of the brain. The financial reduction of the social body is provoking a wave of depression, and nationalism is a way of transforming depression into aggressiveness. This is the lesson that comes from the European elections:

financial abstraction is fueling the aggressive body of nationalism.

LiA: What is the special meaning of the Occupy movement, particularly as manifested in the Gezi Park resistance? What is the danger of a place? What type of opportunities does it bring?

FBB: Occupy Gezi Park has simultaneously been a movement *against* the devastation of the urban environment, and *for* the reactivation of the erotic body of society—very much like the Egyptian insurrection in January and February of 2011. The reactivation of the erotic body has intersected with the connective wave of self-organization. Commentators have emphasized the role of Facebook and Twitter in the mobilization of both Tahrir Square and Gezi Park. That role is obvious: Facebook and Twitter are normal parts of the daily life and work of the new generation of cognitive precarious workers. What is more interesting in these events is not the use of social media, but this social body coming out from Facebook and Twitter and deciding to meet physically in a place. This has been the high point of the experience. But these precarious cognitive workers have been unable to create a permanent form of existence, of collaboration, and of social power. So many people met in the streets of London, New York, and Madrid, but they did not manage to transfer the energy of the street occupations into a permanent transformation of daily work relations. They did not manage to win the day after.

LiA: What will the conditions be on the day after?

FBB: The recomposition and reactivation of the social body, of the erotic body of society, is the reason for Occupy's existence. But we have not found a political exit. We did not find the way out. So the precarious cognitive generation is now withdrawing into depression and cynicism, and calling it "coolness." Occupy means the reactivation of the social body. But the energy coming from Occupy must be transferred into the real place of production: not just the urban territory, but the bio-financial global network. We have been unable to link these two levels in our practice.

LiA: You describe the general intellect as a new form of labor. But how do we relate Chinese workers at Foxconn, Italian migrant workers in Rome, or Filippina domestic workers in Hong Kong to cognitive labor and the general intellect? We disagree with the idea that the main actors in Occupy movements have been cognitive workers. How can we imagine a heterogonous kind of labor? Can you clarify what you mean by the "precarity of intellectual labor" and its central position in the general intellect? Does it not reproduce an old hierarchy between manual and intellectual labor?

FBB: The general intellect takes the form of an ocean, an infinite sprawl of depersonalized fragments of bio-time: capital picks up and recombines the digitalized fragments of work-time. This is the continuous scramble of the global labor market. These fragments are linguistic fragments, or fractals. Language is formatted in such a way that our linguistic performance is made compatible with the global linguistic machine. But the process of precarization not only concerns intellectual workers. Cognition is everywhere in the cycle of work. Every act of work is submitted to digital abstraction, or to its collateral effects. Abstraction penetrates every fragment of the nervous system of social work. The physical activity of industrial workers is subjected to this same process of precarization. This creates a condition of political weakness for workers: everybody is exposed to the blackmail of precarity. Furthermore, the fragmentation or fractalization of work-time mirrors the fractalization of capital, because capital is also submitted to a process of deterritorialization, abstraction, and recombinant fractalization. A hundred years ago, capital was physically identifiable in the physical assets of the owner. But capital was dephysicalized and deterritorialized when the financial function took over and subjected the industriousness of society to financial blackmail. Now that financial capital isn't based on physical assets anymore, it is all about the virtual possession of abstract fractals, of disembodied money. In the history of money, there is a moment when money is purely a tool of exchange. Then money becomes as an activator of credit. And finally, you have the passage to money as universal mobilizer of human energies.

LiA: ... in the form of, for example, debt. Debt is now deeply connected to these new conditions.

FBB: Yes, debt. Credit and debt are mere activators of social energy, and they force social time to accept any kind of blackmail. Money isn't a semantic tool anymore, an indicator pointing to a referent. Money is a purely pragmatic tool for the mobilization of the nervous energies of society, and debt is the chain that obliges you to accept any kind of blackmail. In this purely pragmatic stage, money is no longer a referential function. It's the function that motivates people to accept slavery.

Istubalz, Untitled, 2014.

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This conversation took place on May 24, 2014 during the workshop Running Along The Disaster, organized by Otonom Publishing and the LaborinContemporaryArt research collective in Istanbul.

Franco "Bifo" Berardi, founder of the famous Radio Alice in Bologna and an important figure in the Autonomia movement in Italy, is a writer, media theorist, and media activist. He currently teaches Social History of the Media at the Accademia di Brera, Milan. His most recent book, entitled The Uprising, was published by Semiotext(e) in 2012.

Önder Özengi is a critic and writer, trained in Anthropology and Art. He wrote his MA thesis about institutional critique in contemporary art after 1960s. He curated various exhibitions such as "Relative Position and Conclusions," Suriye Arcade, 2009, Istanbul, "Never Again" Depo, Istanbul, 2013. He is a researcher in the project "Like a Rolling Stone: Labor in Contemporary Art" with Pelin Tan. Ozengi lives and works in Istanbul.

Pelin Tan is a researcher in the project Like a Rolling Stone: Labor in Contemporary Art (2012-–-2015), which surveys working conditions in art. She is a member of the video collectives Artiklşler and videoccupy, and with Anton Vidokle she codirected 2084, the first in a series of video episodes on the future history of art/artists. Tan is Associate Prof. and vice-dean of Architecture Faculty of Mardin Artuklu University.

Sabu Kohso

Mutation of the Triad: Totalitarianism, Fascism, and Nationalism in Japan

The Triad of Perversity

History repeats itself. There is no event that disappears without a trace. Everything we experience returns in a new context, in a different form; time and space make up a multi-dimensional complexity where everything that has happened is enfolded in collective memory, waiting for the proper moment to unfold itself and reappear as mutation. But the interconnectivity of events is expanding and growing more dense, to the extent that it is exceeding our grasp.

The mess of current political conflicts that are devastating people's lives across the globe internalize increasingly multiplied forces. These forces include not only those identified as left or progressive—mass movements for revolutionary transformation or reform—but also those identified as right or tradition-oriented: i.e., religious fundamentalism and ultranationalism. When struggles for independence waged by ethnic and religious minorities confront increasingly repressive states, nationalism inexorably surfaces in both camps—among the rulers and the ruled. The limits of representative democracy are thereby exposed, and the noise of unfolded history rushes in to fill the void. This is happening not so much within political institutions as across the social field. In other words, previous articulations of political tendencies get jumbled up, and are then set loose by mediatized spectacles that speak to our desires. The flow of images, signs, and symbols is what seems to connect people both locally and internationally. These connections could develop in one of two directions: either towards the reverberating "Eros effect" of people's uprisings (George Katsiaficas), or towards the spreading of xenophobic behavior, discourse, and culture.

In this situation, it is worthwhile to think through the perverse triad of totalitarianism, fascism, and nationalism in order to resituate the ontological status of people's struggles and revolutionary projects. Both the struggles and the triad are born of the mess of existing social relations and conformity, involving the collapse—or original impossibility—of political representation (Marx and Schmitt). They are both ways to exploit fissures within the organization of power, but at the same time, they diverge significantly: while the struggles seek to reorient the situation toward the liberation of all our existential territories—mind/body, society, and environment—the triad embodies the will to be captured by a single territory, that of the oppressor, be it the state, the nation, or religion.

In this context, I would like to offer notes on the triad that provides the basis for *blood and soil* in Japan. This triad persisted even after the defeat of the imperialist regime in World War II, surviving through the country's postwar democracy, and continuing up to and beyond the Fukushima nuclear disaster. Along the way, the triad has undergone a series of monstrous mutations.

A worker of the Fukushima Dai-ichi nuclear power plant is given a radiation screening as he enters the plant for an emergency operation. Photo: AFP/Getty Images.

Virtual Totalitarianism After the War

Totalitarianism is a political system based on dictatorship and bureaucracy; fascism is a form of micro-organization that pushes nationalism to the extreme, toward a single destiny for all; nationalism provides both totalitarianism and fascism with the affective territory of engagement, operation, and control. They often work in ensemble, aiming at the radical extinction of the differences in our existence. In Nazi Germany, the state apparatus was taken over by the fascist machine—rather than vice versa—which fueled the death drive of the entire nation. "How else are we to understand the way they were able to keep the war going for several years after it had been manifestly lost?" (Félix Guattari) So too in imperialist Japan, the slogan of "all die rather than surrender" rallied the nation to sustain the regime of emperorist fascism, even after defeat on all fronts, from Manchuria to East Asia to the Pacific, up until the unprecedented atrocity in Hiroshima and Nagasaki.

Japan's unconditional surrender came in 1945. The fascist officers of the Imperial Japanese Army, who had sought to realize "all-nation death," either committed suicide or were hanged. The totalitarian regime was dismantled by the US occupation forces, which subsequently imposed "democratic reforms," such as the new constitution (the so-called "peace constitution") and land reform. At the same time, however, the occupation forces exempted a number of first-class war criminals and recruited them to redeploy their influential status across the apparatuses, in order to create an allied regime to confront America's new enemies on the Asian continent. Most notably, the emperor himself was excused from being tried on the order of General MacArthur, who grasped that Japan's social conformity had always been reassembled in different historical junctures by summoning the emperor's symbolic power. From the feudal domains, to the modern absolutist state, to the postwar democracy, all forms of sovereign power were able to rule the populace as "Japanese" by filling the emperor's place as the "empty sign" (Roland Barthes) with their forms of governance.

Thus, postwar nationalism was initially given territoriality

Park Dae-im was drafted by the Japanese Imperial Army in 1934 and forced into prostitution in the service of the Japanese troops invading China. She was sent to a euphemistically-named comfort station in Mukden, now Shenyang, China were she received a residence permit for foreigners, which she has kept with care as proof of her past. Photo: Ahn Sehong.

of operation by the US military. Roughly three types of nationalism appeared thereafter: (1) anti-US nationalism, which formed not only the basis for the ideological Right, but also shaped certain antiwar, anti-imperialist, and revolutionary movements for "true independence" from the US, especially during the Korean and Vietnam Wars; (2) anti-communist nationalism, which animated the most substantial part of the Right and the ruling power, at the same time as it enjoyed a broad appeal, from conservative politicians to the industrial and financial sectors to the military to the commoners; since the end of the Cold War, it has become a pro-US, anti-China, anti–North Korea ideology; (3) and the nationalism of commoners' movements that consist of "molecular fascism" (Deleuze/Guattari), e.g., xenophobic citizens' groups, unconditional emperor worshippers, and *yakuza* organizations that work as mercenaries for the ruling conservatives.

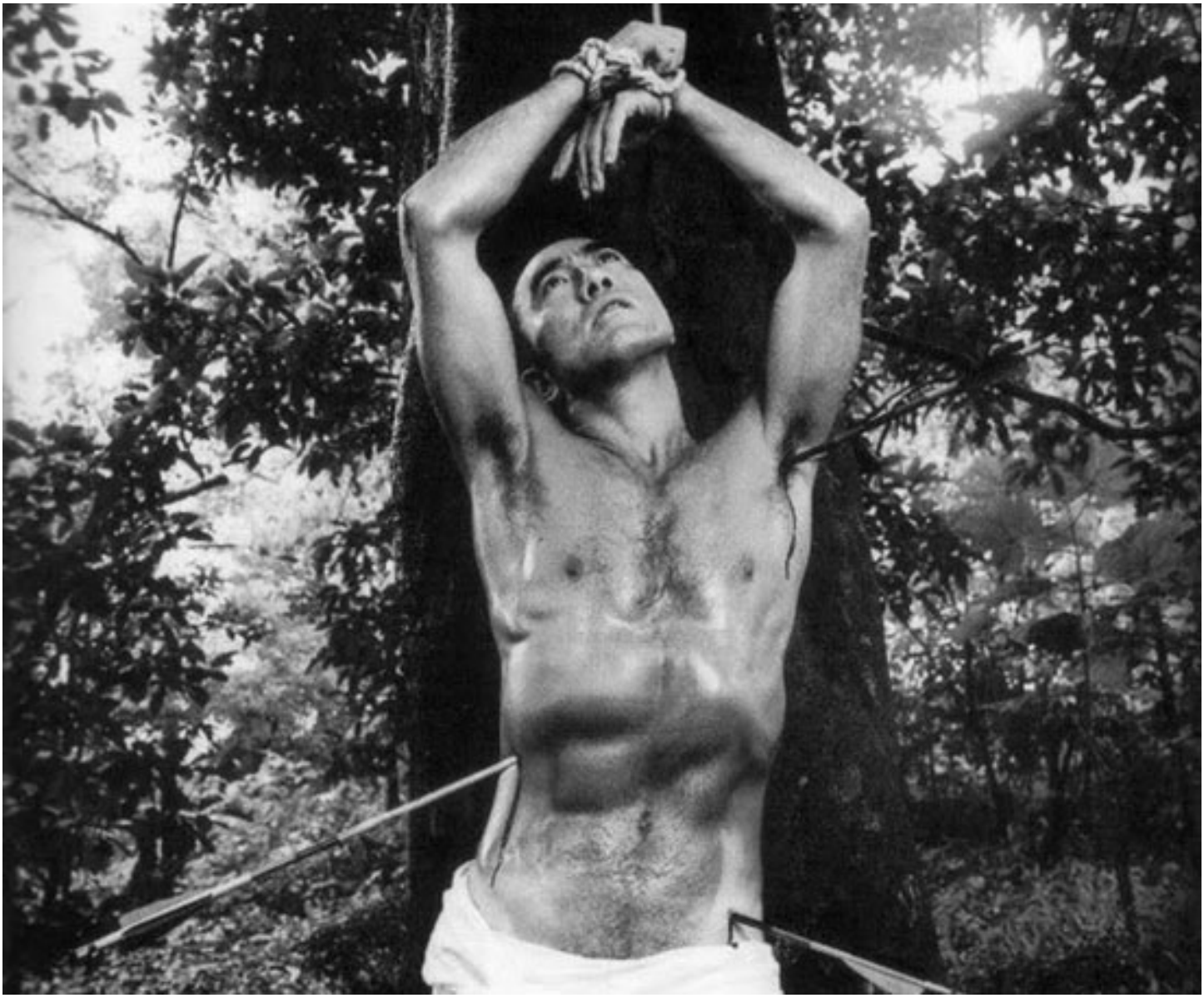
Emperor worship miraculously persists among a large part of the population, thanks to the media. It constantly reports the "private" whereabouts of members of the royal family. By ceaselessly watching them—how they grow up, go to school, vacation; get engaged and married; perform in public; make speeches of encouragement, sympathy, and mourning—the residents of the archipelago are supposed to affirm their Japanese identity. This is an *imposed education* in how to be a proper citizen, by way of disseminating amiable spectacles and narratives about the royal family—spectacles that the family members themselves are made to act out.

Although the totalitarian regime is gone, a totalitarian machine is still at work to articulate homogenous nationhood: this machine is the the so-called "symbolic emperor system." Totalitarianism still exists *virtually*. In terms of producing the machine, one cannot ignore the role of the material apparatuses of the metropolitan network of Tokyo—centered around the Imperial Palace—which both expand and concentrate the circulation of commodities, information, and transportation to serve the gigantic economic apparatus. The impression, shared by many around the world, that the Japanese are homogenous is due to the tightness of the network, successfully realizing a society of *concentrated fashion*—of behavior, ways of life, cultural taste, and political ideas—that congeals the desires of the masses and orients them monodirectionally.

Pornographic Fascism in Postwar Democratic Japan

The restorative images of self-professed fascist groups—orderly marches, war songs, military uniforms, the Rising Sun, and so forth—are associated with the ultraright or with *yakuza* organizations. One of the most significant roles of fascist/ *yakuza* organizations has been their violent oppression of radical labor movements in day-laborer ghettos (these include Sanya in Tokyo and Kamagasaki in Osaka), where they run underground labor-recruiting businesses under the guise of "emperor worship societies." Although their conduct appears to be far from the serene life/performance of the royal family, these two cohabitate in the spectrum of operations of the ruling power, working equally toward the totalization of the society.

One of the most extreme experiences of postwar Japanese history was the coup attempt and the subsequent ritualized suicide of Yukio Mishima in 1970, carefully planned as a media event in collaboration with two of his comrades from the militia he founded, the Shield Society. His case first shocked and then puzzled many across the political spectrum. One ultraleft faction admitted that Mishima's act has surpassed their own radicalism. A few ultraright thinkers praised it. But the majority of conservatives, including military officers, regarded it as too dangerous or a joke. Mishima was famous as a nuanced emperor-worshiper, a right-wing opinion leader, and, of course, a celebrated novelist, writing innumerable stories in a highly symbolic, decorative, and graphic style. At the same time, he was a multi-talented performer; he befriended and collaborated with such avant-garde artists as *butoh* dancer Tatsumi Hijikata, painter Tadanori Yoko-o, and singer/actress Akihiro Miwa. He was also known for his aesthetic and corporeal passion for homosexuality. Certainly, his existence and actions hardly fall into conventional categories of the political. But precisely for this reason—and with his narcissistic death drive and irrepressible desire to exhibit his dying body in extreme agony—he should be regarded as *the fascist par excellence* in the age of media/spectacle.



Kishin Shinoyama, Mishima as St. Sebastian, 1966. Photograph.

Since the bursting of the mid-'90s economic bubble in Japan, the promises of middle class life have been broken. The dream of having a home in the suburbs with two children and a car has faded. Through neoliberal reforms, the precarization of labor has spread across society. The signs of social decomposition have surfaced as frictions within various apparatuses. This situation has reinforced commoners' fascistic drives, evident in everyday circumstances such as disciplining, bullying, and violence in families, school, and the workplace, and in society at large, in the form of the bashing of those who deviate from social norms (or fashions) and the hatred of (especially Asian) foreigners.

The mass xenophobic movement *Zaitoku-kai* (Citizens Against the Special Privileges of Resident Foreigners) was established in 2006 and remains active today. One of its main tactics is to use the internet (especially Twitter) and other media to loosely organize actions that are designed to get maximal public attention. The membership of this group no longer consists of mainly macho male fighters; it now includes "normal citizens" of varied age and sex—normal except for their use of racist language directed at resident Koreans, which they scream loudly in Korean residential areas and near Korean schools.

Among establishment conservatives, the denial of the Nanjing Massacre and of the use of Comfort Women is widespread, involving known politicians and academics.

I call this culture driven by nationalistic spectacles and the denial of historical facts "pornographic fascism." It is based on a dynamic of revealing and hiding, of exhibitionism and denialism: revealing private life (of the

imperial family), one's own dying body (in media spectacle), and the graphic language of racism, while hiding the dirty secrets of history. Pornographic fascism is driven by the desire to perform martyrdom for the homogenized territory of the mass media.

Radioactive Nationalism in a Post-Nuclear Disaster Society

In Japan's post-nuclear disaster society, the national death drive has manifested itself in three main forms: (1) working class suicide due to "Abenomics" (the economic policies of the current prime minister, Shinzō Abe); (2) antagonism toward other Asian countries; and (3) the project to reconstruct Fukushima and support the local economy by willingly consuming irradiated food.

By focusing on lowering the unemployment rate—largely through the introduction of work-sharing—Abenomics is making working conditions more and more unstable and disposable. It is transforming the entire working populace into "day-workers." Many people expect that they will be ruined by overwork at an early age. But at least when it comes to statistics, Abe is surprisingly popular, with an approval rating of around 60 to 70 percent.

The Japanese government is increasingly isolated in East Asia, partly due to disputes with China over island territories, and partly due to provocative visits by Japanese politicians to Yasukuni Shrine, a shrine to Japanese war dead. Yet the government persists in its "nationalist pride" and in continuously serving US hegemony in the region (by invoking the right of "collective self-defense").

In the wake of the Fukushima nuclear explosion, people have been exposed not only to radiation but also to massive spectacles and torrents of information. The strategy of the ruling powers—the government, the electric companies, and the media—is not the same as information control in totalitarian states. It seems instead to rely on a tactic of undecidability. These powers allow a flood of spectacles to be disseminated to the public (for instance, the endless watering of the crippled reactors) while indefinitely postponing any judgment about the truth of information that is put into circulation (especially concerning radiation contamination and its effects on living organisms). It is amidst this spectacle/information soup that the campaign "Eat and Support Fukushima" has emerged as the vanguard of a nationalist death drive, whose promoters include the Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry, and Fisheries; a number of supermarket chains; as well as some consumers. Here, the enabling condition is the social totality called Japan and its economic and industrial control over the wellbeing of individual bodies. Instead of supporting the evacuation of residents from the contaminated areas, the priority of the ruling powers is to reconstruct Fukushima by binding as many people as possible to that unlivable land. This drive is significantly encouraged by intellectual and cultural interventions as well (e.g., the Tourism Development Plan of the Fukushima Daiichi, Project Fukushima, and so forth).

There are at least three territories of interest involved in the reconstruction. First, the reconstruction is crucial for the local economy and local industries; second, for sustaining and reinforcing the functions of the metropolitan network (of Tokyo); and third, for preventing the global economy from sinking. These territories are messily intertwined at the moment. In order to properly rearrange them into a hierarchy (global, national, metropolitan, and local), the coming Tokyo Olympics in 2020 is to provide the best imaginable opportunity. Meanwhile, sustaining Japan's nuclear power—even after the disaster and despite the probable recurrence of earthquakes—is still part of the government's central policy, which is, after all, a must for a global regime that relies on endlessly developing nuclear energy and weaponry. That is to say, the triad of perversity—virtual totalitarianism, pornographic fascism, and radioactive nationalism—is subordinated to global capitalism.

One last word: damages from the ongoing nuclear disaster are not evenly shared among the populace. If the unending spread of radioactive nuclides and their coming effects on life forms can be called *apocalyptic*, then it is a "combined and uneven apocalypse" (Evan Calder Williams). It is experienced differently according to class, age, gender, region, and way of life. In this context, radioactive nationalism functions to make these experiences *more combined* and *more even* among the commoners, while reserving the "unevenness" for the ruling class. It is a call for further economic flourishing in exchange for the devastation of our existential territories—mind/body, society, and environment. The decomposition of these territories has already begun, eroding both our wellbeing and our social relations—which is the true battleground between revolutionary projects and the triad.

This flower was allegedly found in the proximity of the Fukushima Dai-ichi nuclear power plant. The Japanese Embassy has refused to confirm the origin of other such images from the area.

X

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Oleksiy Radynski

Maidan and Beyond, Part II: The Cacophony of Donbas

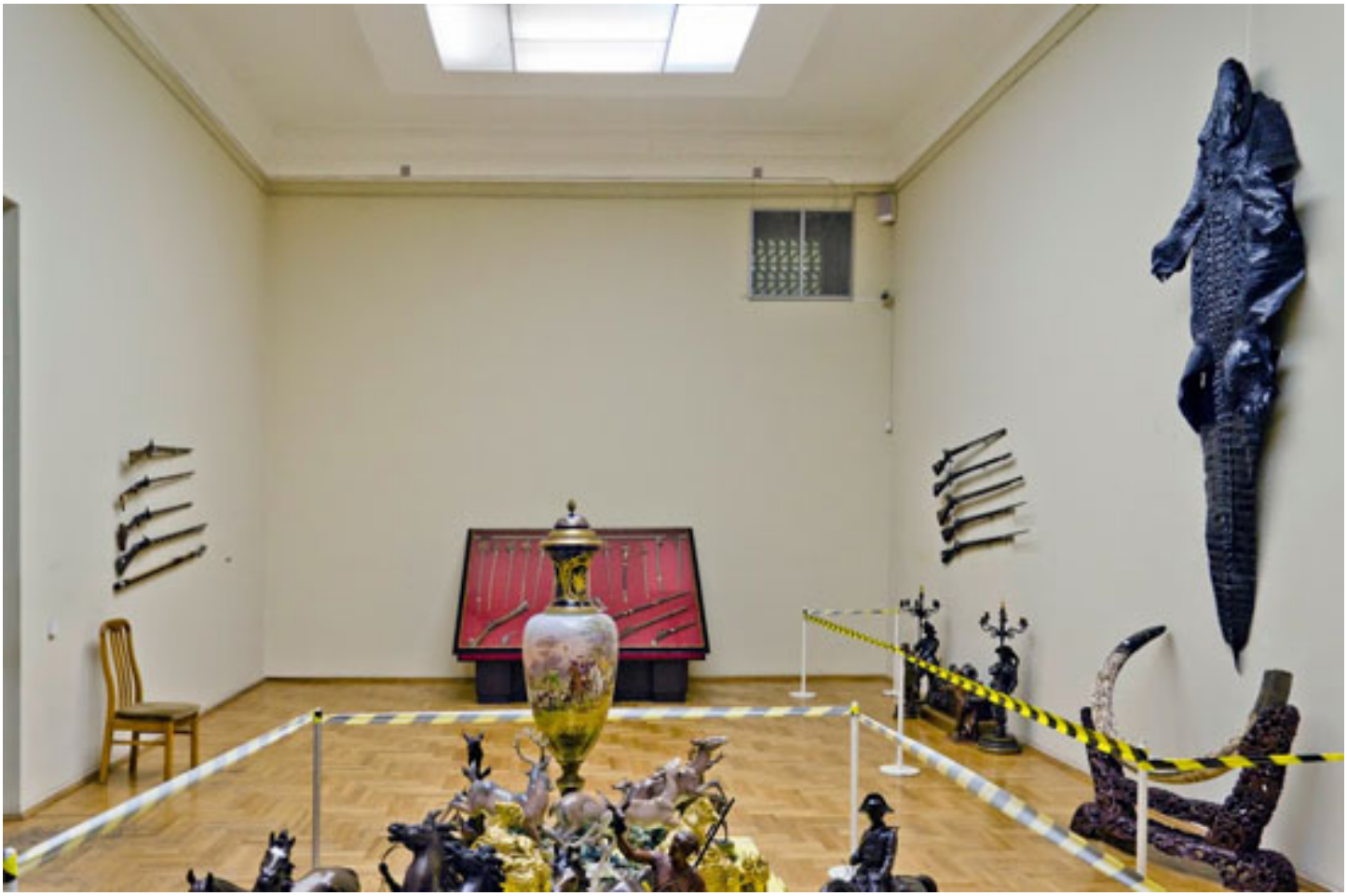
Continued from " **Maidan and Beyond, Part I** *"*

1.

On February 22, 2014, the activists of the Maidan movement seized the suburban residence of ousted Ukrainian president Victor Yanukovych, who had fled Kyiv the previous day. Yanukovych's residence, Mezhyhirya, was notorious long before the fall of the regime for the extent of its megalomaniac luxury. Nevertheless, the occupiers were utterly shocked by the discoveries they made inside. Stocked with a tremendous amount of artwork—icons, portraits, and pieces of decorative art—Mezhyhirya resembled a bizarre museum of looted treasures. These works turned out to be mere leftovers from Yanukovych's art collection; it soon became clear that the president had begun evacuating his possessions at least a couple of days before he himself fled.[1] In any case, the activists and cultural workers who discovered the collection found it significant enough to be taken to the National Art Museum of Ukraine.

When the Maidan militiamen along with the cultural activists brought the Mezhyhirya treasures to the National Museum in Kyiv, amidst the smoking ruins of the barricades that had surrounded the museum's premises for more than a month of street battles, the museum's staff was initially puzzled. The content of the donation seemed dubious at best—despite the fact that a painting ascribed to Jan Bruegel the Younger was also there. What the protesters perceived as sublime works of art turned out to be a random collection of luxurious items, most of which were actually gifts presented to the former president by his cronies. Now these gifts were filling the empty rooms of the National Museum—all artworks had been evacuated when the fierce street fighting with the riot police began. Meanwhile, the Mezhyhirya residence itself was opened to visitors, who flooded its enormous territory in the thousands, exemplifying a bourgeois interest in the wellbeing of the upper classes rather than a spirit of revolutionary destruction. The attitude of Ukrainian revolutionaries towards the palace of an ousted autocrat differed drastically from their French and Soviet counterparts. In Paris and Saint Petersburg, revolutions gave birth to public museums. In Kyiv, the revolution's outcome was an art show.

Soon after the fall of the regime, the Yanukovych collection being stored in the National Museum's empty halls was turned into an exhibition. The show was organized with the assistance of a notorious nationalist militia of Maidan called the Right Sector (we will hear more of them later).[2] A note accompanying the show said



View of the "Codex of Mezhyhiria," The National Art Museum, Ukraine.

that the objects presented there had no artistic merit, and that they were exhibited as mere evidence of an evil dictator's taste. The curatorial statement was full of snobbish, elitist contempt for the "tasteless" political class—supposedly personified by the former president—and seemingly directed towards Yanukovych's lower-class background.[3] But in fact, unconsciously, the exhibition represented the troubled imagination of a whole society rather than that of a particular kleptocrat. None of the works shown at the exhibition were acquired by Yanukovych himself. Rather, it was the others—his business partners, party comrades, occasional guests, and relatives—who chose these objects based on their own assumptions about his preferences and tastes. The complex interplay of projections of desire behind the Yanukovych collection was now being displayed publicly.

At the heart of this interplay was an incredible story of social mobility exemplified in Yanukovych himself—a story that could be dubbed the Ukrainian Dream. His was a story of an orphan raised in an economically depressed, crime-ridden area, who was jailed twice as a youngster for hooliganism and robbery, emerged during the turbulent post-Soviet transition as a mafia boss, ran for president, stole the vote, and was removed from power by the "color revolution" against this electoral fraud. He then won the next presidential election, putting his country on the brink of economic collapse and civil war during the four years of his autocratic rule. His lifestyle of excessive luxury was not just the perverse obverse of the poverty and denigration that most of his compatriots live through. It also represented the roots of the bizarre political regime of post-Soviet oligarchy: unprecedented, and largely arbitrary, social advancement based on the ultimate looting of assets left behind by the Soviet state. Most of those who donated to the Yanukovych collection were of course the successful beneficiaries of this kind of advance—while most of the audience that flooded the National Museum, the passive spectators of this luxurious world, were its victims.

One of the objects presented at this exhibition was a late-nineteenth-century map of Donbas, an impoverished coal-mining region from which the ousted president hailed. It was also home to a vast majority of the president's clan, which had built its fortunes and political capital through the rampant privatization and exploitation of the region's numerous industrial assets. By the time the

View of the "Codex of Mezhyhiria," The National Art Museum, Ukraine.

Yanukovych exhibition opened in the museum in late April, large swaths of territory represented on that map of Donbas were engulfed in armed civil conflict—one of the outcomes of the Maidan revolt in Kyiv. This war was of course inspired by the clash of financial interests, but justified solely by the ghosts of the past.

2.

In 1930, Dziga Vertov completed *Enthusiasm (Symphony of Donbas)*, a documentary film praising the labor of Donbas coal miners during the first Five Year Plan in the USSR. One of the film's episodes shows a fierce anticlerical campaign in Donbas, with Soviet stars replacing Orthodox crosses on the tops of churches, and with churches themselves being turned into museums and workers' clubs. In one of the shots, a procession of atheists removes the treasures found at a church, just like the Maidan activists would carry away the possessions of Yanukovych from his residence.

In spring 2014, a comparable outburst of iconoclasm took place in Donbas, this time directed at the institutions of state rather than the church. Some groups in Donbas did not accept the overthrow of the regime of their fellow Donbasian, despite the fact that their region suffered from his corrupt rule no less than any other. As a result of total impoverishment under Ukrainian authority and a massive Russian propaganda campaign, an active and radicalized minority decided that joining the Russian Federation would be a good solution for Donbas, and a violent protest campaign was launched. The furious crowds of Donbas dwellers (with the substantial support of mercenaries from neighboring Russia) stormed city halls, security services, police stations, and other state institutions, tearing down Ukrainian flags, tridents, and other governmental symbols, and replacing them with Russian tricolors—or with the flag of a self-proclaimed People's Republic of Donetsk.

In between these two waves of iconoclasm lies the fascinating history of a region that until recently was probably one of the most ignored and depressing places on earth, despite the fact (or maybe precisely because of the fact) that it had served as a backbone for the Soviet project from the 1930s until its inglorious end—both in industrial and cultural terms. At the heart of this project

This image is a detail of a Map of Donbas region, on view at the "Codex of Mezhyhiria," The National Art Museum, Ukraine.

Dziga Vertov, Symphony of Donbas, 1930. Film still.

were the ideals of labor and proletarian identity—and the Donbas region was one of their most highly promoted representatives.

Symphony of Donbas marks one of the first cinematic representations of shock labor—an ideology and practice of superproductive physical work. Shock labor was supposed to transcend the capacities of the human body and contribute to the accelerated industrialization of the Soviet Union—and thus to the creation of a Communist society. The Donbas region became a breeding ground for shock workers—a new kind of laborer, ready for endless, voluntary, sacrificial self-exploitation that had to replace the outdated, capitalist modes of exploitation based on market relations. In the mid-1930s, Donbas gave birth to the Stakhanovite movement, a Soviet application of Taylorism named after Aleksey Stakhanov, who had reportedly mined 227 tons of coal in a single shift. But in the postwar Soviet Union, the ecstatic ideology of acceleration from the Stalinist era was replaced by an all-encompassing stagnation. Time in Donbas went by slower and slower until the clock of progress finally froze for good in the early 1990s, when the state largely shut down the region's factories and mines and sold them off to new private owners for nearly nothing. The sites of the shock workers' records of the 1930s were transformed into places of sacrificial self-exploitation of an entirely different kind: illegal, mostly manual work in the abandoned mines controlled by the mafia, which provided yesterday's labor heroes with the most miserable means of existence.[4] Meanwhile, the idea of shock labor was outsourced and implemented elsewhere, in the ever-accelerating cognitive factories of digital turbocapitalism.

In *Symphony of Donbas*, Vertov envisages the conflation of shock work and cognitive labor, and reveals that the point where the two meet is propaganda. In fact, the film itself was often dismissed as mere propaganda, while it actually explores and transcends the limits of propaganda by laying its device bare. The film opens with an image of a young woman listening to the titular *Symphony of Donbas*—a radio program about the fight for communism in the region. Shots of the woman wearing headphones are intercut with documentary shots of workers in Donbas, which by way of parallel montage are rendered her "internal cinema," in other words, emerging from her imagination. The documentary nature of those labor scenes is thus subverted, and the border between reality and fiction becomes blurred. Vertov's montage allows us to perceive political reality as an internalized experience, and turns our subjectivities into small propaganda machines of their own.

Just as Dziga Vertov's experiments were easily appropriated by the Soviet media machine (devoid of their self-reflexive dimension, of course), this machine itself was then swallowed by the ideologues of post-Soviet Russia. To be sure, various means of conflating reality and fiction are part of the everyday job of mass media virtually everywhere, also in the demoliberal societies of the West. What differs in the current Kremlin-backed propaganda machine is that for more than a decade it has not been limited by any democratic procedures of influence and control.[5] Postmodern ideas of reality as a mere collection of narratives were never realized as successfully as in Russia. The media picture can be assembled out of disparate fragments of reality completely voluntarily, given the fact that there is no credible possibility for publicly verifying the media's claims.

Since the Maidan movement began, the Kremlin-backed media has launched a total information war against political dissent in Ukraine. This campaign has proven especially successful in Donbas, a region with strong economic and historical ties to Russia, and where the Russian media is still dominant. If Dziga Vertov's art was supposed to engage the viewer in intensive physical work

Dziga Vertov, Symphony of Donbas, 1930. Film still of a passage portraying anti-clerical campaign underway in Donbas.

via mobilization at an immediate motoric level, the Russian media was able to push the population of Donbas into a kind of ideological shock labor. But the major tool of mobilization is no longer an idea of a bright distant future. On the contrary, the historical memory of the Soviet past became a force behind the second phase of the Maidan revolt—its counterrevolution, dubbed the Anti-Maidan, which took the form of an armed uprising in Donbas.

3.

On May 9, 2014, celebrated as a Victory Day, a group of unidentified gunmen attacked the Museum of the Great Patriotic War in Donetsk, stealing the WWII-era arms that were on display in the museum's exhibition.[6] The gunmen called themselves the Home Guard of a self-proclaimed Donetsk People's Republic and told the museum staff that the seized weapons would be used in their fight against the alleged fascists that are attacking their land, just as they did over seventy years ago. It may sound like the most bizarre case in the history of museum heists, but this episode is probably the best summary of the ideological confrontation induced by Kremlin-backed television in its Donbas audience. Devoid of any vision of the future, this confrontation was focused on the battles of the past that were to be restarted today, as if for over seven decades they were simply on pause and could now be launched again by pressing the "play" button on the YouTube channel of Russia Today. Now, the glorious war of the Soviets against the fascists had to be fought again. This time, fellow Ukrainians who happened to be the followers of the Western-backed government in Kyiv impersonated the fascists. How could this twist ever take place?

The specter of fascism has been haunting Eastern Europe at least since the collapse of USSR. There were plenty of historical parallels that justified the fears of a post-Soviet fascist threat. In the early 1990s, the West had subjected the new post-Soviet states to economic and cultural humiliation comparable to that of the Weimar Republic after WWI. Western politicians and entrepreneurs did not only want to profit from what they perceived as their victory over USSR in the Cold War. It seems that the ultimate (albeit unconscious) goal of the "transition" from the Soviet system to post-Soviet neocapitalism was to punish the societies of the former USSR for their sin of adhering to Communist ideology. This sin had to be burnt out of their minds by means of savage shock therapy and other neoliberal measures, implemented in the post-Soviet countries more radically than anywhere in Europe. The West did avoid the mistake of Versailles when dealing with Germany after WWII, but then it repeated the same mistake when dealing with the leftovers of USSR after the Cold War. As a result of economic impoverishment and political denigration by the victorious first world, a perfect ground for extreme revanchist nationalism was created in a formerly second-world region that quickly joined the ranks of the third.

In Russia, this nationalism is peculiar because it justifies itself on the basis of the Soviet project, which is still perceived as leftist and antifascist, despite its nearly total absorption into the symbolic world of the far right. Russia's apparent greatness was thus based upon its victory over the Nazis, claimed to be a victory of the Russian army rather than Soviet one, which was actually composed of Byelorussians, Georgians, Kazakhs, Tatars, Ukrainians, and many others who fought alongside Russians. Meanwhile, some Ukrainians fought against the Red Army—and this was a great pretext to launch a reenactment of a half-century-old feud.

During the last decade, there was a tremendous process of excavating the ghosts of the past on both sides of the Russian-Ukrainian border. While the myth of the Great Patriotic War was being resurrected in Russia, in Ukraine a right-wing government put in power by the Orange Revolution began glorifying the nationalists who fought both the Red Army and the Nazis, despite being one-time Nazi collaborators. The historical stupidity of the Ukrainian government provided the Kremlin propaganda machine with an opportunity to warn its audiences of the Nazi threat coming from Ukraine, while the Russian authorities were destroying the remnants of freedom of speech in their country, outlawing public dissent, supporting far-right youth organizations, persecuting ethnic minorities and labor migrants, and banning "homosexual propaganda."

If there is such thing as "politics of memory," it is exactly what Donbas saw in spring 2014, when the pretext to pit citizens against each other did not stem from ethnic, religious, or social issues, but from conflicting (and equally mistaken) views of the past. Kremlin-backed media took

Exhibition view at the Museum of Great Patriotic War, Donetsk, 2012.

advantage of the presence of some far-right groups at Maidan and painted all of the antigovernment protests in Ukraine as a Western-backed neo-Nazi coup. When enough people in eastern Ukraine believed this story, they were told that Ukrainian Nazis were coming to eliminate Russian-speakers with the weapons they got from NATO, so the locals should arm themselves. In some places, police stations were seized with the help of Russian mercenaries, and the armed rebellion against the Ukrainian state began. When the army sent troops to disarm the separatists, the initial fairy tale of "Nazis coming back to eliminate us" started to fulfill itself in the minds of those involved.

There's a certain irony in the fact that the resistance in Donbas still claims to be somehow antifascist, since from the very beginning many of its participants openly identified themselves as sympathizers of the Russian far right. The rule of the Donetsk People's Republic in Sloviansk, the first town taken over by the separatists, started with an attack on the local Roma population. In the so-called constitution of the Donetsk People's Republic, abortions are banned, and the "leading and dominating faith" is the orthodox Christianity of the Moscow Patriarchate. The Donetsk People's Republic actually seems like an attempt to reverse time and undo the anti-obscurantist iconoclasm captured in Donbas by Vertov. It's no surprise that the Donbas war immediately became a magnet for history lovers and military geeks of all stripes. The so-called leader of the Home Guard of the Donetsk People's Republic, proven to be an officer from the Russian secret services, is actually famous as a participant in the historical reenactment movement in Russia, known for his love of monarchy. He had been an active participant in numerous historical reconstructions of the Russian Civil War before he actually became a military commander in real life. It seems that history no longer repeats itself as farce. It repeats itself as historical reenactment.

P.S.

In March 2014, weeks before heavy fighting started in the Donbas region between the Ukrainian army and local separatists joined by mercenaries from Russia, I went to a small Donbas town known for its huge salt mine, which now serves as an army weapons warehouse. The entrance to the mine was surrounded by an Anti-Maidan protest

Dziga Vertov, Symphony of Donbas, 1930. Film still.

camp opposing the possible transport of weapons from the mine, weapons that allegedly could be used by the army against the protesters in Donbas. Most of the weapons stored in the mine were said to date back to WWII, although they still seem to be fit for fighting. Everyone I talked to in the camp (like nearly all the dissenters in Donbas) was sure that the government wanted to hand over these weapons to an obscure post-Maidan militia called the Right Sector. Why them? From the very beginning of the Maidan movement, this newly founded, loose coalition of marginal far-right sects became the darling of each and every Kremlin-backed media outlet, which reported on every one of the group's provocative moves. The group thus became a nightmare for many Eastern Ukrainians opposed to Maidan and loyal to Russian TV. Its actual role in Ukrainian politics is very hard to determine, because it hardly exists anywhere outside these media reports. The group boasts from two to three hundred members, and its candidate in the presidential election of 2014 won around 1 percent of the vote.7 Social media analysts said that its swift rise in popularity during the Maidan uprising bore clear signs of very professional web promotion. When standing at a checkpoint together with some pro-Russian activists who were staring into the misty Donbas steppe, waiting for the armed units of the Right Sector to arrive, I asked myself what those much-feared warmongers were doing at that time. Maybe they were actually preparing for an exhibition at the National Art Museum of Ukraine?

X

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recently been published in *Soviet Modernism 1955-1991: Unknown Stories* (ed. by Katharina Ritter, Ekaterina Schapiro-Obermair, and Alexandra Wachter, 2012), *Post-Post-Soviet?: Art, Politics, and Society in Russia at the Turn of Decade* (ed. by Marta Dziewianska, Ilya Budraitskis, and Ekaterina Degot, 2013); *Sweet Sixties: Spirits and Specters of a Parallel Avant-Garde* (ed. by Ruben Arevshatyan and Georg Schöllhammer, 2014). His latest films include *Incident in the Museum* (2013), *Ukraine Goes To War* (with Tomas Rafa, 2014), and *Integration* (2014).

1
CCTV footage from Mezhyhirya proves that Yanukovych was already packing his bags during the negotiations on the resolution of the Ukraine crisis that he held with the French, German, and Polish foreign ministers on February 20–21, 2014. Some suggested that Yanukovych had to flee Kyiv because the agreement arranged by the international negotiators (which included limitations on presidential power and early elections) was broken by the opposition. But Mezhyhirya's evidence proves that Yanukovych was about to flee anyway, with the intention of creating a pretext to undermine the agreement because of alleged security concerns.

2
See the National Museum's website http://web.archive.org/web/20140603203921/http://namu.kiev.ua/en/exhibitions/active/view.html&eid=234 .

3
See http://artukraine.com.ua/eng/a/inventory-of-a-dictator/#.U5sSmxagHKG .

4
See the first episode of *Workingman's Death* (2005) by Michael Glawogger.

5
Despite all the shortcomings of representative democracy, it is ironic to see its mechanisms being despised in the West by those who still possess them, while being ridiculed by authoritarians in Russia who have effectively privatized the right to be elected. It's obviously a trap to regard the Russian crackdown on representative democracy as an argument in its favor; according to this view, Western representative democracy is the only "still democratic" option available. But it's far more dangerous to consider the Putinist system as a "counter-imperialist" alternative that could provide opportunities for reclaiming democracy.

6
"The Great Patriotic War" is the name given to WWII in the Soviet Union. According to Soviet history, the Great Patriotic War started in 1941, with the German attack on the USSR, rather than in 1939, with the division of Poland. (In this way, Soviet historiography tries to conceal the fact that the USSR made a deal with the German Nazis before the start of WWII to divide Poland.)

Oxana Timofeeva

The End of the World: From Apocalypse to the End of History and Back

> Well, Prince, so Genoa and Lucca are now just family estates of the Buonapartes. But I warn you, if you don't tell me that this means war, if you still try to defend the infamies and horrors perpetrated by that Antichrist—I really believe he is Antichrist—I will have nothing more to do with you and you are no longer my friend, no longer my "faithful slave," as you call yourself!
> —Leo Tolstoy, *War and Peace*[1]

Both the history of the present and psychoanalysis teach us that at the beginning there was a traumatic event, or a series of traumatic events, to which our experience never stops referring. There is something missing, however, in this post-traumatic approach. There is some insufficiency here. What do historians say where collective traumas such as wars, the Holocaust, or genocide are concerned? Normally, they express their belief that these traumas can be worked out, that the function of memory is to shed light on these events, to make us aware and conscious of them, and thus to prevent their repetition in the future. In its turn, psychoanalysis, at least in its obvious, clinical form, addresses an individual traumatic experience, which declares itself through a series of symptoms, and which can potentially be cured. This is of course a simplification, but I just want to be clear that there is something these scientific practices have in common—namely, a certain idea of the present, which can be cured, and of the future, which by this remedy can be saved. In both cases, however, a reference to the traumatic past is necessary—without this, recovery or redemption is impossible.

I propose, instead of trauma, to talk about catastrophe. The difference between the two is that one cannot really recover after a catastrophe, as one normally recovers after a trauma. Catastrophe is meta-traumatic. It happens absolutely: at the beginning there is—there was—always already the end. Catastrophe defines the borders of a collective and the true sense of what we call history. By catastrophe I mean, of course, what people do to other people or to nature, and what nature or gods do to people: wars, genocide, bomb explosions, hurricanes, earthquakes, volcanic eruptions, but also certain legendary events, like the expulsion of humans from Paradise, the Flood, and of course, the Apocalypse. Above all, I am thinking about the catastrophe of one's own existence, this apocalypse of the now—the irredeemable nature of a single present moment. You cannot change anything; the worst is what just happened: your beloved just died, your child just died, a giraffe in the zoo just died, god died, too, you yourself just died or woke up in your bed in the body of an uncanny insect, like Kafka's Gregor

Film still from Sharknado, 2013.

Samsa.

As opposed to what is usually said, catastrophe's time is not in the future, but in the present, which we can only grasp as the past, because it flows, just as the waters of the Flood: time itself is catastrophic. Catastrophe is what already happened, no matter how long ago—it happened in prehistory, or it's happening right now, although people are still expecting some bigger, ultimate catastrophe in the future, as if the previous ones did not really count. I want to make this point as clear as possible. Our collective imagination, overwhelmed by all kinds of pictures and scenarios of a future final collapse—be it another world war, Armageddon, an alien invasion, an epidemic or a pandemic, a zombie virus, a robot uprising, an ecological or natural catastrophe—is nothing but projections of this past-present. We project onto the future what we cannot endure as something which already occurred, or which is happening now. We still believe that the worst is yet to come—it is a perspective, but not a reality, and therefore our reality is still not that bad. A fear of the future and anxiety about some indefinite event ("we will all die") is easier to suffer than a certain, irreparable, and irreversible horror that has just happened ("we are all already dead").

There is, however, a difference between reality (which is still not that bad) and the real. There are two times: the time of so-called reality, and real, or catastrophic, time, which flows, irreversibly, like music. The time of so-called reality gives us a delusion of the present and the future, to which we are dedicated and where we believe there is salvation. We look to the future and for the future; we have visions of future catastrophes, and these visions prevent us from grasping the catastrophe of the real, or the real catastrophe, which just happens. Only Walter Benjamin's angel, Angelus Novus from Klee's painting, sees history as "one single catastrophe," at which he looks back with horror: "The angel would like to stay, awaken the dead, and make whole what has been smashed. But a storm is blowing from Paradise; it has got caught in his wings with such violence that the angel can no longer close them."[2]

An early and well-known version of the final worldwide catastrophe is presented in chapters 6–8 of Genesis. You all know the story: at a certain moment, God regretted what he had created, because people committed too much sin. He decided to destroy everything, to erase all flesh from the face of the earth in order to give humanity another chance. Although animals didn't commit any sins, they too had to share this destiny. Along with his family, Noah was obliged by God to take along animals of all species—of every clean animal by sevens, male and female, and of every unclean animal by couples, male and female.

In some paintings dedicated to this story, we see the ark, Noah's family, and an enormous crowd of animals queuing to get in. Perhaps there was panic, like in our apocalyptic movies where there is a very limited transport vessel and an unlimited number of people trying to board it. It is the only way to be saved from the virus, from the zombie attack, or, just like in Noah's case, from some global natural disaster: two, four, six, seven—"No, sorry," Noah may say to the last in line, "we have enough of your kind."

Jan Brueghel the Elder, Noah's Ark , c. sixteenth century. Oil on panel.

Film still from Darren Aronofsky's Noah, 2014.

The last of each species enters, the doors of the ship are closed, the abyss of the sky opens, and cold waters cover the earth.

In the recent American film version of this story by Darren Aronofsky, the eponymous Noah (Russell Crowe) doesn't really get any direct instructions from God. He only gets signs, which he decodes in his own way, and perhaps incorrectly. From the very beginning, when he starts to build the ship, until the end, when he desperately goes on drinking upon arrival, he is constantly doubting his interpretation of God's will. At a certain point, all of the preselected animals, already in order, simply come to the ark and occupy their respective places. Of course, God cannot talk directly to this Noah, as he did to the other Noah of Genesis, because this new Noah is supposed to be a man of free choice—a true American who will save the world. What is interesting about the film is one of Noah's dream-like visions: a water column full of dead and dying, drowning bodies of humans and other animals. That's how a catastrophe might really look from inside, from the point of view of the one who is there in the water—here is a girl, hands up, here is a small elephant, a snake, a mess of beasts of all sizes, all slightly losing their power of resistance and going to the bottom, together with plants, fragments of things, and debris.

Most often we tend to identify ourselves with those who will be saved. We think of ourselves as one of those chosen seven of our species who were taken onboard—one of those who managed to go through the holy police cordon, behind which the damned, the sinners, the infected, the losers, and all the others were left. In our reality-time imagination we all belong to Noah's family; we look at the disaster from outside, from the ark, so that only the water's surface can be seen, and not what is going on in its depths—in the real-time of the catastrophe. It still did not happen to us, it happened to someone else, and for those in the water, it's really happening—that's why I say that they are living through, or rather dying through, a real, or catastrophic, time. In reality-time, in turn, the waters are still coming closer and closer, the catastrophe can and will happen, and we need to be prepared for it—at least that's what popular Christian culture teaches us, constantly bringing us new material for daydreaming about our disastrous future (in which, if we are good enough, we will be finally saved).

Some people are still trying to search for signs of a forthcoming apocalypse in the Book of Revelation, the final book of the New Testament, as if ignoring the fact that someone named John, the author of this book, dating approximately from the first century AD, proclaimed that "the time is at hand, all this will happen shortly." Although all the relevant data are encoded according to an opaque biblical numerology, most researchers who address this question seem to agree that the number of the beast of the Apocalypse—a numerical version of the Antichrist—points to the name of Nero the Emperor of Rome, who, together with Domitian, was known as a very cruel dictator, massacring and persecuting early Christian communities. As Engels indicates in his short essay on the Book of Revelation (1883), with a reference to Ernst Renan, these communities in that era "were rather like local sections of the International Working Men's Association."[3] The author of the book was himself most likely one of the victims of this mass repression, and he wrote this book on Patmos Island, to which he was exiled by the Romans for believing in "the word of God and for the testimony of Jesus Christ."[4]

The very word *Apokalypsis*, from the Koine Greek, means "unveiling" or "revelation." It unveils and reveals the truth about a certain reality. As far as it unveils (i.e., unveils what is), etymologically, the apocalypse is always now. "How Christianity looked in 68 [AD] we can here see as in a mirror," Engels says about the Book of Revelation, thus perfectly grasping a mirroring relationship between reality and the real, revealed through this peculiar numerology.[5] In this sense, Revelation is a book on history, which depicts the religious and class struggle of that time, and addresses Christians with a call for solidarity: note that John does not address just anyone; his book contains messages for the seven churches of Asia, i.e., the existing

Christian communities of his day. "The apocalypse is now, don't give up"—that's how one would now translate John's message.

If we believe that John's apocalypse was already at hand, doesn't this mean that, for now, the catastrophe he revealed has already happened, the world is over, and we are now all living in the post-apocalypse? And if the world is over, how is it possible, then, not to give up? Alexander Men, a Russian Orthodox priest, theologian, and biblical scholar, who was murdered in 1990 by an axe-wielding assailant, replies to this question in his lecture dedicated to The Book of the Revelation (1989): "The end of the world is a permanent reality; it constantly repeats."[6] Men interprets it in a very Christian way: there is a catastrophe, and there is a salvation; all turning points in history are apocalyptic, the struggle between good and evil repeats again and again, and the good may even win each time a believer opens the door of his heart to Jesus, who knocks there.

But isn't it true that, if there is no god, a catastrophe should happen alone, without the necessary supplement of salvation? In this case, one can still say that the end of the world is a permanent reality. This will just mean that the time of the real sometimes simply catches reality-time by its tail, or breaks its screen, behind which there is neither future, nor even present. The catastrophe of the real makes the reality of the catastrophe permanent. That's how one would explain (although there are various possible explanations—since the story is true, its interpretation is infinite) the fact that the event of the apocalypse constantly repeats.

One of the relatively secular, modern versions of the apocalypse is the idea of the end of history, presented by Alexander Kojève, based on his (mis)reading of Hegel. While for Hegel the movement of spirit is both historical and eternal, and the end can be understood in terms of the goal of history, which coincides with the dialectical development of reason, knowledge, and so forth, Kojève simply declares that history is over—that nothing really new can ever happen on earth. It seems that there is nothing catastrophic about this version, except for its assertion that there is no more future.

To make a long story short, the beginning of time, according to Kojève, coincides with the appearance of man. Before this moment, there is no time. There is only natural being, or space, and animals that inhabit this space. History starts when, at a certain point, one of those animals turns into a man. The appearance of man as an active, suffering, fighting, and working nothingness will introduce history and time, and in the process, will negate the naturally given multitude of beings for the benefit of his supernatural, ideal goals. Human beings open history, which will be the history of struggles, wars, and revolutions through which they actively change the world. The point is that the end of history should coincide with its beginning, and at the end of History, human beings should turn back into animals. Kojèvian history goes around only once, with no repetition, and this is the history of becoming human, which is already over. To finalize history, man has to create a universal homogeneous state of mutual recognition—a state of the total satisfaction of all desires. At the end of history, man does not need to change the world, to work and to fight any longer; satisfaction is possible here and now.

Following Kojève's logic, this point was theoretically already achieved—after the battle of Jena, since even Hegel saw Napoleon as a world spirit riding on horseback:

> In and by this battle the vanguard of humanity virtually attained the limit and the aim, that is, the *end*, of Man's historical evolution. What has happened since then was but an extension in space of the universal revolutionary force actualized in France by Robespierre-Napoleon. From the authentically historical point of view, the two world wars with their retinue of large and small revolutions had only the effect of bringing the backward civilizations of the peripheral provinces into line with the most advanced (real or virtual) European historical positions.[7]

I must note that, even before Kojève, apocalyptic expectations of Napoleon were prominent, especially in Russian literature and particularly in Tolstoy's *War and Peace* and Gogol's *Dead Souls*. Thus, one of Tolstoy's characters, Pierre Bezukhov, is obsessed with the idea that Napoleon is the true Antichrist, whose name, when written in French and deciphered according to an ancient numerical plate, is the same 666 as the beast of the Apocalypse. The main character of Gogol's novel, Chichikov, travels across rural Russia and literally collects dead souls. People spread various rumors about him,

> among them a theory that Chichikov was Napoleon, escaped from St. Helena and travelling about the world in disguise. And if it should be supposed that no such notion could possibly have been broached, let the reader remember that these events took place not many years after the French had been driven out of Russia, and that various prophets had since declared that Napoleon was Antichrist, and would one day escape from his island prison to exercise universal sway on earth. Nay, some good folk had even declared the letters of Napoleon's name to constitute the Apocalyptic cipher![8]

From Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit*, which was

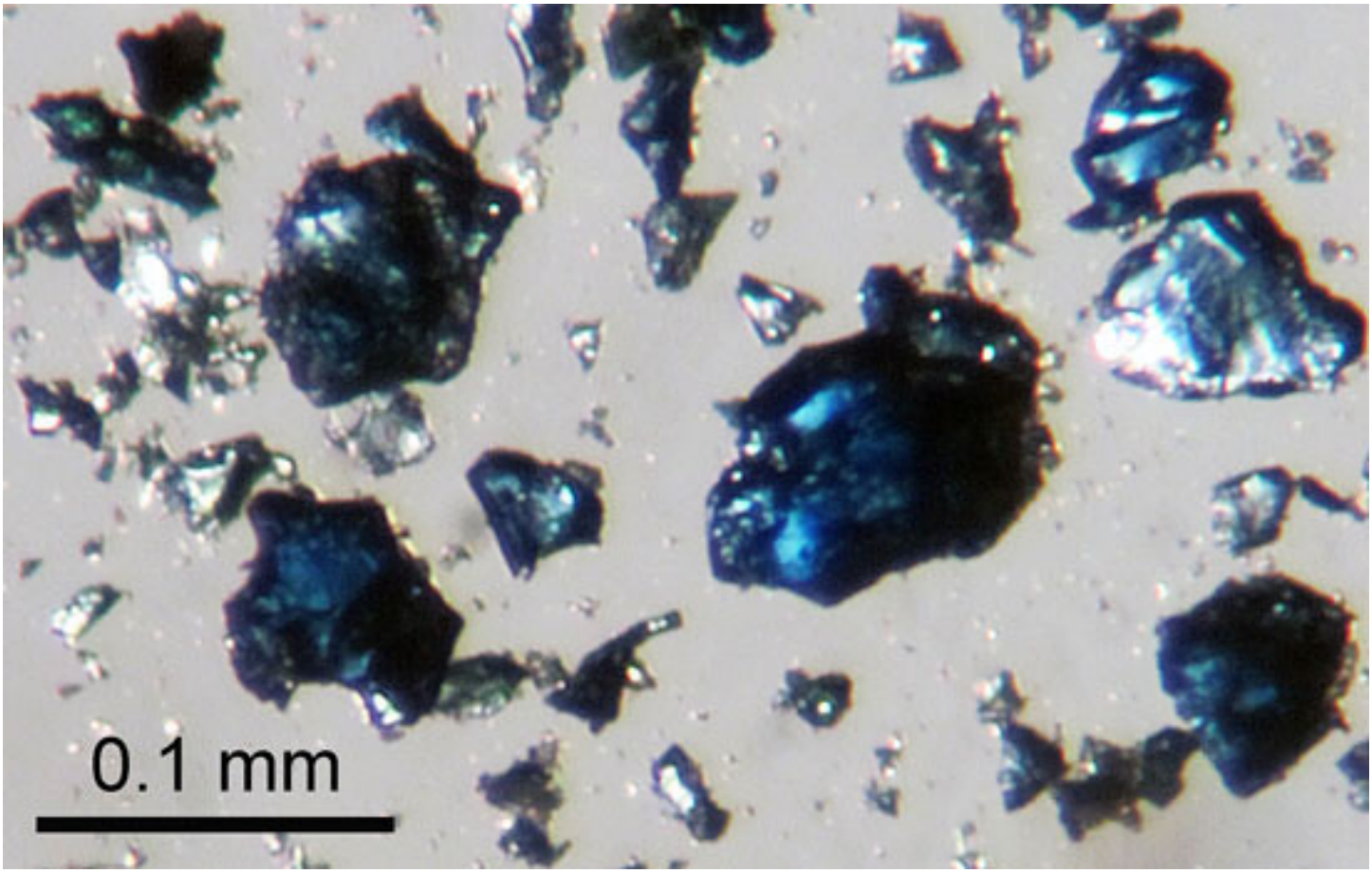
Saint Beatus of Liébana, The Apocalypse of Saint Sever, 1150.

Film still from Kevin Costner's Waterworld, 1995.

finished in 1807, to Gogol's *Dead Souls*, published in 1842, the Emperor-horseman of the Apocalypse took a long journey through Europe to Russia and back, in order to end up, after one century, celebrated in a secular apocalypse by Kojève. The battle of Jena was a kind of Kojèvian Armageddon, where "European historical positions" finally won, with a universal state now on the way—there was nothing left for it to do but fit a certain social reality, find a good-enough state that could serve as a model for further posthistorical unfolding.

Of course, such a state was soon indicated—first in Kojève's own, rather ironic note about the American way of life, with its expanding consumption as a perfect example of human beings turning back into animals (although Kojève himself in fact proposed several other exemplars of this, including Russia and Japan). Then followed the more popular and official version by Francis Fukuyama, who literally and positively identified the end of history with American liberal democracy and contemporary capitalism.

A very clear and simple objection to this can be raised from the point of view of communist eschatology. "The history of all hitherto existing society is the history of class struggles," write Marx and Engels in *The Communist Manifesto*. As long as the struggle continues, history goes on. While for a capitalist ideologist like Fukuyama, the final battle has already been won (and thus the winner makes history his property, which is now commodified, carefully stored, or just thrown off, but never freely distributed), for a communist, Armageddon is still to come (unless it's going on right now). A communist cannot let the enemy have history. Just like the early Christians, he doesn't want to give up: for this reason, he needs to believe that history continues. This makes sense. Imagine if someone stole all the drinkable water on earth. A thirsty crowd is knocking on the thief's door and asking for water. *The water is gone*, he says to them, but they know that the water is not gone, that it was just stolen. Capitalism is like this: it steals water. But imagine if there is really no more water, if the enemy really won and has already devastated and dehydrated the land. This is a catastrophe, somehow opposite to the Flood—the Thirst.



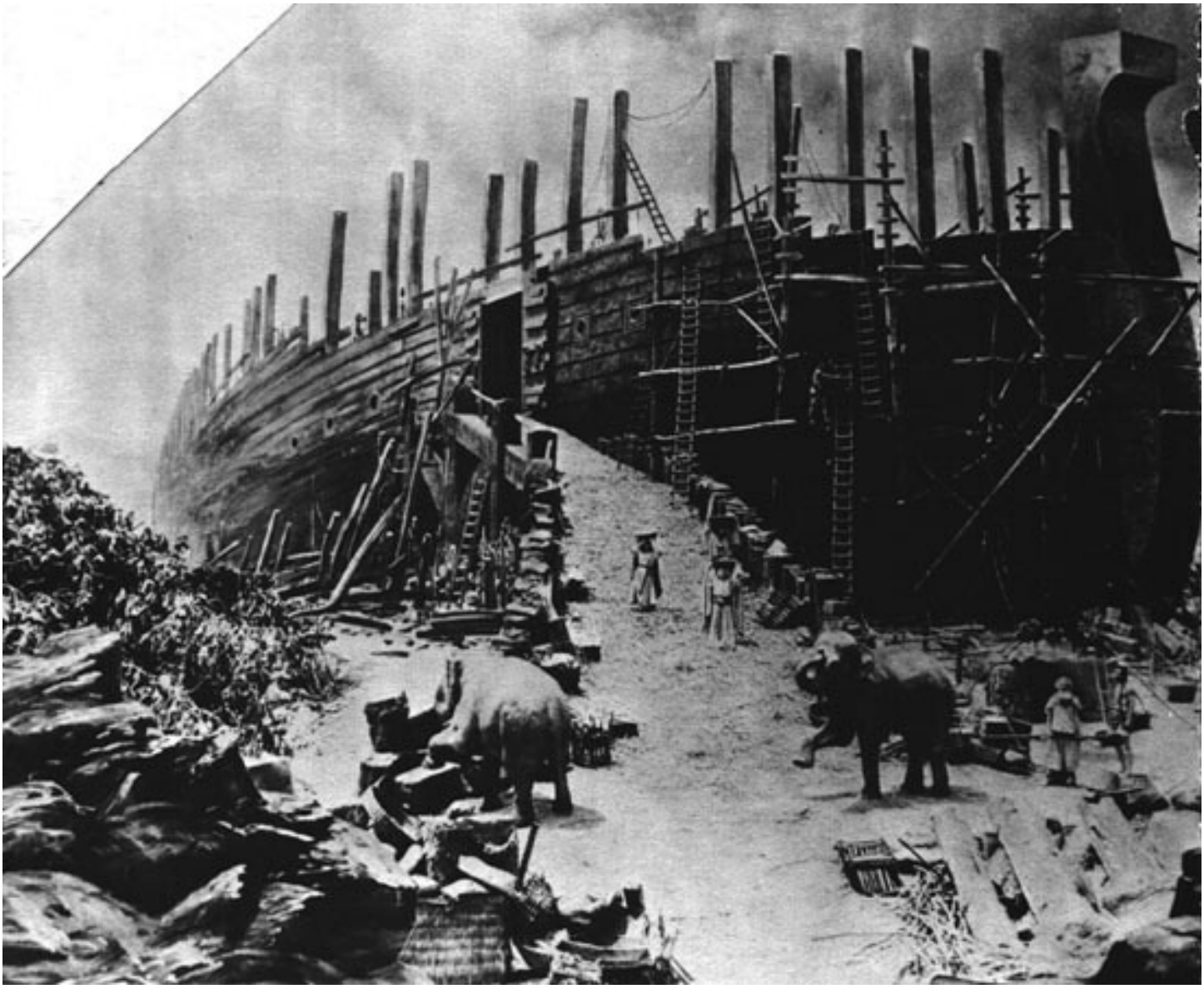
A form of crystalized water recently found at 600 km below the earth's crust has lead scientist to believe a larger reserve of subterranean water is still to be explored at these depths.

There are, however, some versions of the end of history which, I must say, come quite close to the Kojèvian version, although they explicitly belong to the field of anticapitalist thought. Thus, the theory of the multitude proposed by Antonio Negri and Michael Hardt implies that we are now living in a world of global empire. In this world, the traditional industrial proletariat does not exist anymore—it has already disappeared, and instead of class struggle, a creative multitude of singularities develops out of its own life an immanent resistance to capitalism (thus we have the totality of global capital and its immanent resistance). Traditional national states are dying too, giving way to transnational capital, which does not know borders.

If we try to apply these theses to our reality and read them through our reality-time, they immediately lose any sense (although a lot of Western people take them literally and truly believe that immaterial labor has now replaced material labor, and the global has replaced the national). Of course, material workers are still here, they still create all that we have in our daily lives—all those dresses, cars, Coca-Colas. This world of commodities we live in is a result of the highly exploited and totally noncreative material labor of the people in the third world, of migrants, of the poor.

Though they are not socially represented, material laborers are here, and their existence must not be ignored. The nation-state is still here too—capitalism and the nation-state still go hand in hand, and the imperialist tendencies of capital only increase the role of the nation-state, when it's needed (look at Russia and Ukraine, at Israel, at Syria, at the new debates about migration policy in Europe, at the new discussion on identity/integration, sovereignty, and so forth). The multitude and capital are not just two entities existing in front of each other: the undead nation-state stands in between them, and when needed, prevents the multitude from acquiring a class consciousness (that's how, for example, political protests in non-Western countries, where the working class never ceased to exist, easily transform into national/ethnic conflicts). In short, such leftist versions of the end of history seem to be refuted by history itself, which goes on and on.

To this reasonable objection to the postmodern anticapitalist form of the end of history, one could reply



Film still from Michael Curtiz's Noah's Ark, 1928.

that these ideas can actually make sense, but from an apocalyptic perspective: they can be read as a new apocalypse for the left. Another evil empire wins, and another community doesn't give up. And again, like any apocalypse, this one gives way to futurist and messianic visions of a forthcoming catastrophe, followed by salvation. Thus, contemporary accelerationists seem to seriously care about the future; it should be snatched from the enemy's claws. The future should be pushed forward to the very brink of capitalist catastrophe: capitalism will destroy itself and the world around it sooner or later, but our task is to outrun its catastrophic sprint, to pass ahead. (In a way, the "Accelerationist Manifesto" sounds like the plot of an old Soviet science fiction story, where scientists from a faraway communist future go back to the past with a time machine to prevent a catastrophe.[9]) But isn't capitalism itself a catastrophe? Does it not kill workers? Isn't, finally, the number of the capitalist beast inscribed into the barcode of every commodity, as some crazy Christians never stop warning?

Finally, I will mention yet another thinker who raised an objection to both the capitalist and the communist end of history. In his "Letter to X, Lecturer on Hegel," written in 1937, Bataille famously says:

> If action (doing) is—as Hegel says—negativity, the question arises as to whether the negativity of one who has "nothing more to do" disappears or remains in a state of "unemployed negativity." Personally, I can only decide in one way, being myself precisely this "unemployed negativity" (I would not be able to define myself more precisely). I don't mind Hegel's having

> foreseen this possibility; at least he didn't situate it at the conclusion of the process he described. I imagine that my life—or, better yet, its aborting, the open wound that is my life—constitutes all by itself the refutation of Hegel's closed system.[10]

This looks like a very personal objection, even a spectacular one ("what about me?"). Bataille continued to develop this argument, particularly in his *The Accursed Share*, where he links it to his version of political economy. Quite simply, the end of history would mean the end of social inequalities (which is a final goal of communism), and as far as these inequalities continue to exist, history cannot be ended. But even communism cannot really, according to Bataille, effectively achieve its goal—it wants to eliminate differences for the sake of a universal humanity, but humanity itself is divided between the human, the nonhuman, and the more or less human. Humanity itself is distributed unequally—as far as we negate ourselves as animals, history doesn't have an end, at least a happy end. And, unlike Kojève, Bataille insists that we cannot transform into animals again—becoming human is irreversible (an open wound is produced by humans' separation from animality, and this is what it means to be a human being).

Mermaid-clad swimmers perform in Florida's Mermaid theme park, Weeki Watches.

This appears to be a true deadlock, for which only a yet bigger deadlock can provide a kind of solution. What really eliminates differences is catastrophe: in the waters of the Flood, everyone is equal. I am arguing not for a messianic, but a catastrophic communism, i.e., the end of the world taken in its real-time. In this time, the end of the end of history doesn't mean that we still have a future, and that it will get better or worse. It will not get worse, it's already worse. All of these phenomena that are associated with reality and that are supposed to reemerge after the new beginning of history—wars, repression, butchery, and so forth—are really visions of our present zombie apocalypse. The end of the end as the real end would mean an encounter between reality-time and real-time. It would force us to accept the fact of our real-time apocalypse, and to take it over as the only true revolutionary situation—a situation where there is no hope, but only despair. In this situation, we cannot keep waiting for a future catastrophe (with a happy end); a messianic moment of hope, of believing in the future and in the idea that we are still full of life, puts us to sleep, lost in dreams. Only when already dead, and facing no future, do we really have nothing to lose.

X

Oxana Timofeeva is a philosopher from St. Petersburg, and is the author of *Solar Politics* (Polity 2022), *How to Love a Homeland* (Kayfa ta, 2020), *History of Animals* (Bloomsbury 2018), *Introduction to the Erotic Philosophy of Georges Bataille* (New Literary Observer, 2009), and other writings.

1
Leo Tolstoy, *War and Peace*, trans. Louise and Aylmer Maude http://www.gutenberg.org/files/2600/2600-h/2600-h.htm

2
Walter Benjamin, "Theses on the Philosophy of History," in *Illuminations: Essays and Reflections* , ed. Hannah Arendt, trans. Harry Zohn (New York: Schocken, 1969).

3
Frederick Engels, "The Book of Revelation" http://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/subject/religion/book-revelations.htm

4
Revelation (The Apocalypse of John) 1 http://www.earlychristianwritings.com/text/revelation-kjv.html

5
Engels, "The Book of Revelation"

6
Alexander Men, "Apocalypse" (in Russian) https://web.archive.org/web/20160305125935/http://www.alexandrmen.ru/books/apokal/apokal24.html

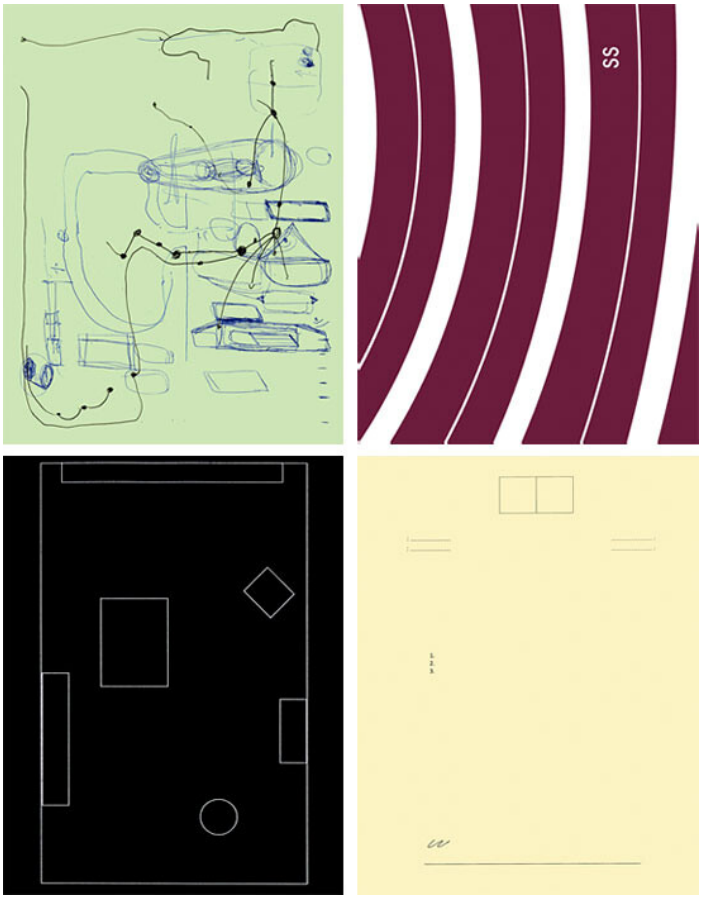
7
Alexander Kojève, *Introduction to the Reading of Hegel: Lectures on the* Phenomenology of Spirit, ed. Allan Bloom, trans. James H. Nichols, Jr. (New York: Basic Books, 1969), 160.

8
Nikolai Gogol, *Dead Souls*, Part 5 http://www.fullbooks.com/Dead-Souls5.html

9
Alex Williams and Nick Srnicek, "#ACCELERATE MANIFESTO for an Accelerationist Politics" http://criticallegalthinking.com/2013/05/14/accelerate-manifesto-for-an-accelerationist-politics/

10
Georges Bataille, *The Bataille Reader* , eds. Fred Botting and Scott Wilson (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 1997), 296.

If you take a close look, you can see it.



Clockwise from the upper-left corner: Plate 204 A History of a Timeline; Plate 199 A History of a Nomination; Plate 250 A History of a Contract; Plate 218 A History of a Floor Plan.

Walid Raad

Appendix XVIII: Plates 22-257

With *The Atlas Group (1989–2004)*, I spent fifteen years working on a project about the wars in Lebanon. I have known and I have seen how the Lebanese wars of the past four decades have affected Lebanon's residents physically and psychologically—from the one hundred thousand plus who have been killed, to the two hundred thousand plus who have been wounded, to the million plus who have been displaced, to the even more who have been psychologically traumatized.

I have also seen and I have known how the Lebanese wars of the past four decades have affected Lebanese cities, their neighborhoods, buildings, and streets. But what I had not considered was how the wars can also affect colors, lines, shapes, and forms.

Some of these colors, lines, shapes, and forms are affected physically, and, like burned books or razed monuments, they are materially destroyed and lost forever. We can never access them again.

But others are affected in a more subtle way. They are not destroyed. They are not removed from view. And yet these colors, lines, shapes, and forms are all of a sudden and for unknown reasons treated by some artists, writers, thinkers, and others as though they had been affected physically. Though they have not been physically destroyed, some sensitive people treat them as if they had been destroyed.

Let me give me you an example: a painter paints for years using only a particular shade of red. She paints monochromes with this red. Monochrome after monochrome. We are familiar with such painters. But one day she stops using this shade of red in her paintings. Were you to visit her studio, you would find it filled with the red paint tubes she has always used, as she did not stop using this shade of red because the color is no longer being manufactured. Considering that artists tend to go through phases, she might simply be in her blue phase, or her yellow phase, or perhaps she just does not want to deal with colors anymore. But then dozens of years later, and tens of artworks later, this shade of red still does not appear in any of her artworks.

Now her family begins to worry. They think maybe she is getting old; that her eyes are weakening. So they send her to consult an ophthalmologist. The ophthalmologist tells her that her eyes are fine, and that maybe she should consult a therapist. She consults a psychoanalyst, and after a few months her analyst tells her she is as healthy as anyone else. However, I am convinced that this woman, this artist, must have sensed all along that the blockage was never in her eyes. It was never in her psyche. The block was in the color. The color has been affected and is no longer available. That's all. And the artist may know this, or, rather, she may feel it.

But then there are instances—as you can see with the accompanying plates—when some colors, lines, shapes, and forms can sense the forthcoming danger. And when they sense it, they deploy defensive measures: they hide; they take refuge; they hibernate, camouflage, and dissimulate. Of course, I had expected that when they hide, they do so in the artworks of past artists. I had thought past Master paintings, sculptures, drawings, and buildings would be their most hospitable hosts. But I was wrong.

Instead, it seems that when some colors, lines, shapes, and forms sense the forthcoming danger, they somehow just leap, or jump, or drift, or somehow "abandon" their present location to take refuge in certain documents that circulate around artworks. They are no longer within those artworks, but in documents that circulate around them.

For example, they might go into a dissertation. In fact, they seem to be quite fond of academic dissertations, especially the ones written by foreigners on a native culture and in a foreign language. They love to go there.

Plate 188 A History of a Biennale

For example, take one of the first dissertations written in English on Lebanese modernism by an American anthropologist at an American university. Many colors came here.

From time to time, lines camouflage themselves in budgets, especially those that itemize the costs of cultural exchanges between two Arab cities: Cairo and Beirut for instance.

Shapes hibernate in letterheads, such as this gallery's letterhead for instance, which is on a letter written by a Lebanese gallery to the Lebanese minister of culture requesting the first Lebanese National Pavilion in Venice in 2005. Shapes hibernated here.

Forms are drawn to the graphic logos of companies that support the arts, providing condition reports, floor plans, business cards, price lists, catalogue covers, indices, appendices.

Now, if we observe the budget, do we find numbers? Absolutely not. These are lines disguised as numbers.

The condition report? No. This is a shape taking refuge within a condition report.

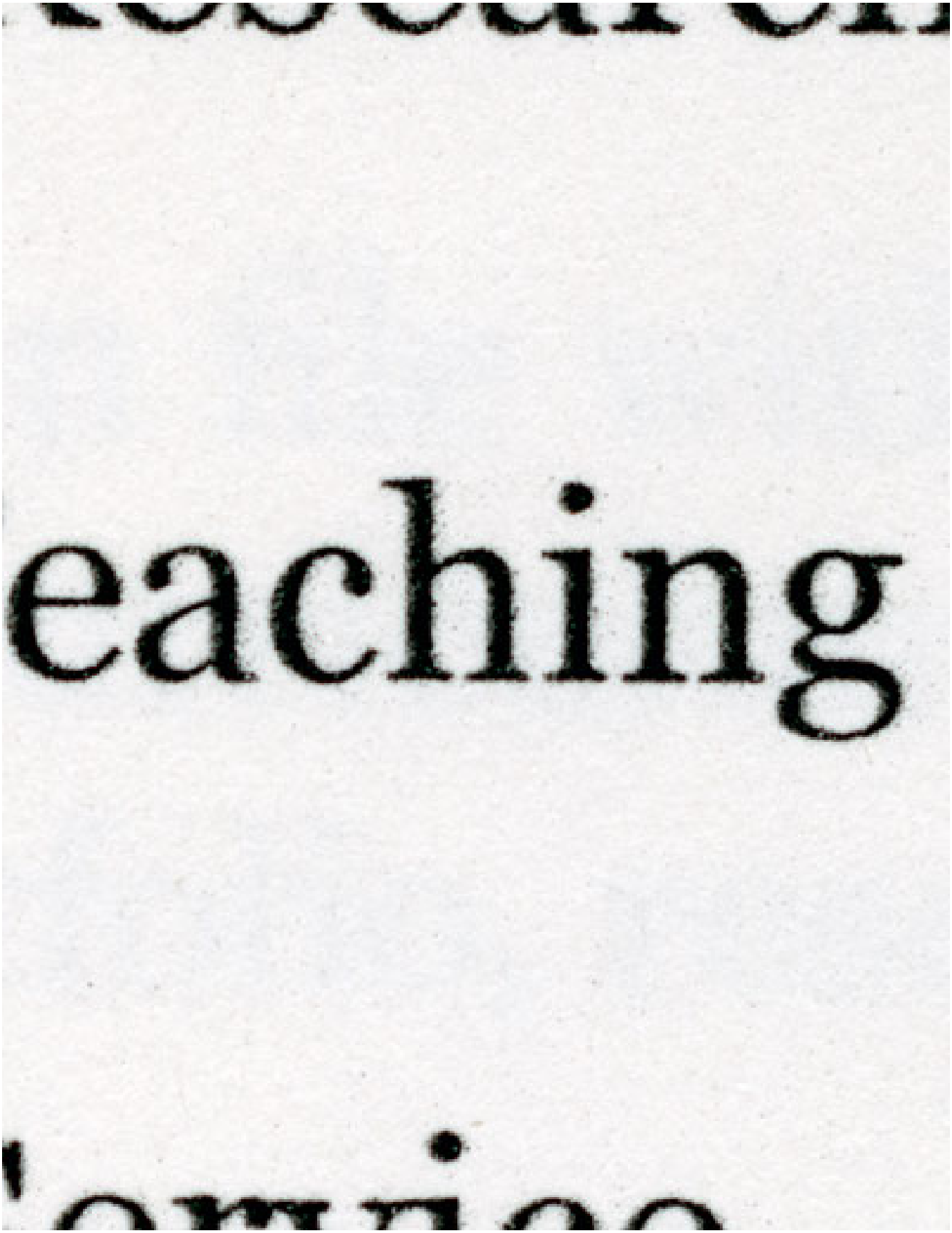
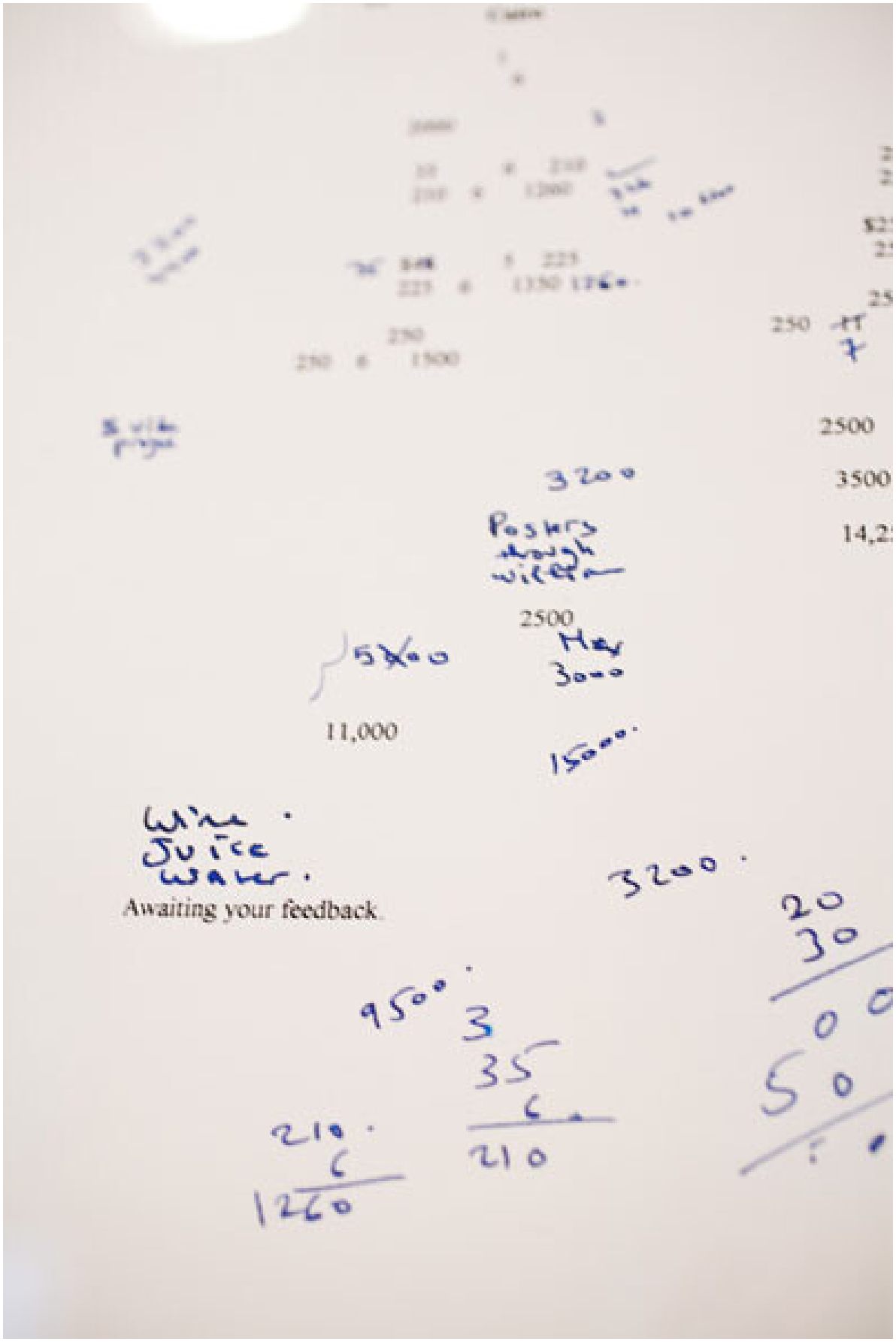


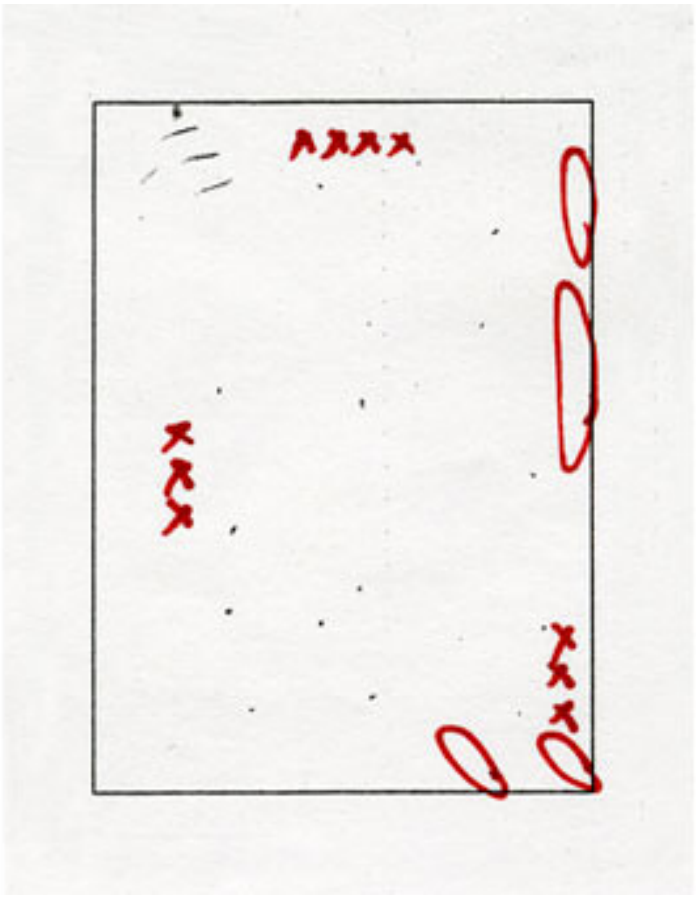
Plate 257 A History of Teaching

Plate 091 A History of a Dissertation

Plate 106 A History of a Budget



Installation view TBA21, Vienna. Photo: Jakob Polacsek.



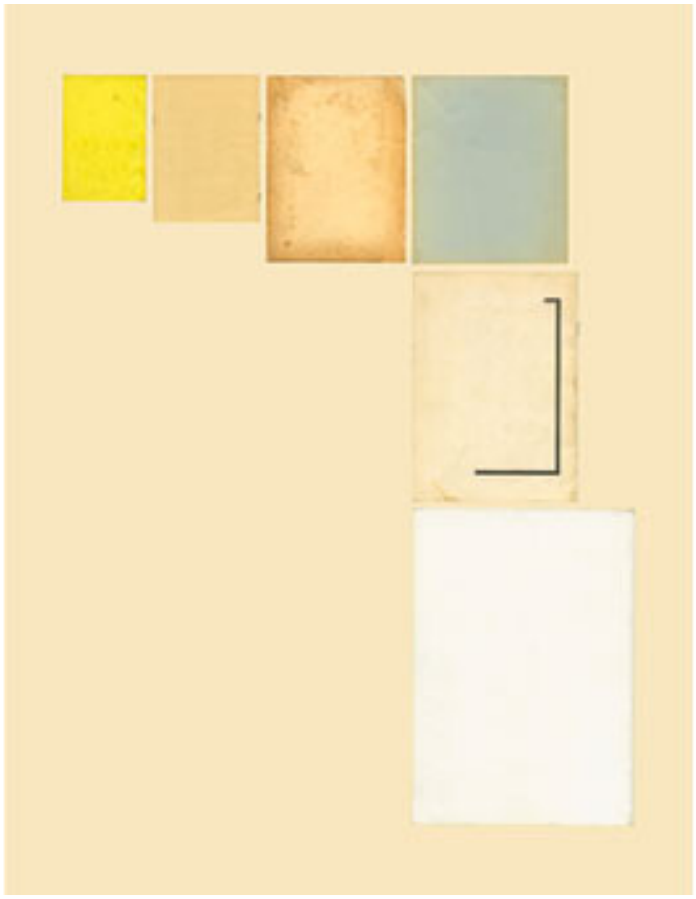


Plate 200 A History of a Condition; Plate 092 A History of a Monograph

And this is not a book, but a form dissimulating as a book.

And of course, this is not blue.

This is not yellow.

This is not black.

These are the colors, lines, shapes, and forms that compose the fifty-four plates displayed here.

View of dOCUMENTA 13, Kassel. Photo: Markus Kämmerer and Tanja Jürgensen.

X

Walid Raad is an artist and an Associate Professor of Art at The Cooper Union (New York). Raad's works include *The Atlas Group*, a fifteen-year project (1989–2004) about the contemporary history of Lebanon, and the ongoing projects *Scratching on Things I Could Disavow* and *Sweet Talk: Commissions* (Beirut). His books include *The Truth Will Be Known When The Last Witness Is Dead*, *My Neck Is Thinner Than A Hair*, *Let's Be Honest*, *The Weather Helped*, and *Scratching on Things I Could Disavow*.

Boris Groys

On Art Activism

Current discussions about art are very much centered on the question of art activism—that is, on the ability of art to function as an arena and medium for political protest and social activism. The phenomenon of art activism is central to our time because it is a new phenomenon—quite different from the phenomenon of critical art that became familiar to us during recent decades. Art activists do not want to merely criticize the art system or the general political and social conditions under which this system functions. Rather, they want to change these conditions by means of art—not so much inside the art system but outside it, in reality itself. Art activists try to change living conditions in economically underdeveloped areas, raise ecological concerns, offer access to culture and education for the populations of poor countries and regions, attract attention to the plight of illegal immigrants, improve the conditions of people working in art institutions, and so forth. In other words, art activists react to the increasing collapse of the modern social state and try to replace the social state and the NGOs that for different reasons cannot or will not fulfill their role. Art activists do want to be useful, to change the world, to make the world a better place—but at the same time, they do not want to cease being artists. And this is the point where theoretical, political, and even purely practical problems arise.

Art activism's attempts to combine art and social action come under attack from both of these opposite perspectives—traditionally artistic and traditionally activist ones. Traditional artistic criticism operates according to the notion of artistic quality. From this point of view, art activism seems to be artistically not good enough: many critics say that the morally good intentions of art activism substitute for artistic quality. This kind of criticism is, actually, easy to reject. In the twentieth century, all criteria of quality and taste were abolished by different artistic avant-gardes—so, today, it makes no sense to appeal to them again. However, criticism from the other side is much more serious and demands an elaborate critical answer. This criticism mainly operates according to notions of "aestheticization" and "spectacularity." A certain intellectual tradition rooted in the writings of Walter Benjamin and Guy Debord states that the aestheticization and spectacularization of politics, including political protest, are bad things because they divert attention away from the practical goals of political protest and towards its aesthetic form. And this means that art cannot be used as a medium of a genuine political protest—because the use of art for political action necessarily aestheticizes this action, turns this action into a spectacle and, thus, neutralizes the practical effect of this action. As an example, it is enough to remember the recent Berlin Biennale curated by Artur Zmijewski and the criticism it provoked—described as it was by different ideological sides as a zoo for art activists.

In other words, the art component of art activism is often seen as the main reason why this activism fails on the pragmatic, practical level—on the level of its immediate

Michael Rakowitz, Joe Heywood's paraSITE shelter, 2000. Battery Park City, Manhattan. Plastic bags, polyethylene tubing, hooks, tape. Courtesy of the artist and Lombard Freid Gallery, NY

social and political impact. In our society, art is traditionally seen as useless. So it seems that this quasi-ontological uselessness infects art activism and dooms it to failure. At the same time, art is seen as ultimately celebrating and aestheticizing the status quo—and thus undermining our will to change it. So the way out of this situation is seen mostly in the abandoning of art altogether—as if social and political activism never fails as long as it is not infected by art viruses.

The critique of art as useless and therefore morally and politically bad is not a new one. In the past, this critique compelled many artists to abandon art altogether—and to start to practice something more useful, something morally and politically correct. However, contemporary art activism does not rush to abandon art but, rather, tries to make art itself useful. This is a historically new position. Its newness is often relativized by a reference to the phenomenon of the Russian avant-garde, which famously wanted to change the world by artistic means. It seems to me that this reference is incorrect. The Russian avant-garde artists of the 1920s believed in their ability to change the world because at the time their artistic practice was supported by Soviet authorities. They knew that power was on their side. And they hoped that this support would not decrease with time. Contemporary art activism has, on the contrary, no reason to believe in external political support. Art activism acts on its own—relying only on its own networks and on weak and uncertain financial support from progressively minded art institutions. This is, as I said, a new situation—and it calls for new theoretical reflection.

The central goal of this theoretical reflection is this: to analyze the precise meaning and political function of the word “aestheticization.” I believe that such an analysis allows us to clarify the discussions around art activism and the place where it stands and acts. I would argue that today, the word “aestheticization” is mostly used in a confused and confusing way. When one speaks about “aestheticization,” one often refers to different and even opposing theoretical and political operations. The reason for this state of confusion is the division of contemporary art practice itself into two different domains: art in the proper sense of the word, and design. In these two domains, aestheticization means two different things. Let

Martin Kippenberger, The Modern House of Believing or Not, 1985. Oil on canvas.

us analyze this difference.

Tina Modotti, Bandolier, Corn, and Sickle, 1927. Bromoil gelatin silver print.

Aestheticization as Revolution

In the domain of design, the aestheticization of certain technical tools, commodities, or events involves an attempt to make them more attractive, seductive, and appealing to the user. Here aestheticization does not prevent the use of an aestheticized, designed object—on the contrary, it has the goal of enhancing and spreading this use by making it more agreeable. In this sense, we should see the whole art of the premodern past as, actually, not art but design. Indeed, the ancient Greeks spoke about " *techne*"—not differentiating between art and technology. If one looks at the art of ancient China, one finds well-designed tools for religious ceremonies and well-designed everyday objects used by court functionaries and intellectuals. The same can be said about the art of ancient Egypt and the Inca Empire: it is not art in the modern sense of the word, but design. And the same can be said about the art of the Old Regimes of Europe before the French Revolution—here we also find only religious design, or the design of power and wealth. Under contemporary conditions, design became omnipresent. Almost everything that we use is professionally designed to make it more attractive for the user. It is what we mean when we talk about a well-designed commodity: it is "a real work of art," as we say about an iPhone, a beautiful airplane, and so forth.

The same can also be said about politics. We are living in a time of political design, of professional image making. When one speaks, for example, about the aestheticization of politics in reference to, let say, Nazi Germany, then one often means aestheticization as design—as an attempt to make the Nazi movement more attractive, more seductive. One thinks about the black uniforms, nightly *fakelzüge*, and so forth. Here it is important to see that this understanding of aestheticization as design has nothing to do with the notion of aestheticization as it was used by Walter Benjamin, as he was speaking about fascism as the aestheticization of politics. This other notion of aestheticization has its origin not in design but in modern art.

Indeed, artistic aestheticization does not refer to an attempt to make the functioning of a certain technical tool more attractive for the user. On the contrary, artistic aestheticization means the defunctionalization of this tool, the violent annulation of its practical applicability and efficiency. Our contemporary notion of art and art aestheticization has its roots in the French Revolution—in the decisions that were made by the French revolutionary government concerning the objects that this government inherited from the Old Regime. A change of regime—especially a radical change such as the one introduced by the French Revolution—is usually accompanied by a wave of iconoclasm. One could follow these waves in the cases of Protestantism, the Spanish conquest of the Americas, or the fall of the Socialist regimes in Eastern Europe. The French revolutionaries took a different course: instead of destroying the sacred

Double Comb: Scenes from the Story of Joseph, mid-sixteenth century. Ivory, probably of flemish origin.

and profane objects belonging to the Old Regime, they defunctionalized, or, in other words, aestheticized them. The French Revolution turned the design of the Old Regime into what we today call art, i.e., objects not of use but of pure contemplation. This violent, revolutionary act of aestheticizing the Old Regime created art as we know it today. Before the French Revolution, there was no art—only design. After the French Revolution, art emerged—as the death of design.

The revolutionary origin of aesthetics was conceptualized by Immanuel Kant in his *Critique of the Power of Judgment*. Near the beginning of this text, Kant makes clear its political context. He writes:

> If someone asks me whether I find the palace that I see before me beautiful, I may well say that I do not like that sort of thing ... ; in true Rousseauesque style I might even vilify the vanity of the great who waste the sweat of the people on such superfluous things ... All of this might be conceded to me and approved; but that is not what is at issue here ... One must not be in the least biased in favor of the existence of the thing, but must be entirely indifferent in this respect in order to play the judge in the matter of taste.[1]

Kant is not interested in the existence of a palace as a representation of wealth and power. However, he is ready to accept the palace as aestheticized, that is, negated, made nonexistent for all practical purposes—reduced to pure form. Here the inevitable question arises: What

should one say about the decision by the French revolutionaries to substitute the aesthetic defunctionalization of the Old Regime for total iconoclastic destruction? And: Is the theoretical legitimation of this aesthetic defunctionalization that was proposed almost simultaneously by Kant a sign of the cultural weakness of the European bourgeoisie? Maybe it would be better to completely destroy the corpse of the Old Regime instead of exhibiting this corpse as art—as an object of pure aesthetic contemplation. I would argue that aestheticization is a much more radical form of death that traditional iconoclasm.

Already during the nineteenth century, museums were often compared to cemeteries, and museum curators to gravediggers. However, the museum is much more of a cemetery than any real cemetery. Real cemeteries do not expose the corpses of the dead; they conceal them. This is also true for the Egyptian pyramids. By concealing the corpses, cemeteries create an obscure, hidden space of mystery and thus suggest the possibility of resurrection. We have all read about ghosts, vampires leaving their graves, and other undead creatures wandering around cemeteries at night. We have also seen movies about a night in the museum: when nobody is looking, the dead bodies of the artworks come to life. However, the museum in the daylight is a place of definitive death that allows no resurrection, no return of the past. The museum institutionalizes the truly radical, atheistic, revolutionary violence that demonstrates the past as incurably dead. It is a purely materialistic death without return—the aestheticized material corpse functions as a testimony to the impossibility of resurrection. (Actually, this is why Stalin insisted so much on permanently exhibiting the dead Lenin's body to the public. Lenin's Mausoleum is a visible guarantee that Lenin and Leninism are truly dead. That is also why the current leaders of Russia do not hurry to bury Lenin—contrary to the appeals made by many Russians to do so. They do not want the return of Leninism, which would become possible if Lenin were buried.)

Thus, since the French Revolution, art has been understood as the defunctionalized and publicly exhibited corpse of the past. This understanding of art determined postrevolutionary art strategies—until now. In an art context, to aestheticize the things of the present means to discover their dysfunctional, absurd, unworkable character—everything that makes them nonusable, inefficient, obsolete. To aestheticize the present means to turn it into the dead past. In other words, artistic aestheticization is the opposite of aestheticization by means of design. The goal of design is to aesthetically improve the status quo—to make it more attractive. Art also accepts the status quo—but it accepts it as a corpse, after its transformation into a mere representation. In this sense, art sees contemporaneity not merely from the revolutionary, but rather, the postrevolutionary perspective. One can say: modern and contemporary art sees modernity and contemporaneity as the French revolutionaries saw the design of the Old Regime—as already obsolete, reducible to pure form, already a corpse.

Aestheticizing Modernity

Actually, this is especially true of the artists of the avant-garde, who are often mistakenly interpreted as being heralds of a new technological world—as ushering in the avant-garde of technological progress. Nothing is further from the historical truth. Of course, the artists of the historical avant-garde were interested in technological, industrialized modernity. However, they were interested in technological modernity only with the goal of aestheticizing modernity, defunctionalizing it, to reveal the ideology of progress as phantasmal and absurd. When one speaks about the avant-garde in its relationship to technology, one usually has a specific historical figure in mind: Filippo Tommaso Marinetti and his "Futurist Manifesto" that was published on the front page of the newspaper *Figaro* in 1909.[2] The text condemned the "passéistic" cultural taste of the bourgeoisie and celebrated the beauty of the new industrial civilization ("a roaring motor car which seems to run on machine-gun fire is more beautiful than the Winged Victory of Samothrace"), glorified war as the "hygiene of the world," and wished "to destroy museums, libraries, and academies of any sort." The identification with the ideology of progress seems here to be complete. However, Marinetti did not publish the text of the "Futurist Manifesto" isolated, but included it inside a story that begins with a description of how he interrupted a long nightly conversation with his friends about poetry by calling them to stand up and drive far away in a speedy car. And so they did. Marinetti writes: "And we, like young lions, chased after Death … Nothing at all worth dying for, other than the desire to divest ourselves finally of the courage that weighed us down." And the divestment took place. Marinetti describes the nocturnal ride further: "How ridiculous! What a nuisance! … I braked hard and to my disgust the wheels left the ground and I flew into a ditch. O mother of a ditch, brimful with muddy water! … How I relished your strength-giving sludge that reminded me so much of the saintly black breasts of my Sudanese nurse."

I will not dwell too long on this figure of the return to the mother's womb and to the nurse's breasts after a frenetic ride in a car towards death—it is all sufficiently obvious. It is enough to say that Marinetti and his friends were hoisted out of the ditch by a group of fishermen and, as he writes, "some gouty old naturalists"—that is, by the same passéists against which the manifesto is directed. Thus, the manifesto opens with a description of the failure of its own program. And so it is no wonder that the text fragment that follows the manifesto repeats the figure of defeat. Following the logic of progress, Marinetti envisions the coming of a new generation for which he and his

Giacomo Balla, Design for teapot for tea set (Modello di teiera per servizio da thè), 1916.

friends will appear, in their turn, as the hated passéists that should be destroyed. But he writes that when the agents of this coming generation try to destroy him and his friends, they will find them "on a winter's night, in a humble shed, far away in the country, with an incessant rain drumming upon it, and they'll see us huddling anxiously together … warming our hands around the flickering flames of our present-day books."

This passages show that for Marinetti, to aestheticize technologically driven modernity does not mean to glorify it or try to improve it, to make it more efficient by means of better design. On the contrary, from the beginning of his artistic career Marinetti looked at modernity in retrospect, as if it had already collapsed, as if it had already become a thing of the past—imagining himself in the ditch of History, or at best sitting in the countryside under incessant post-apocalyptic rain. And in this retrospective view, technologically driven, progress-oriented modernity looks like a total catastrophe. It is hardly an optimistic perspective. Marinetti envisions the failure of his own project—but he understands this failure as a failure of progress itself, which leaves behind only debris, ruins, and personal catastrophes.

I have quoted Marinetti at some length because it is precisely Marinetti whom Benjamin calls as the crucial witness when, in the afterword to his famous essay about "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction," Benjamin formulates his critique of the aestheticization of politics as the fascist undertaking par excellence—the critique that still weighs heavily on any attempt to bring art and politics together.[3] To make his point, Benjamin cites a later text by Marinetti on the Ethiopian War in which Marinetti draws parallels between modern war operations and the poetic and artistic operations used by Futurist artists. In this text, Marinetti famously speaks about "the metallization of the human body." "Metallization" here has only one meaning: the death of the body and its turning into a corpse, understood as an art object. Benjamin interprets this text as a declaration of war by art against life, and summarizes the fascist political program with these words: "Fiat art—pereas mundi" (Let there be art—let the world perish.) And Benjamin writes further that fascism is the fulfillment of the *l'art pour l'art* movement.

Of course, Benjamin's analysis of Marinetti's rhetoric is correct. But there is still one crucial question here: How reliable is Marinetti as a witness? Marinetti's fascism is an

Futurist Enresto Michahelles's TuTa Jumpsuit, 1919.

already aestheticized fascism—fascism understood as a heroic acceptance of defeat and death. Or as pure form—a pure representation that a writer has of fascism when this writer is sitting alone under an incessant rain. The real fascism wanted, of course, not defeat but victory. Actually, in the late 1920s and 1930s, Marinetti became less and less influential in the Italian fascist movement, which practiced precisely not the aestheticization of politics but the politicization of aesthetics by using Novecento and Neoclassicism and, yes, also Futurism for its political goals—or, we can say, for its political design.

In his essay, Benjamin opposes the fascist aestheticization of politics to the Communist politicization of aesthetics. However, in Russian and Soviet art of the time, the lines were drawn in a much more complicated way. We speak today of the Russian avant-garde, but the Russian artists and poets of that time spoke about Russian Futurism—and then Suprematism and Constructivism. In these movements we find the same phenomenon of the aestheticization of Soviet Communism. Already in his text "On the Museum" (1919), Kazimir Malevich not only calls upon his comrades to burn the art heritage of previous epochs, but also to accept the fact that "everything that we do is done for the crematorium."[4] In the same year, in his text "God is Not Cast Down," Malevich argues that to achieve the perfect material conditions of human existence, as the Communists planned, is as impossible as achieving the perfection of the human soul, as the Church previously wanted.[5] The founder of Soviet Constructivism, Vladimir Tatlin, built a model of his famous *Monument to the Third International* that was supposed to rotate but could not, and later, a plane that could not fly (the so-called *Letatlin*). Here again, Soviet Communism was aestheticized from the perspective of its historical failure, of its coming death. And again in the Soviet Union, the aestheticization of politics was turned later into the politicization of aesthetics—that is, into the use of aesthetics for political goals, as political design.

I do not want, of course, to say that there is no difference between fascism and Communism—this difference is immense and decisive. I only want to say that the opposition between fascism and Communism does not coincide with the difference between the aestheticization of politics rooted in modern art and the politicization of aesthetics rooted in political design.

Frida Kahlo's corset displayed in "Appearances Can Be Deceiving: The Dresses of Frida Kahlo," Museo Frida Kahlo, Mexico City, Mexico

I hope that the political function of these two divergent and even contradictory notions of aestheticization—artistic aestheticization and design aestheticization—has now became more clear. Design wants to change reality, the status quo—it wants to improve reality, to make it more attractive, better to use. Art seems to accept reality as it is, to accept the status quo. But art accepts the status quo as dysfunctional, as already failed—that is, from the revolutionary, or even postrevolutionary, perspective. Contemporary art puts our contemporaneity into art museums because it does not believe in the stability of the present conditions of our existence—to such a degree that contemporary art does not even try to improve these conditions. By defunctionalizing the status quo, art prefigures its coming revolutionary overturn. Or a new global war. Or a new global catastrophe. In any case, an event that will make

the entirety of contemporary culture, including all its aspirations and projections, obsolete—as the French Revolution made all the aspirations, intellectual projections, and utopias of the Old Regime obsolete.

Contemporary art activism is the heir of these two contradictory traditions of aestheticization. On the one hand, art activism politicizes art, uses art as political design—that is, as a tool in the political struggles of our time. This use is completely legitimate—and any critique of this use would be absurd. Design is an integral part of our culture, and it would make no sense to forbid its use by politically oppositional movements under the pretext that this use leads to the spectacularization, the theatralization of political protest. After all, there is a good theater and bad theater.

But art activism cannot escape a much more radical, revolutionary tradition of the aestheticization of politics—the acceptance of one's own failure, understood as a premonition and prefiguration of the coming failure of the status quo in its totality, leaving no room for its possible improvement or correction. The fact that contemporary art activism is caught in this contradiction is a good thing. First of all, only self-contradictory practices are true in a deeper sense of the word. And secondly, in our contemporary world, only art indicates the possibility of revolution as a radical change beyond the horizon of our present desires and expectations.

Nuns examine Calder's mobiles and stabiles at Frank Perls Gallery, 1953. Photo: Ann Rosener. Copyright: Smithsonian Museum

Aestheticization and the U-Turn

Thus, modern and contemporary art allows us to look at the historical period in which we live from the perspective of its end. The figure of Angelus Novus as described by Benjamin relies on the technique of artistic aestheticization as it was practiced by postrevolutionary European art.[6] Here we have the classical description of philosophical metanoia, of the reversal of the gaze —Angelus Novus turns his back towards the future and looks back on the past and present. He still moves into the future—but backwards. Philosophy is impossible without this kind of metanoia, without this reversal of the gaze. Accordingly, the central philosophical question was and still is: How is philosophical metanoia possible? How does the philosopher turn his gaze from the future to the past and adopt a reflective, truly philosophical attitude towards the world? In older times, the answer was given by religion: God (or gods) were believed to open to the human spirit the possibility of leaving the physical world—and looking back on it from a metaphysical position. Later, the opportunity for metanoia was offered by Hegelian philosophy: one could look back if one happened to be present at the end of history—at the moment when the further progress of the human Spirit became impossible. In our postmetaphysical age, the answer has been formulated mostly in vitalistic terms: one turns back if one reaches the limits of one's own strength (Nietzsche), if one's desire is repressed (Freud), or if one experiences the fear of death or the extreme boredom of existence (Heidegger).

But there is no indication of such a personal, existential turning point in Benjamin's text—only a reference to modern art, to an image by Klee. Benjamin's Angelus Novus turns his back to the future simply because he knows how to do it. He knows because he learned this technique from modern art—also from Marinetti. Today, the philosopher does not need any subjective turning point, any real event, any meeting with death or with something or somebody radically other. After the French Revolution, art developed techniques for defunctionalizing the status quo that were aptly described by the Russian Formalists as "reduction," the "zero device," and "defamiliarization." In our time, the philosopher has only to take a look at modern art, and he or she will know what to do. And this is precisely what Benjamin did. Art teaches us how to practice metanoia, a U-turn on the road towards the future, on the road of progress. Not coincidentally, when Malevich gave a copy of one of his own books to poet Daniil Kharms, he inscribed it as follows: "Go and stop progress."

And philosophy can learn not only horizontal metanoia—the U-turn on the road of progress—but also vertical metanoia: the reversal of upward mobility. In the Christian tradition, this reversal had the name " *kenosis*." In this sense, modern and contemporary art practice can be called *kenotic*.

Indeed, traditionally, we associate art with a movement towards perfection. The artist is supposed to be creative. And to be creative means, of course, to bring into the world not only something new, but also something better—better functioning, better looking, more attractive. All these expectations make sense—but as I have already said, in today's world, all of them are related to design and not to art. Modern and contemporary art wants to make things not better but worse—and not relatively worse but radically worse: to make dysfunctional things out of functional things, to betray expectations, to reveal the invisible presence of death where we tend to see only life.

This is why modern and contemporary art is not popular. It is not popular precisely because art goes against the normal way things are supposed to go. We are all aware of the fact that our civilization is based on inequality, but we tend to think that this inequality should be corrected by upward mobility—by letting people realize their talents, their gifts. In other words, we are ready to protest against the inequality dictated by the existing systems of power—but at the same time, we are ready to accept the notion of the unequal distribution of natural gifts and talents. However, it is obvious that the belief in natural gifts and creativity is the worst form of social Darwinism, biologism, and, actually, neoliberalism, with its notion of human capital. In his lectures on the "birth of biopolitics," Michel Foucault stresses that the neoliberal concept of human capital has a utopian dimension—and constitutes, in fact, the utopian horizon of contemporary capitalism.[7]

As Foucault shows, the human being ceases here to be seen merely as labor power sold on the capitalist market. Instead, the individual becomes an owner of a nonalienated set of qualities, capabilities, and skills that are partially hereditary and innate, and partially produced by education and care—primarily from one's own parents. In other words, we are speaking here about an original investment made by nature itself. The world "talent" expresses this relationship between nature and investment well enough—talent being a gift from nature and at the same time a certain sum of money. Here the utopian dimension of the neoliberal notion of human capital becomes clear enough. Participation in the economy loses its character of alienated and alienating work. The human being becomes a value in itself. And even more importantly, the notion of human capital, as Foucault shows, erases the opposition between consumer and producer—the opposition that risks tearing apart the human being under the standard conditions of capitalism. Foucault indicates that in terms of human capital, the consumer becomes a producer. The consumer produces his or her own satisfaction. And in this way, the consumer lets his or her human capital grow.[8]

At the beginning of the 1970s, Joseph Beuys was inspired by the idea of human capital. In his famous Achberger Lectures that were published under the title *Art=Capital* (*Kunst=Kapital*), he argues that every economic activity should be understood as creative practice—so that everybody becomes an artist.[9] Then the expanded notion of art (*erweiterter Kunstbegriff*) will coincide with the expanded notion of economy (*erweiterter Oekonomiebegriff*). Here Beuys tries to overcome the inequality that for him is symbolized by the difference between creative, artistic work and noncreative, alienated work. To say that everybody is an artist means for Beuys to introduce universal equality by means of the mobilization of those aspects and components of everyone's human capital that remain hidden and inactive under standard market conditions. However, during the discussions that followed the lectures, it became clear that the attempt by Beuys to base social and economic equality on equality between artistic and nonartistic activity does not really function. The reason for this is simple: according to Beuys, a human being is creative because nature gave him/her the initial human capital—precisely the capacity to be creative. So art practice remains dependent on nature—and, thus, on the unequal distribution of natural gifts.

However, many leftist and Socialist theoreticians remained under the spell of the idea of upward mobility—be it individual or collective. This can be illustrated by a famous quote from the end of Leon Trotsky's book *Revolution and Literature*:

> Social construction and psychophysical self-education will become two aspects of the same process. All the arts—literature, drama, painting, music, and architecture will lend this process beautiful form ... Man will become immeasurably stronger, wiser, and subtler; his body will become more harmonized, his movement more rhythmic, his voice more musical ... The average human type will rise to the heights of an Aristotle, a Goethe, or a Marx. And above this ridge new peaks will rise.[10]

It is this artistic, social, and political alpinism—in its bourgeois and Socialist forms—from which modern and contemporary art tries to save us. Modern art is made against the natural gift. It does not develop "human potential" but annuls it. It operates not by expansion but by reduction. Indeed, a genuine political transformation cannot be achieved according to the same logic of talent, effort, and competition on which the current market economy is based, but only by metanoia and *kenosis*—by a U-turn against the movement of progress, a U-turn against the pressure of upward mobility. Only in this way

G.U.L.F. Labor banknote designed by Noah Fischer for the Guggenheim protest of March 29th, 2013.

can we escape the pressure of our own gifts and talents, which enslaves and exhausts us by pushing us to climb one mountain after another. Only if we learn to aestheticize the lack of gifts as well as the presence of gifts, and thus not differentiate between victory and failure, do we escape the theoretical blockage that endangers contemporary art activism.

There is no doubt that we are living in a time of total aestheticization. This fact is often interpreted as a sign that we have reached a state after the end of history, or a state of total exhaustion that makes any further historical action impossible. However, as I have tried to show, the nexus between total aestheticization, the end of history, and the exhaustion of vital energies is illusionary. Using the lessons of modern and contemporary art, we are able to totally aestheticize the world—i.e., to see it as being already a corpse—without being necessarily situated at the end of history or at the end of our vital forces. One can aestheticize the world—and at the same time act within it. In fact, total aestheticization does not block political action; it enhances it. Total aestheticization means that we see the current status quo as already dead, already abolished. And it means further that every action that is directed towards the stabilization of the status quo will ultimately show itself as ineffective—and every action that is directed towards the destruction of the status quo will ultimately succeed. Thus, total aestheticization not only does not preclude political action; it creates an ultimate horizon for successful political action, if this action has a revolutionary perspective.

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1
Immanuel Kant, *Critique of the Power of Judgment,* ed. Paul Guyer (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 2000), 90–91.

2
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Lawrence Liang

Ultranationalism: A Proposal for a Quiet Withdrawal

I developed an early suspicion of any form of nationalism courtesy of a geography teacher and an imaginary cricket game. As the only student of Chinese origin in a high school in Bangalore, I was asked by my teacher in a benign voice who I would support if India and China played a match. Aside from the ridiculousness of the question (China does not even play cricket), the dubious intent behind it was rather clear, even to a teenager. Still, I dutifully replied, "Sir, I will support India," for which I received a gratified smile and a pat on the head. I was offended less by the crude attempt by someone in power to force a kid to prove his patriotism, than by the outright silliness of the game. If all it took to establish the euphoric security of nationalism was that simple answer, I figured there must be something drastically wrong with the question. I was left, however, with an uneasy feeling (one that has persisted through the years), not because I had given a false answer but because I had been forced to answer a false question. The answer made pragmatic sense in a schoolboy way (you don't want to piss off someone who is going to be marking your papers), and I hadn't read *King Lear* yet to know that the only appropriate response to the question should have been silence. If Cordelia refuses to participate in Lear's competition of affective intimacy, it is not just the truth, but also the distasteful aesthetics of her sister's excessive declarations of love, that motivates her withdrawal into silence.

If we similarly measure ultranationalism not just on a political plane but on an aesthetic one, we are immediately struck by just how deafeningly loud and shrill it is. While one could attempt to counter the ascending clamor with speech of one's own, there are times when our silence may be our greatest weapon. I would suggest that if we think of ultranationalism as an affective excess marked by a hyperperformative jingoism, often orchestrated around sporting rituals, then one of the undervalued ways of countering excess has been asceticism.

If nationalism presumes our consent to a social contract and ultranationalism forcefully demands such a consent, what would it mean to imagine silence as a political act—not one of tacit consent, but rather the withdrawal of it? Stanley Cavell argues that presumptions of the social contract are always subject to repudiation through the withdrawal of consent, or withdrawal from society.[1] The withdrawal of my consent is not necessarily a nihilistic rejection of the world, but a dispute that I have about its content. It is both possible and reasonable to reject society as it stands (because it is unfaithful to what I have consented to) while still consenting to a conversation about the horizon of possibilities of this society. The radical potential of such disagreements about the substantive content of politics is testified to by the existence of laws of sedition, which seek to criminalize forms of speech that create "disaffection" towards the state. For Agamben, the state is not founded on a social bond of which it is the expression, but rather on the

dissolution, the unbinding it prohibits.

Schoolchildren display posters of Indian cricket player Sachin Tendulkar, known to be one of the greatest batsmen of all time, India, 2013. Photo: AP.

But while the state may enforce laws against speech, how does it proscribe seditious thoughts and feelings that do not seek out a public, but are uttered in silence? In 2013, on a trip to postwar Jaffna, Sri Lanka to meet activists and scholars, I was introduced to Jagadeesan (known to a few as "the philosopher"), who lived alone in a remote village. The philosopher was once a part of the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam, but after he became a critic of their politics, he was arrested, detained, and tortured by them for several years. After his release, he withdrew from active political life, choosing to live in isolation. When we asked him what he felt about the postwar situation and the mounting Sinhalese chauvinism spurred on by the victory of the ultranationalists, he looked at us and replied that he had no idea since he rarely talked to people any longer. Gesturing to the trees in front of the house, he said that he now only spoke to trees and shared his jokes with them, since people did not even understand jokes anymore. If people no longer understood jokes, he said, it was clear that the world was going mad and there was no hope left. He indicated that he was less and less interested in the political affairs of the world around him, and more and more attracted to forms of spiritual practice (even as he gave detailed instructions to someone on how to repair their pump: he had been an engineer). His helpfulness to his neighbors and his comfort with technical matters seemed to bely the claim that he had entirely withdrawn from the social, and yet at the same time, his melancholic disposition seemed to indicate a form of inhabiting the world through the act of mourning it, which in his case required his turning away from it.

Jagadeesan's withdrawal from society and his loss of hope could be interpreted as a form of apolitical ascetic withdrawal into the domain of the spiritual. However, it may benefit us to recall another political ascetic, Henry David Thoreau, who allegedly turned away from politics and towards nature at the height of his political career. In contrast to accounts that see Thoreau's withdrawal into the woods to write *Walden* as an apolitical act that diverged from his more explicitly political writings such as *Civil Disobedience*, Shannon Mariotti, in her book *Thoreau's Democratic Withdrawal*, focuses on how withdrawal from public life may itself be the basis for rethinking the political.[2] It is often assumed that democracy cannot thrive if citizens withdraw from public spaces, but how are we to find expressions for our

deepest disagreements with the very content of democratic politics and its validation by a vast majority of people? Mariotti claims that Thoreau's deepest insights into democracy and politics may be found not in his explicitly political writings, but in his reflections on nature. In fact, *Walden* is a text that forces us to move beyond the binaries of politics and nature, democracy and withdrawal. Thoreau's retreat into nature, Mariotti suggests, was not a retreat from the political as much as an immersion into a form of life that allowed for the cultivation of one's true nature as the means to understand and activate the basis of a true democracy. In his essay on civil disobedience, Thoreau stated that he wanted to be a "bad subject" but a "good neighbor," and towards such end he resembled Socrates, the quintessential bad citizen who disturbed, prodded, and destroyed the euphoric security of the state with his questions.

If ultranationalism is charged with an affective immediacy bordering on frenzied exuberance, what Thoreau and Jagadeesan share is a melancholic relation to the present, but a melancholia based not on a mythical idea of an idealized past that has been lost, but instead on a mourning for an alternative future that the present does not allow. Their respective withdrawals into nature and silence are, to my mind, a kind of experimentation with forms of selves that reject any pragmatic or realist usurpations of the political horizons of the self. In that sense, it would be a mistake to read either Thoreau or Jagadeesan in purely personal terms, since their withdrawals are both a response to the state of politics as we currently know it, as well as an attempt to redefine a political community that includes trees and neighbors. The temporal distance of one and the spatial proximity of the other are anathema to the national imagination of time and boundaries.

If the radical call of politics is cast in terms of a call to action and a demand for a response, how do we situate the refusal to stand up and the refusal to be counted in a collective as the performance of a nonrepresentative individual? Rancière has suggested that perhaps the truly dangerous classes are not so much those that make up a "collective," with their clear sense of common purpose (class, race, and so forth), but those that refuse to be collapsed within any collective, whether dominant or oppositional. Thus if we revisit Thoreau's assertion that his thoughts "are murder to the State, and involuntarily go plotting against her" in light of his fierce individualism, we find in it a seditious imagination that exceeds the language of an anti-nationalist politics, which itself often runs the risk of being wedded to a logic of counter-collective claims—whether as an alternative public sphere, a cosmopolitanism, or even a nationalism in fancy dress (as is the case with many armed struggles).

The desire to be a good neighbor and to befriend trees offers us a different kind of affective surplus—one that finds echoes in Leela Gandhi's description of the radical anticolonial politics of friendship. Tracing the careers of individual Europeans like C. F. Andrews (Mahatma Gandhi's trusted friend and secretary) and writers like E. M. Forster, Leela Gandhi provides us an image of sedition not as a collective political act but as a series of individual refusals which nonetheless undermine the possibility of a consistent uniform whole—the sustaining myth of any ultranationalism. Leela Gandhi describes a woman in Australia driving to a detention center with a placard bearing the words "You are not alone," to show her solidarity with those inside. Long before she could even raise her slogan, she was arrested and detained. But in that single moment of violence, she herself became an alien—subject, as aliens are, to the crushing might of the state. Gandhi suggests that we understand this relatively insignificant act—this minor self-endangerment for another—as one that produces a surplus of sociality and love. She chooses to call it the politics of friendship.[3]

Leela Gandhi then cites E. M. Forster's marvelous passage in his *Two Cheers for Democracy* where he says

> I hate the idea of causes, and if I had to choose between betraying my country and betraying my friend, I hope I should have the guts to betray my country. Such a choice may scandalize the modern reader, and he may stretch out his patriotic hand to the telephone at once and ring the police … When they do, down with the state say I, which means the state would down me.[4]

Ultranationalism presumes that the nation should be both the natural and preferred home for everyone, but as Forster's words show us, there may be those who do not feel at home in the nation and are threatened with either exile in the case of political action, or with self-exile in the case of Thoreau and Jagadeesan. It is this uneasiness of not being at home, which prompts a withdrawal from the comforts of our given political communities, to which we need to turn our attention.

For Thoreau, cities represented an enclave of comfort, which produces citizens as machines produce commodities. But if sedition runs the risk of the subject being cast out of the sphere of the citizen, withdrawal runs an additional risk—of being cast out of the domain of the political itself. But it is precisely the potential of these nonpolitical realms, such as walking and neighboring, to which Shannon Mariotti draws our attention. Specific practices such as walking and huckleberry picking seem to inculcate in Thoreau a sense of affection that moves from the natural world to the social world and back (a recurring theme in classical Chinese poetry as well). To love a particular mountain or stream is not to love the motherland or fatherland in an abstract sense. It is instead

A street sign pays homage to Henry David Thoreau, near Concord, Massachusetts.

a mode of passionate inhabitation which in fact often runs contrary to the imagination of national interest, as witnessed by the struggles of indigenous people across the world against large modernist development projects that propel them into a homogenous empty time. Even as I write this, a new ultranationalist government in India, led by Narendra Modi, is being sworn in after a decisive victory in the recent national elections. One of the anticipated changes that the new government is going to bring about is an amendment to the land acquisition law that will make it easier for the state and corporations to acquire land from indigenous people and forest dwellers.

A few years ago, when the state of Himachal Pradesh was attempting to acquire land for a skiing resort, a ninety year-old man who had objected to his land being acquired stated that he did not see the urgency of moving from where he was. On being asked why, as the compensation package was good, he explained that the "dhoop" (warm sunlight) that he was used to for the last twenty years in the patch where he sat everyday would disappear from his life, and he was not keen to lose it. It is no surprise that the root word for the word "fond" comes from the word "ground," and there can perhaps be no common ground on which we can stand, no collective ideal that we can imagine, if it not founded on an idea of gentle affection of this kind. This is the form of passionate dwelling that we need to retreat to if we are to truly withdraw from the hyperbolic clarion call of nationalism.

If the excess of ultranationalism demands that we stand whenever the national anthem is played, or that we cheer in the loudest voice every act of triumphant chest-beating, it may well be time for us to continue sitting where we are precisely because we love the ground that we sit on, and to do so quietly, since sedition sometimes speaks in whispers. Let us also consider, via the words of George Steiner, what it may mean to walk, to withdraw, and to discover anew another political nature:

> Trees have roots. Men have legs, with which to visit, to dwell among the rest of mankind as guests. I would want to think of these visitors as the truly human beings we must try to become if we are to survive at all … Intrusion may be our calling, so as to suggest to our fellow men and women at large that all human beings must learn how to live as each others guests in life. There is no society, no religion, no city, no village not worth improving. By the same token, there is none not worth leaving when injustice or barbarism takes charge. Morality must always have its bags packed.[5]

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1
Stanley Cavell, *Cities of Words: Pedagogical Letters on a Register of the Moral Life* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press, 2004). See also Andrew Norris, *The Claim to Community: Essays on Stanley Cavell and Political Philosophy* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2006).

2
Shannon L. Mariotti, *Thoreau's Democratic Withdrawal: Alienation, Participation, and Modernity* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2010).

3
Leela Gandhi, *Affective Communities: Anticolonial Thought, Fin-de-Siècle Radicalism, and the Politics of Friendship* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2006).

4
Ibid. 25.

5
George Steiner, *Errata: An Examined Life* (London: Hachette UK, 2011). Steiner has various versions of this quote in different books.

Another conversation threw up a fascinating image: "During our regular night shifts, the general manager used to be abrasive with any worker he saw dozing. He used to take punitive action against them. One night, one hundred and eight of us went to sleep, all together, on the shop floor. Managers, one after the other, who came to check on us, saw us all sleeping in one place, and returned quietly. We carried on like this for three nights. They didn't misbehave with us, didn't take any action against us. Workers in other sections of the factory followed suit. It became a tradition of sorts."

— *Faridabad Mazdoor Samachar* (Faridabad Workers' News), May 2014[1]

Raqs Media Collective

Is the World Sleeping, Sleepless, or Awake or Dreaming?

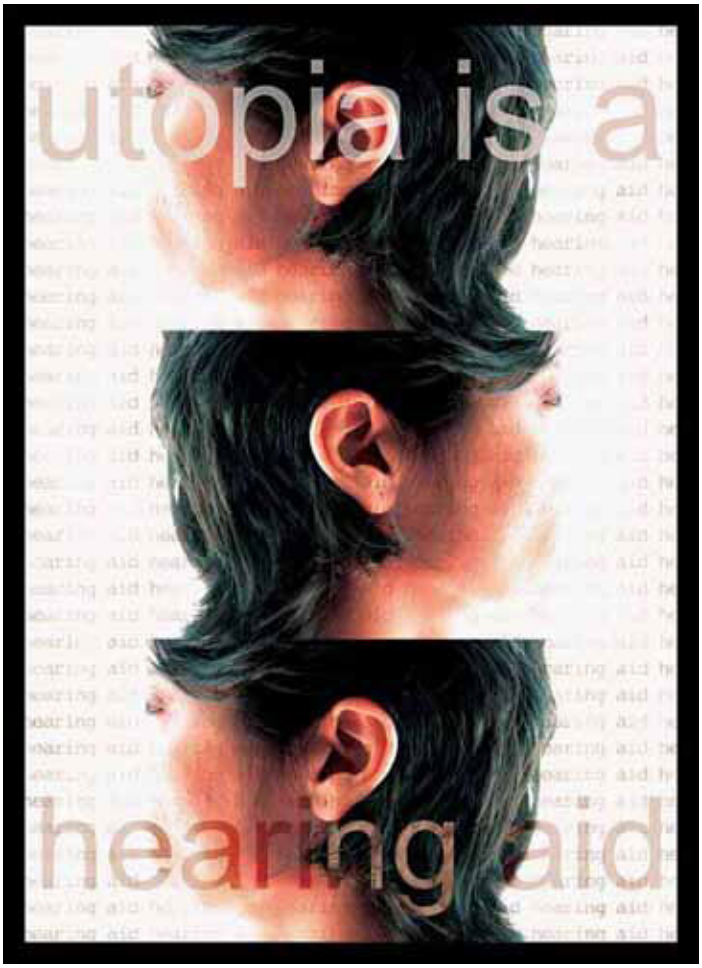
A hundred years after 1914 saw nationalism explode in an orgy of violence like the world had never seen before, we are waking up to a new reality that appears to be as repetitive as a recurring nightmare. In some parts of the world, ultranationalist parties are once again walking into the bright lights. This could be a sordid one-act play or a full-blown tragic opera, but for now, they think they hold the public in thrall.

And they are singing. So loudly that the din appears to drown out every other sound. These are times when one needs a hearing aid, to listen to the murmur of other conversations. Some of these conversations may be incipient, some have never ceased. They may never cease. If they are inaudible, one has to try a little harder to hear them.

In India, the recently victorious ultranationalist "strongman" has tweeted "the good days have come" to the enthusiastic, breathless applause of a captive "eternal-growth" court. His counterparts, flashing victory signs in Europe, Russia, Hungary, Turkey, Japan, Egypt, Korea, and elsewhere, have all talked up the same "good times." Television ratings and stock market indices have momentarily soared, in generally sluggish global economies, as have the global sales of weapons, sedatives, tranquilizers, and antidepressants.[2]

Anxieties about alertness, agency, hypnosis, and the nightmares of a catatonic seizure of the popular will by "fascism" often rear their head in the wake of sweeping victories for right-wing parties. Are we drifting into a disaster with our eyes shut, or sleepwalking with our eyes wide open?

For the past few decades, globally, many well-meaning but



Raqs Media Collective, Utopia is a Hearing Aid, 2003. 60 x 84 cm Poster design for Utopia Station.

demoralized people, especially artists and intellectuals, but also activists, have been losing sleep. They suffer from a peculiarly debilitating activist insomnia consisting of relentless Facebook posting, forwarded petitions, and other rituals of narrowing particularity that have taken the place of heretical, insurrectionary, and transcendental visions. We are restless, exhausted through the operation of the worst, most damaging technique available to torturers: sleep deprivation. We could all do with a "sleep in" on the long night shifts. It appears as if there has been a generalized forgetting of the arts and sciences of dreaming, especially lucid dreaming.

This makes it sobering, and even mildly therapeutic, to undertake a close reading of a different account of sleep, and of awakening—the one that opens this essay, from *Faridabad Workers News* (FMS), a workers' newspaper.

To recapitulate: One night in a factory, after a worker is admonished for his fatigue on the shop floor, 108 workers decide to fall asleep on the night shift. The gentlest possible refusal of capital's rapacious claim on time and the human body. The newspaper goes on to say, "Workers in other sections of the factory followed suit. It became a tradition of sorts."

We have been reading *FMS*—which is produced by some friends in Faridabad, a major industrial suburb of Delhi and one of the largest manufacturing hubs of Asia—for the past twenty-five years. The paper has a print run of twelve thousand, is distributed at regular intervals by workers, students, and itinerant fellow travellers at various traffic intersections, and is read on average by two hundred thousand workers all over the restless industrial hinterland of Delhi.

Over the years, this four-page, A1-size paper full of news and reports of what working people are doing and thinking in one of the biggest industrial concentrations of Asia has acted as a kind of reality check, especially against the echolalia—manic or melancholic, laudatory or lachrymose—that issues forth at regular intervals from the protagonists as well as the antagonists of the new order. In these circumstances, the paper acts as a kind of weather vane, a device which helps us scent the wind, sense undercurrents, and keep from losing our head either in the din of the ecstatic overture for capital and the state, or in the paralyzing grief over their attempts to strengthen their sway.

This month's *FMS*, published a week before the results of India's elections unleashed a frenzy of mourning and celebration, talks about questions coming to shore. It says,

> While distributing the paper, we were stopped twice and advised: "Don't distribute the paper here. Workers here are very happy. Are you trying to get factories closed?" That reading, writing, thinking, and exchange can lead to factory closures—where does this thought come from?
> Perhaps this fear is a result of messages that circulate between the mobile phones of tailors. Or perhaps this fear emerges because workers on the assembly line are humming!
>
> The industrial belt that surrounds Delhi has been going through a deep churning over the last few years. Hundreds of thousands of young men and women are gathering enormous experience and thought at an early age. They are giving force to waves of innovative self-activity, finding new ways of speaking and thinking about life and work, creating new forms of relationships. In the gathering whirlwind of this milieu, many long-held assumptions have been swept away, and fresh, unfamiliar possibilities have been inaugurated. Here we are presenting some of the questions that have coursed through our conversations and which continue to murmur around us.
>
> **Why should anyone be a worker at all?**

Is it time to strike at the moment. It is the moment to strike at time. Raqs Media Collective, Strike, 2011. Stainless steel and LED strip lights.

This question has gained such currency in these industrial areas that some readers may find it strange that it is being mentioned here at all. But still, we find it pertinent to underscore the rising perplexity at the demand that one should surrender one's life to that which has no future. And again, why should one surrender one's life to something that offers little dignity?

If we put aside the fear, resentment, rage, and disappointment in the statement "What is to be gained through wage work after all?," we can begin to see outlines of a different imagination of life. This different imagination of life knocks at our doors today, and we know that we have between us the capacity, capability, and intelligence to experiment with ways that can shape a diversity of ways of living.

Do the constantly emerging desires and multiple steps of self-activity not bring into question every existing partition and boundary?
In this sprawling industrial zone, at every work station, in each work break—whether it's a tea break or a lunch break—conversations gather storm. Intervals are generative. They bring desires into the open, and become occasions to invent steps and actions. No one is any longer invested in agreements that claim that they might be able to bring forth a better future in three years, or maybe five. Instead, workers are assessing constantly, negotiating continually; examining the self, and examining the strength of the collective, ceaselessly. And with it, a wink and a smile: "Let's see how a manager manages this!" The borders drawn up by agreements are breached, the game of concession wobbles, middlemen disaggregate.

When we do—and can do—everything on our own, why then do we need the mediation of leaders?
"Whether or not to return to work after a break, and across how many factories should we act together—we decide these things on our own, between ourselves," said a seamstress. Others concurred: "When we act like this, on our own, results are rapid, and our self-confidence grows," and elaborated, "on the other hand, when a leader steps in, things fall apart; it's disheartening. When we are capable of doing everything on our own, why should we go about seeking disappointment?"

Are these acts that are relentlessly breaching inherited hierarchies not an announcement of the invention of new kinds of relationships?
In previous issues, we have discussed at length how the men and women workers of Baxter and Napino Auto & Electronics factories displaced the management's occupation of the shop floor. During that entire time, workers did not leave the factory. Men and women stayed inside the factory day and night, side by side; this signals their confidence in their relationship. There are several instances too of temporary and permanent workers acting together to demand equal increments in wages and other facilities. People are acting against inherited divisions, forging uncharted bonds.

Are these various actions that are being taken today breaking the stronghold of demand-based thinking?

The most remarkable and influential tendency that has emerged in this extensive industrial belt cannot be wrapped up, contained in, or explained via the language of conditions, demands, and concessions. Why? Over the years, the dominant trend has been to portray workers as "poor things," which effectively traps them in a language that makes them seem victims of their condition and dependent on concessions. And then they are declared as being in thrall to the language of conditions, demands, and concessions. This is a vicious cycle. In the last few years, the workers of Maruti Suzuki (Manesar) have ripped through this encirclement.

"What is it that workers want? What in the world do workers want?"

The company, the local government, the central government were clueless in 2011, they stayed clueless through 2012, and they are still clueless. This makes them nervous. That is why, when workers exploded despite the substantial concessions being offered by management, it resulted in six hundred paramilitary commandos being deputed to restore "normalcy." A hundred and forty seven workers are political prisoners even today.

Do all these questions hold for everyone, everywhere in the world?

Do these questions hold for everyone, everywhere in the world?

A month before these questions were addressed to the worker-readers of Faridabad, the April 2014 issue of *FMS* featured a categorical statement, and another question. Both begin with the same declaration about what the paper thinks is happening to the seven billion people of our planet.

> Today we can say with full confidence that an unsettling courses through seven billion people. It is inspired by the desire for an assertion of the overflowing of the surplus of life. It is an expression of creative, boundless astonishment.
>
> Today we can say with full confidence that an unsettling courses through seven billion people. And relatedly, a crisis-laden astonishment: What happens to the colossal wealth that is being produced? Where does it go? How is it that such a tiny sliver from it reaches daily life?

Astonishment is an interesting emotion. It can signal a profound delight alloyed with surprise, as well as the kind of deep anger that borders on puzzled rage. In dreams, we are far more comfortable with astonishment than we are when we are awake and distracted. This double-edged astonishment features both a joy at the self-discovery of the multitude's own capacities as a planetary force, as well as a recognition of how life itself is being drained of worth and value. This takes us to a new ground—a place of radical uncertainty. Here, both the perils and the potentials of a new global subjectivity lie in wait. Why can we not see them? Why can we not hear them call out? Perhaps they are feigning sleep, restoring themselves with an unauthorized midshift siesta that could break, if they wanted it to, any moment.

Perhaps, in places, it has already broken.

> Emergence of factory rebels. Attack on factories by congregations of workers. Frightened management. Industrial areas turn into war zones. Rising numbers of workers as political prisoners. Courts that keep refusing bail. A mounting rebuttal on shop floors of the unsavory behavior of managers and supervisors. The dismantling of the managerial game of concessions. Irrelevance of middlemen. An acceleration of linkages and exchanges between workers.

"This," says the paper, "is the general condition of today."

The one thing that we can say with certainty is that management no longer knows what workers are thinking. They do not know what happens next.

> Ebullitions all around, the unshackling of factories. Workers refuse to leave the factory. The undoing of

> the occupation of factories by management. Making factories unfettered spaces for collective gathering. Creating environments that invite the self, others, the entire world to be seen anew. Ceaseless conversation, deep sleep, thinking, the exchange of ideas. The joining together of everyone in extended relays of singing. The invention of new relationships. Whirling currents of possibility opened up by the making of collective claims on life.

This *too* is the general condition of today.

So how will the sinking ship of the state keep sailing? How will orders be given and obeyed if so few are even speaking the language of the captain anymore? For the ship not to sink, at least not yet, these orders must at least appear to be given and obeyed. Someone must semaphore.

Perhaps the rise of nationalism of the far right across the world is not as much a sign of the increasing power of capital and the state as it is a recognition, by those at the helm of affairs, of their own besieged situation. They are under siege. Once again the rulers do not know what is going on in the minds of those they rule. For all practical purposes, the subjects are opaque, oblivious to every command. Management does not even know whether the workers are asleep or awake. When they are asleep, they seem to be animated by the current of vivid dreams. When they are awake, they doze at the machine. Is this why every leader asks his nation to awaken? So that he can be reassured that they are at least listening to him? The more they sleep, the louder is the call to rise.

Postscript: The Kumbhakarna Proposition[3]

Kumbhakarna, a warrior in the Sanskrit epic *Ramayana*, is remembered for his ravenous appetite, enormous strength, ethical doubts (he did not want to fight in a needless war, but he did so when pressed, out of duty and loyalty), and his preference (given to him as a boon) for hibernating half the year away.

The Kumbhakarna Proposition is a proposal to recognize the revolutionary potential of the cultivated hibernation of a reticent strength, whose awakening has consequences. Like Kumbhakarna's prowess, which some attribute to his preference for sleep over wakefulness, the radical move may derive its strength from gestation. To assert, propose, or desire seduction into a long period of invisible ferment may be seen as a wager to linger or loiter over thinking, as opposed to making haste for the purposes of execution. This is the time to dream lucidly. To envision and realize the things that one cannot do when one is awake, distracted, bored, busy. This is the time for hearing voices, to become open to the murmur of the universe, for heresy, for audacious conversations, for acts to turn factories into orchards, and a laughter that makes standing armies into brass bands.

Let them who rule risk fatigue with their watchfulness.

We wink to them, good night!

Raqs Media Collective, Blackboard (A Time of Deficit), 2013. Screen print on mirrored steel.

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Raqs Media Collective (Monica Narula, Jeebesh Bagchi, Shuddhabrata Sengupta) have been variously described as artists, curators, editors, and catalysts of cultural processes. Their work, which has been exhibited widely in major international spaces and events, locates them 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. They co-founded Sarai in 2000, at the Centre for the Study of Developing Societies, Delhi. They are members of the editorial collective of the Sarai Reader series, and have curated “Insert2014,” “Sarai Reader 09,” “The Rest of Now" and co-curated “Scenarios” for Manifesta 7. An exhibition of their works is currently showing at Centro de Arts Dos de Mayo, Madrid.

1
For occasional translations from lead essays, and PDFs of monthly issues, see http://faridabadmajdoorsamachar.blogspot.in/ . All translations in this essay are by Shveta Sarda.

2
See "Antidepressants: Global Trends," *The Guardian*, Nov. 20, 2013 http://www.theguardian.com/news/2013/nov/20/mental-health-antidepressants-global-trends ; and *World Drug Report 2013*, United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime http://www.unodc.org/unodc/secured/wdr/wdr2013/World_Drug_Report_2013.pdf

3
See text by Raqs Media Collective in *The Curatorial: A Philosophy of Curating* , ed. Jean-Paul Martinon (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2013).

James T. Hong

The Nationalist Thing Which Thinks: Notes on a Genealogy of Ultranationalism

Preamble

Much has been written about nationalism, probably too much, and each day seems to bring more headlines and tragic stories about nationalist causes and ultranationalist atrocities. Everyone else's nationalism is a problem, while one's own intimate nationalist tendencies go unchecked.

The following is my self-understanding of the theoretical origins of ultranationalism—a topic that I have contemplated and researched for many years now. I have attempted to draft a speculative blueprint, which can be applied to any or at least most species of nationalism in the West and in the East. My leading assumption, which I don't consider controversial, is that what we now call "nationalism" has its imaginary origins in the West (Enlightenment thinking). From these Western roots, only some of which are outlined below, nationalism has, to me at least, grown into something not only dangerous but also politically indispensable.

The end of the Cold War failed to bring about the end of history as the liberal world order, and liberal democracies have failed to reign in the excesses and instabilities of global capitalist markets and to rid the new world order of primitive ideologies and political enmities. The threats to "forms of life," to the will to life, continue to exist. Stateless people and groups are exceptionally vulnerable to "disappearing." There can be no effective movement for collective self-preservation without the proper political determination.

1. From Radical Doubt to Transcendental Emptiness

It is easy to doubt the existence of Atlantis or Uranus, or strange creatures such as the penis-head fish. But in his 1641 *Meditations on First Philosophy,* Descartes goes so far as to doubt the existence of his own body and any material objects around him. After entertaining the idea that some evil demon is tricking him with sensations of a false world, Descartes arrives at the bedrock of his famous thought experiment: his doubt itself, or "I think."

Ever since *ego cogito, ergo sum*, a cottage industry of "rational psychologists" have elaborated upon "I think" by considering the "I" a thinking substance distinct from the body. But for Kant, in 1781, this I is empty and indescribable:

> Through this I, or He, or It (the thing), which thinks, nothing further is represented than a transcendental subject of thoughts = X, which is recognized only through the thoughts that are its predicates, and about which, in abstraction, we can never have even the least concept.[1]

The I is an X, a metaphysically naked, transcendental placeholder, and only in the space of this X is freedom made possible. The world of phenomena must follow the so-called "laws of nature," but the emptiness of the I, the nonphenomenal *cogito*, is somehow outside of nature, that is, space and time. It is the *noumenon*, the thing in itself.

The noumenon is a negative object of thought—our concepts only yield knowledge when they are related to phenomena. The thing in itself is the conceptual limit; it arises as the surplus of thought, the detritus of reason, like the "eye that cannot see itself." Hence Kant's famous observation: "Thoughts without content are empty, intuitions without concepts are blind."[2]

The thing which thinks3

2. What Am I, this Thing Which Thinks?

The noumenal I is an unnatural and frightening philosophical abstraction—a transcendental loneliness.[3] The thing which thinks is always already an embodied and situated thing, which not only thinks but also *cares*. Thinking is a striving for knowledge, sometimes for hope, or occasionally for change. Skipping Hegel, we can approach the notion of the thing which thinks with Schopenhauer's answer nearly four decades after Kant's first *Critique*:

> What Kant opposed as *thing in itself* to mere *phenomenon*—called more decidedly by me *representation*—and what he held to be absolutely unknowable, that this *thing in itself*, this substratum of all phenomena, and therefore of the whole of Nature, is nothing but what we know directly and intimately and find within ourselves as *the will.*[4]

This *will* inside each of us, and expressed in the proposition "I think," is for Schopenhauer extra-moral, preconscious, and perpetually in a state of becoming. Ideas or actions are not followed because they are good, they are good because we *will* them. Everything in the cosmos—not only our transcendental selves—exhibits *will*. The magic of creation (*creatio ex nihilo*) happens in the transition from noumenon to phenomenon.[5]

For organic creatures, Schopenhauer sometimes calls the will the "will to life," which can just as easily be described as the will to power. Heidegger states it succinctly: "To think is to will, and to will is to think."[6]

3. The Mass of Metaphors

The "I will" as "I think" always already resides in a language. A prison house or a "house of Being," language is a straitjacket—an instrument for manipulating reality, and in some sense, the world itself. It is the condition of the possibility for Cartesian doubt. As thinking things, we use language, but we don't create it; we are thrown into it. Thought without language is empty, and words without content are stupid.

Kant's Copernican Revolution—to explain objectivity with subjectivity—hinges on the subject's proper use of concepts and "categories" to organize the buzzing, blooming sensory world. This transcendental and thus mysterious mental process of understanding the world (what Kant calls the "transcendental schematism") is similar to the creative processes we employ when we use natural language. Children learn language by using it; they do not learn by following a strict set of explicit rules. To explain processes such as these, Kant resorts to the imagination:

> Synthesis in general [i.e., making sense of things] is, as we shall subsequently see, the mere effect of the imagination, of a blind though indispensable function

> of the soul, without which we would have no cognition at all, but of which we are seldom even conscious.[7]

The transcendental faculty of the imagination is the condition of the possibility for us figuring things out at all, let alone our ability to use language, interpret texts, and of course, make art. How things in the world appear to us and what makes them significant is a function of language synthesized by the imagination. Language is by nature communal, and the imagination is guided by the will. As Herder asked in 1784: "Has a people anything dearer than the speech of its fathers? In its speech," he continues,

> resides its whole thought-domain, its tradition, history, religion, and basis of life, all its heart and soul. To deprive a people of its speech is to deprive it of its one eternal good … The best culture of a people cannot be expressed through a foreign language … With language is created the heart of a people.[8]

4. Practical Consciousness

Just as we always already reside in a language, we always already think within ideology. Ideology is both a distorting mirror and an actual *imaginary* relationship with the real world. It distorts by obfuscating competing ideologies and by naturalizing its own mechanisms. Language without ideology is empty (the scientific ideal), and ideology without politics is blind.

Ideologies are not simply background ideas that guide our behavior in the world. They are also material, manifesting themselves in physical actions such as shaking hands or queuing. In Althusser's Marxist theory, a special type of social entity employs ideology: the beautifully named "ideological state apparatus."[9] The state is the most powerful ideological state apparatus—more so than the local Masonic lodge or art museum—but it functions primarily through the use of physical violence.

Ideological state apparatuses train our bodies and minds.[10] Symbolic violence is superficially more sophisticated than physical violence, and sometimes more difficult to see. Both physical and symbolic violence inspire us to "operant conditioning." We don't simply learn to follow the rules, we embody them in "know-how." As Althusser puts it, "The existence of ideology and the hailing or interpellation of individuals as subjects are one and the same thing."[11] When ideology is effective, we want in. We become ambitious:

Subjectivity without a subject.

> In ideology the real relation is inevitably invested in the imaginary relation, a relation that *expresses a will* (conservative, conformist, reformist or revolutionary), a hope or a nostalgia, rather than describing a reality.[12]

Without mentioning ideology by name, Heidegger calls it "the implementation of the will of the state, that is, of the people."[13] So-called "highly successful people" have not gamed the system. An ideology has birthed them. For Althusser the dominant ideological state apparatus is the educational system. Nationalist and ethnic ideologies, especially in East Asia, emphasize the family apparatus, which has been and is being expanded into the politicized, extended family. "Nature raises families;" writes Johann Gottfried von Herder, "the most natural state is therefore also one people, with one national character."[14]

5. Politics and- National Salvation

The state espouses its own ideologies while being the site of many competing ideologies, some of which may be

The ultranationalist.

expressly opposed to the state and the status quo. Ideologies become properly "political" when they make Carl Schmitt's well-known distinction between friends and enemies. In our private lives, we each have our own personal enemies, but private animosities are not properly political. The political is necessarily public and always involves one group opposed to another group in a potential life or death struggle:

> War follows from enmity. War is the existential negation of the enemy. It is the most extreme consequence of enmity. It does not have to be common, normal, something ideal, or desirable. But it must nevertheless remain a real possibility for as long as the concept of the enemy remains valid.[15]

Religious, moral, nationalist, or economic ideologies may become sufficiently political, if they can successfully group people into friends and enemies and inspire them to actual or potential violent conflict. Religious fanaticism in itself is not necessarily political. The religious fanatic becomes politicized once she is willing to die fighting the enemy. No community is a political unit in Schmitt's sense unless it has drawn the friend-enemy distinction, and its members are willing to engage in real war. "Each [political] participant is in a position to judge whether the adversary intends to negate his opponent's way of life," Schmitt explains, "and therefore must be repulsed or fought in order to preserve one's own form of existence."[16]

In other words, politics is necessary, because political entities exist. The existence of a state presupposes the existence of other competing states, and in those competing states, if one is not a friend, then one is an enemy. Schmitt warns that

> if a people no longer possesses the energy or the will to maintain itself in the sphere of politics, the latter will not thereby vanish from the world. Only a weak people will disappear.[17]

In and of itself, class conflict is now an unfashionable reason to make international war. Religion was once a significant politicizing force, with a clear differentiation between believer and heretic, but after the dawn of political theology, it is now the nation. Even Samuel Huntington uses Schmittian terms in explaining that "cultural identity defines the state's place in world politics, its friends, and its enemies."[18] The greatest imaginary unit with which to designate the friend-enemy distinction is the nation. "Indeed," Benedict Anderson concludes, "nation-ness is the most universally legitimate value in the political life of our time."[19]

Nations are not identical to states, and nationalist ideologies on occasion oppose official state ideologies. States usually, but not necessarily, administer a physical territorial area. Nations can and do exist without territories, but the accumulation or settling of a "national territory" (a homeland) is usually a key feature of any nationalist schema. There are currently a few *nation-states* in the world, such as Japan and North Korea, and they both employ various ideological state apparatuses to preserve and promote their political status as such.

Even if the nation does not yet have a geographical territory, it someday will. This ideological attitude reflects a committed and healthy (for the sake of the nation) optimism—a transcendental positivity (a will to life) and a vigorous materialist vision of the earth. Fleeing the vacuum of transcendental loneliness, the nationalist as ultranationalist finds comfort and protection in the settlement. The ultranationalist sees herself in the earth. Thus, following Schmitt,

> Every important change in the image of the Earth is

> inseparable from the political transformation, and so, from a new repartition of the planet, a new territorial appropriation.[20]

The nation, as a shared body or history of culture, language, ethnicity, and even cuisine, is a malleable and volatile concept (the nation = X). Benedict Anderson famously calls them "imagined communities," but it is precisely in this imaginary domain (the transcendental schematism) where nationalism draws its power. In 1922, Mussolini put it this way:

> We have created a myth, this myth is a belief, a noble enthusiasm; it does not need to be reality, it is a striving and a hope, belief and courage. Our myth is the nation, the great nation which we want to make into a concrete reality for ourselves.[21]

"In the same speech," writes Schmitt, "he called socialism an inferior mythology."[22] Mussolini may have been executed and his corpse defiled, but his ideological framework has legs. Liberal democracies have failed to inspire the imagination, and liberal capitalism is a boring myth. Even Islamic fundamentalism can work wonders with a nationalist agenda. When Mussolini talked about "striving," "hope," and "courage," he was really dressing up the notion of the will to life, or simply the *will*.[23] British historian Elie Kedourie sums it up nicely:

> National self-determination is, in the final analysis, a determination of the will; and nationalism is, in the first place, a method of teaching the right determination of the will.[24]

The decisionism of the will is historically impure, tainted and mystified by various ideological complications, especially universalist conceptions such as liberal humanism or socialism. In other words, the will as *political praxis*, as political volunteerism, is ideological. The state as a repressive apparatus constricts the imagination and is by nature a limiting concept.[25] The will is better suited to the open-endedness of the idea of the nation. The state is repressive, the nation expressive. States build while nations grow.

For Schmitt, politics gives us the possibilities for "authentic" existential self-realization embodied in war or struggle, and nationalism driven by the imagination is the most effective method of politicization:

> Only in myth can the criterion be found for deciding whether one nation or a social group has a historical mission and has reached its historical moment … In direct intuition the enthusiastic mass creates a mythical image that pushes its energy forward and gives it the strength for martyrdom as well as the courage to use force. Only in this way can a people … become the engine of world history.[26]

Or we can say with Kant that conflict and war make the will to a life of reason possible.[27] Nationalism is a myth just as much as capitalism is a myth or an ideology. Believing in and living the myth are signs of humanity—of being the X that thinks.[28] The nationalist can see beyond her own nation and can even empathize with those of other nationalities, while the ultranationalist is securely locked within her own hermeneutic circle. This shouldn't be seen as some kind of moral failure. The ultranationalist can act just as morally as any apolitical creature (Nietzsche's "last man"), but she has the advantage of being "extra-moral" and actively participating in the "states of exception" called "war."[29]

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Taiwanese-American filmmaker and artist **James T. Hong** (b. 1970) creates thought-provoking works that prompt conversation on controversial socio-political and historical issues. His films have premiered at international film festivals, including San Francisco International Film Festival (2007), IDFA (International Documentary Festival Amsterdam) (2012), Berlin International Film Festival (Berlinale), and Busan International Film Festival (2019), where he won the prize for Best Documentary (Mecenat Award) for *Opening Closing Forgetting* (2018), a film that follows Chinese survivors of Japanese biological warfare. He has screened films, and presented multimedia installations and performances in biennials and museums around the world, including Haus der Kulturen der Welt (HKW) (2013), Mediacity Seoul Biennial (2014), Kiev Biennial (2016), Para Site, Hong Kong (2015), Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York (2017), and Institute of Contemporary Arts Singapore (2018). He has participated in several editions of the Taipei Biennial, most recently "You and I Don't Live on the Same Planet" (2020), curated by Bruno Latour and Martin Guinard. His 2021 solo show *Animal* at the UK's Ikon Gallery just recently closed. Hong's work is represented by Empty Gallery, Hong Kong. He lives in Taipei.

1
Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason* , trans. Paul Guyer and Allan W. Wood (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 414 (A 346/B 404).

2
Ibid, 193-194 (A 51/B 75).

3
Cropped still from Voice of America, original location https://www.voanews.com/a/gunmen-seize-police-station-in-east-ukraine/1891931.html .

4
Slavoj Zižek problematizes the idea of the noumenal I in *Tarrying with the Negative: Kant, Hegel, and the Critique of Ideology* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1998), 9-17.

5
Arthur Schopenhauer, "The Will in Nature," in *Two Essays by Arthur Schopenhauer* , trans. unknown (London: George Bell and Sons, 1889), 216.

6
"For in every emergence of an act of will from the obscure depths of our inner being into the knowing consciousness a direct transition occurs of the thing in itself, which lie outside time, into the phenomenal world. Accordingly the act of will is indeed only the closest and most distinct manifestation of the thing in itself," in Schopenhauer, *The World as Will and Representation, Volume II* , trans. R. B. Haldane and J. Kemp (Boston: Ticknor and Company, 1887), 407.

7
Martin Heidegger, *Discourse on Thinking* , trans. John M. Anderson and E. Hans Freund (New York: Harper & Row, 1969), 59.

8
Kant, Critique of Pure Reason, 211 (A 78).

9
Johann Gottfried von Herder, "Materials for the Philosophy of the History of Mankind," in the *Internet Modern History Sourcebook* https://sourcebooks.fordham.edu/mod/1784herder-mankind.asp . Herder purportedly coined the term "nationalism."

10
Louis Althusser, "Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses (Notes towards an Investigation)," in *Lenin and Philosophy and Other Essays* , trans. Ben Brewster (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1971).

11
My brief summary of Althusserian ideology absorbs Pierre Bourdieu's account of *habitus* and *doxa*. See Pierre Bourdieu, *Outline of a Theory of Practice* , trans. Richard Nice (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977).

12
Althusser, "Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses," 175.

13
Louis Althusser, "Marxism and Humanism," in *For Marx*, trans. Ben Brewster (London: Verso, 2005), 234.

14
Martin Heidegger, *Nature, History, State* , trans. Gregory Fried and Richard Polt (London: Bloomsbury, 2013), 64.

15
Johann Gottfried von Herder, "Governments as Inherited Regimes," in *Another Philosophy of History and Selected Political Writings* , trans. Ioannis D. Evrigenis and Daniel Pellerin (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 2004), 128.

16
Carl Schmitt, *The Concept of the Political* , trans. George Schwab (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996), 33.

17
Ibid, 27.

18
Ibid, 53.

19
Samuel Huntington, *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2003, 125.

20
Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities* (London: Verso, 2006), 3.

21
Carl Schmitt, *Land and Sea*, trans. Simona Draghici (Washington, DC: Plutarch Press, 1997), 38.

22
Quoted by Carl Schmitt in The Crisis of Parliamentary Democracy, trans. Ellen Kennedy (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1985), 76. Schmitt has been described as a "proto-fascist," and while his legal theories are consistent with fascism, it would seem that all national revolutions are inherently proto-fascist.

23
Ibid. US diplomat Richard Holbrooke famously called Serb nationalist sentiment "historical bullshit."

24
For an extended reading of Heidegger's use of the "will," see Bret W. Davis, *Heidegger and the Will: On the Way to Gelassenheit* (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 2007).

25
Elie Kedourie, *Nationalism* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1996), 76.

26
For Heidegger, the nation exists within the state. See Heidegger, *Nature, History, State* , 43.

27
Schmitt, T *he Crisis of Parliamentary Democracy* , 68.

28
Immanuel Kant, "Idea for a Universal History with a Cosmopolitan Purpose," in *Kant: Political Writings* , ed. H. S. Reiss (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), see Fourth Proposition.

29
See Georges Sorel, *Reflections on Violence* , ed. Jeremy Jennings (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 20-28.

Szabolcs KissPál

The Rise of a Fallen Feather: The Symbolism of the Turul Bird in Contemporary Hungary

The powerful reappearance of the Turul bird in Hungary has become one of the key signifiers of the new national self-definition of the country's right and far right. The symbol is rooted in mystical and romantic historiography, which are the main tools for constructing the current national identity and its historical mission in Europe and the world.

[figure 2014_06_nagyszentmiklos-treasureWEB.jpg
The earliest known representation of the Turul bird on one of the vessels found among the Treasure of Nagyszentmiklós. Its origins and age are still debated, but it probably dates from the Avar Khaganate, sixth to seventh century CE.]

According to researchers, the cult of the Turul is based on the totemistic relationship between the nomadic Hungarian tribes and the Saker Falcon, a hunting bird of the Central Asian steppe. The Turul as a symbol is present in two main narratives from ancient Hungarian legend. The first is "Emese's Dream," in which the progenitress of the Hungarian people is impregnated by a Turul and gives birth to the Arpád Clan, which ruled Hungary during the country's golden age, from the tenth to the thirteen century CE.[1] The second narrative is "The Conquest of the Magyars" ("Honfoglalás"), which concerns the territorial legitimation of the Hungarian state. In this story, Turuls led a group of wandering tribes into the Carpathian basin, showing them the land of their future country.

The Symbolic and the Legal

In 2004, the Hungarian parliament passed a resolution affirming the national symbolic value of many animal breeds native to Hungary.[2] Although the Saker Falcon isn't among the more than one hundred species traditionally bred by Hungarians, in 2006 its temporary replacement on one side of the fifty forint coin by a different design generated anger on the far right, even though this depiction didn't resemble the historic icon of the Turul. "Turul" was also briefly considered as a possible name for a new Hungarian currency introduced in 1926 (authorities ultimately chose the name "*pengő*").[3] Ironically, it was an EU-supported LIFE grant that led to the successful resettlement of the species in the region between 2006 and 2010.[4] In 2013, a bill introduced into the Hungarian

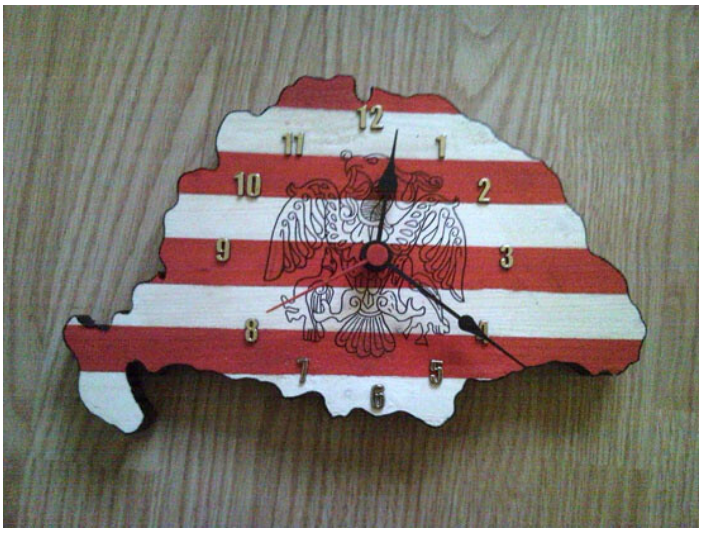
Above: The fifty forint coin with the regular and the temporary designs commemorating the 125th anniversary of the Hungarian Red Cross. Below: Mihály Munkácsy, Honfoglalás (Conquest of the Magyars), 1893. Detail of painting. Note the Turul feather in Arpád's helmet.

parliament by seven MPs of the radical right Jobbik party would have imposed a one-year prison sentence on anyone caught defacing images of the Turul or the Miraculous Deer, another important figure in the Hungarian ethnogenetic myth.[5] Although the bill did not pass, if it were reintroduced today, it might pass easily, as Jobbik itself has presided over the new parliament's cultural committee since April 2014.

[figure 2014_06_boszomenyi-partyWEB.jpg
The symbol of the Hungarian National Socialist Workers Party, transformed following its prohibition in 1933. Notice the Turul on top.]

The story of a memorial depicting a Turul that was erected in the 12th district of Budapest in 2008 is symptomatic of the changing symbolism of the Turul. The board entitled to decide upon the issue ruled against the construction of the memorial. In spite of this, the local mayor, a member of the conservative Fidesz party, green-lighted the project.[6] As Gábor Demszky, a well-known liberal politician, noted, "The Turul … became the symbol of unauthorized construction and of official authority that disregards its own rules."[7] Thus, the populist ethos of the "freedom fighter" was implicitly introduced. This later became the main metaphor of Viktor Orbán's "rebellious" relationship to EU norms and standards: in defense of the new national self, the authoritarian handling of laws is acceptable.

Following the methodology of the British anthropologist V. W. Turner, the polysemous character and multivocality of the Turul symbol can be analyzed with a triarchic approach, involving an exegetical, a positional, and an operational interpretation.[8] The exegetical interpretation relates to ritualistic behavior (totemism, shamanism, paganism). The positional interpretation relates to the symbol's iconological context (revisionist and nationalist elements, such as Greater Hungary, Arpád stripes, and the arrow cross). The operational interpretation concerns what is done with the symbol in public rituals, political rhetoric, trendsetting fashion, and so on.



Above: Wall clock in the shape of Greater Hungary with Arpád stripes. From an online shop. Source: fegeto.blogspot.com. Below: The monument commemorating the military and civilian victims of WWII, 2008. Source: 12.kerulet.ittlakunk.hu.

The Turul and the Pre- and Posthistoriographical Fields (Exegetical)

The current interpretations and political instrumentalizations of the Turul symbol connect to three main historical perspectives: prehistorical, historical, and posthistorical. Pre- and posthistorical perspectives are

used by popular, esoteric-mystical historiography. Official rhetoric shifts between these and the main historical argument, namely, that the Turul symbol was used by the honorable Arpád Dynasty. This argument is used to legitimate the symbol and purify it of the racist and fascist connotations it gained in the twentieth century. This contradiction fuels the controversy around the symbol's various usages, ranging from official to subcultural, from national to extremist.

[figure 2014_06_turul-arrow-crossWEB.jpg
Tattoo depicting the Turul bird with an arrow cross, the symbol of the Hungarian Arrow Cross party (1939–45), which was affiliated with the Nazis. In the subculture of the far right, the Turul has became a popular symbol for use in tattoos, fashion, and household objects. Source: **tattoomary.deviantart.com**.]

The prehistorical perspective positions itself in mythical times, before the settlement of the Hungarians in the ninth century CE. It goes back hundreds of thousands of years, to the era of occult religions. The *Arvisuras*, a pseudo-historical literary work describing elements of the " *táltos*" tradition (the Hungarian shamanic tradition), provides a framework for the occultism of some of the far right groups and subcultures which often cite this narrative as a source.[9] Some of these groups identify themselves as spiritual UFO hunters and claim that in the year 12788 BCE, the Turul Clan left the planet Turul in the solar system Sirius B and landed on earth.[10]

The content of *Arvisuras* is highly speculative and controversial. One of the conspiracy theories around it states that the mythological prehistory it describes was manipulated by Stalin's counter-information service with the intent of depriving Central European nations of their true history and identity by creating a nonhistorical, phantasy-based ethnogenetic narrative.[11] This interpretation clearly integrates anticommunist elements, which are an important part of the rhetoric of both the center-right and the far right.

The posthistorical perspective relates to the period that started with the Trianon Peace Treaty (1920), when, as an effect of postwar trauma, historical consciousness began to step out of reality. In 1919, the Turul Association was formed from several other Christian-nationalist comrade-in-arms groups. Starting in 1928, they held regular, aggressively anti-Semitic demonstrations, and eventually boasted a membership of over forty thousand. Gyula Gömbös, who was prime minister of Hungary from 1932 to 1936, was a central figure and honorary member of the association. He spread protofascist ideology based on the Szeged Idea, a notion developed by anticommunists in Szeged, Hungary in 1919 that blamed a "Judeo-Bolshevik" conspiracy for Hungary's defeat in WWI.[12] After WWII, authorities banned the Turul Association, but András Siklósi, an anti-Semitic poet from Szeged, claims to have recently reestablished it.

Ideology and Fashion (Positional)

Since 1989, the Turul symbol has gradually appeared in various popular designs, from T-shirts and flags to wall clocks, bags, wine, and cutlery. While the iconology of the designs was based mostly on the interwar national-romantic representation of the Turul, starting in 2010, as its usage spread significantly, a new style appeared. This style used the visual language of *Kalocsai* and *Matyó*, two folk traditions of the 1920s, an era when many producers and trade groups, such as the National Federation of Women Tailors, began mass-producing folk-style clothing. In 1934, the Committee of the National Movement for Hungarian Clothing was established to promote this trend among the interwar aristocracy.

In 2010, the Hungarian government launched the *Gombold újra!* (Re-button it!) campaign, which called on designers to integrate, once again, traditional Hungarian folk elements into contemporary fashion.[13]At the same time, the number of online stores offering items with explicitly nationalist designs increased significantly.

It is worth mentioning that the *Matyó* folk tradition, which these designs are based on, was added to the UNESCO list of representative cultural traditions in December 2012, on the initiative of Hungary.[14] Coincidentally, during the same UNESCO session, falconry—a sport and hunting method that is deeply rooted in Hungarian history—was also added to the list.

Above: An image from the blog of one of the spiritual UFO hunters. Source: emf-kryon.blogspot.hu. Below: The very first Hungarian balloon, which took off on May 1, 1902, was called Turul.12 Source: kepesrepules.

Public Rituals in Culture and Subculture (Operational)

The symbol of the Turul has been used in various ways throughout history, mostly in a military context; even now it is used in the logos of three major Hungarian institutions: the Military National Security Service, the Hungarian Army, and the Constitution Protection Office, as well as in a number of official seals of Hungarian settlements. But following the Trianon Peace Treaty, its meaning underwent a significant transformation: it became the general symbol of "national resurrection." The Treaty resulted in the loss of about two-thirds of Hungary's former territories and population. This was experienced as a sociohistorical trauma, and led to an explosion in revisionist politics during the interwar period. Thus, the Turul was gradually transformed into the symbol of the effort to reconquer these lost territories, which ultimately drove Hungary into the catastrophe of WWII.

Due to its fascist-revisionist references, the Turul was tacitly banned from Communist iconography, only to reappear in the public realm after 1989, mostly in popular culture. In the last decade, many new monuments depicting the Turul have been installed, especially since 2010, as a result of the official memory politics imposed by the Fidesz party. There are now more than 257 Turul monuments and statues across Hungary and in neighboring countries, some of which were erected even before WWI and the interwar period.[15]

In 2012, a ten-meter high Turul monument was erected in Opusztaszer National Heritage Park. Its unveiling was presided over by Hungary's current prime minister, Viktor Orbán, who started his inaugural speech by saying: "The Turul is an archetype of the Hungarian people. We are born into it just as we are born into our language and our history. The archetype belongs to our *blood and motherland*."

Since then, the measures taken by the Hungarian government, especially in the field of art and culture, have clearly followed the ideology of "blood and motherland." After the elections of April 2014, in which Fidesz unexpectedly achieved a majority again, a press conference was held. On the stage at the press conference, a small but significant new element had been introduced in the background: the finials on the tops of the national flags were changed from the classical spear to the "archetype" itself.

The symbolism of birds of prey goes back to ancient Egypt. Their usage was transmitted to modern times through Imperial Rome, where they were used as finials on the military standards carried by the Roman legions. The symbol has been widely used in heraldic iconography from the Byzantine Empire to the Third Reich. One can only hope that the new Turul finials on the Hungarian flag are intended to refer to the aquilas of the Roman standards rather than to the Turul's usage during the darkest period of Hungary's past.

Hungarian Prime Minister Gyula Gömbös with a feather in his cap, which was the fashion at the time. Source: rozvanyidavid.fw.hu.

Above: Falconry in Hungary in 1937 and 2012. Sources: filmhiradokonline.hu and csabaimerleg.hu. Below: The 2012 “Re-button it!” fashion show, and one of the Turul designs offered by a shop called Nagymagyar (“very Hungarian,” or one who supports Greater Hungary).

An irredentist memorial erected in 1928 on Freedom Square in Budapest. The “country flag” is held by a Turul (1939). It was replaced in 1945 by a Soviet Red Army memorial. Source: fortepan.hu.

Unveiling of the Turul monument in Opusztaszer, 2012. Source: www.pupublogja.hu.

Above: Assembly of the Arrow Cross Party circa 1938, and a reconstruction of a Roman standard. Sources: origo.hu and romanofficer.com. Below: Press conference following the elections of April 7, 2014. Source: kormany.hu.

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This text is based on a lecture given within the framework of the exhibition *Like a Bird: Avian Ecologies in Contemporary Art*, curated by Maja and Reuben Fowkes (Trafó Gallery, Budapest, December 2013–January 2014).

Szabolcs KissPál (1967) is an artist based in Budapest, Hungary who works in various media, from photography to video, from installation to objects and public interventions. His main field of interest is the intersection between new media, visual arts, and social issues. He currently teaches at the University of Fine Arts Budapest, Hungary, and he is a studio leader at the Academy of Fine Arts and Design in Bratislava, Slovakia. His works have been presented at, among other places, the Venice Biennale, ISCP New York, Stedelijk Museum Amsterdam, and the Seoul International Media Art Biennale, and they can be found in the collections of the Ludwig Museum for Contemporary Art Budapest, the National Museum for Contemporary Art Bucharest, the Muzeum Współczesne Wrocław, and the Kaddist Art Foundation Paris. Since 2012 he has been developing a collaborative activist practice by starting up and maintaining the NO MMA multilingual blog about Hungarian culture and politics. He is one of the founders of the protest group called Free Artist.

1
"Emese's Dream" is one of the earliest known tales from Hungarian history. The legend can be tentatively dated to around 860–870 CE, and with certainty to between 820 and 997 CE (between the birth of Almos and the mass acceptance of Christianity).

2
Parliamentary resolution 32/2004. (IV. 19.): "Protected, native, and ancient Hungarian animal species have their roles in education, the arts, and the preservation of our national identity. They represent an aesthetic value and their genome has economic significance … We consider the animal species listed in the attached document to be native and at the same time—in their names and appearance—symbols of Hungary."

3
See (in Hungarian) https://www.mozaweb.hu/Lecke-Tortenelem-Tortenelem_8-A_rendszer_megszilardulasa-102043 .

4
See https://web.archive.org/web/20141111013559/https://www.sakerlife.mme.hu/en/content/show?dattype=life .

5
Parliamentary modifying bill nr. 2013/ T/10273. Jobbik promotes an openly anti-Roma and anti-Semitic ideology and is currently the third largest party in the National Assembly.

6
See http://hungarianspectrum.wordpress.com/2008/07/27/th .

7
See (in Hungarian) http://magyarnarancs.hu/publicisztika/a-turul-mutatta-az-utat-88440 .

8
See http://www.indiana.edu/~wanthro/turner.htm .

9
"Arvisuras" means "truthfulness." The story is based on an oral myth transcribed by a simple steel worker, Zoltán Paál, in the 1950s and '60s. According to legend, while Paál was in captivity during WWII, he was initiated by a Soviet partisan-shaman into a secret tradition. Following the war, Paál spent his years transcribing the myth, resulting in a literary work of more than ten thousand pages entitled *Sealed With Blood* . The work was partially published in 1972 and almost entirely published in 1998.

10
See (in Hungarian) https://web.archive.org/web/20140410201313/http://www.kincseslada.hu/magyarsag/content.php?article.154 .

11
See (in Hungarian) http://arvisura.balladium.hu/ .

12

13
Gyula Gömbös is still an honorary citizen of Szeged. Local Fidesz and Jobbik MPs blocked the withdrawal of his honorary citizenship in 2011. The archive of the Turul Association was almost entirely lost during the siege of Budapest in 1944, but an interesting fact remains: starting in the mid-1930s, communist students with subversive intentions enrolled in the group, which led to a schism in 1943.

14
See (in Hungarian) http://www.fashiontime.hu/hirek/20120103_gombold_ujra_2_0/ .

15
See http://www.unesco.org/culture/ich/index.php?lg=en&pg=00011&RL=00732 and http://www.unesco.org/culture/ich/RL/00633 .

Liu Ding and Carol Yinghua Lu

From the Issue of Art to the Issue of Position: The Echoes of Socialist Realism, Part II

Continued "From the Issue of Art to the Issue of Position: The Echoes of Socialist Realism, Part I"

In the 1940s, as Socialist Realism took form and began to emerge following the establishment of the Communist Party's leading position in China, its language drew from the realism that had spread throughout the Chinese mainland in the 1920s and '30s. After 1949, Mao started to develop a cultural policy and released several statements on the matter; realism gradually transformed into revolutionary realism. Its incorporation into the revolutionary romanticism of the time meant that it ceased to be a realism that was naturalist in tendency. Rather, it gained spiritual connotations, and provided a blueprint for the political vision of socialism.

In this school of realism, artists sought methods of placing compelling, realistic details at the service of great political lies. The resources and dissemination mechanisms of art production were strictly controlled at one single source, rendering the creative motivations, education, and desires of the individual incomparably insignificant. The devastation wrought on intellectuals during the Cultural Revolution was further recorded in "scar art" and "scar literature."[1] During this period, hundreds of new magazines emerged, as well as thousands of translated texts and periodicals, while some selected foreign films and television programs were screened.

The second emergence of realism in China took place after the Cultural Revolution. This time, realism emerged as a resistant stance—or perhaps it would be more accurately described as emerging in the form of dissatisfaction with the increasingly empty realism that had taken shape since the founding of the nation and the Cultural Revolution. This realism depicted a realer reality, reality as it was witnessed, not the idealized reality portrayed and promised in Communist propaganda discourse, which tended to magnify certain details in the Communist Party's favor.

For instance, in Luo Zhongli's 1980 painting *Father*, the face of an aged farmer was painted in a size nearly as large as the portrait of Chairman Mao that adorns Tiananmen Gate, its details painstakingly depicted. On the surface, this artwork appears to be staunchly resistant to the regime, since prior to the Cultural Revolution, only portraits of leaders were allowed to appear in such a large size. When we look closer, we notice that a pen is sticking out from behind the farmer's ear. Luo Zhongli had wished to express the subject matter purely and naturalistically. But after keenly grasping information about how the government wished to convey the message of a new, educated generation of Chinese citizens, the artist

Cover of the periodical Meishu, 1955.

Luo Zhongli, Father, 1980. Oil on canvas.

decided to add the pen behind the farmer's ear, successfully depicting the type of worker, peasant, and soldier that the government of this new era hoped to mold. This addition thus allowed the work, despite its unconventional size, to conform to the government's new campaign, and allowed the artist to escape blame or suspicion. The pen focused attention on the portrayal of the laborer as—in the language of the Cultural Revolution—"red, bright, and luminescent," rather than on the bold breakthrough that the painting's size represented. *Father* thus gained an easy entry into that year's National Fine Arts Exhibition, winning the grand prize and becoming possibly the most recognizable image of modern Chinese art history.

Stars Art Group

In 1986, Gao Minglu summed up the artistic trends he had observed as the "85 Art Movement." He wrote an essay on the matter, which he presented at the 1986 National Oil Painting Exhibition. He stated,

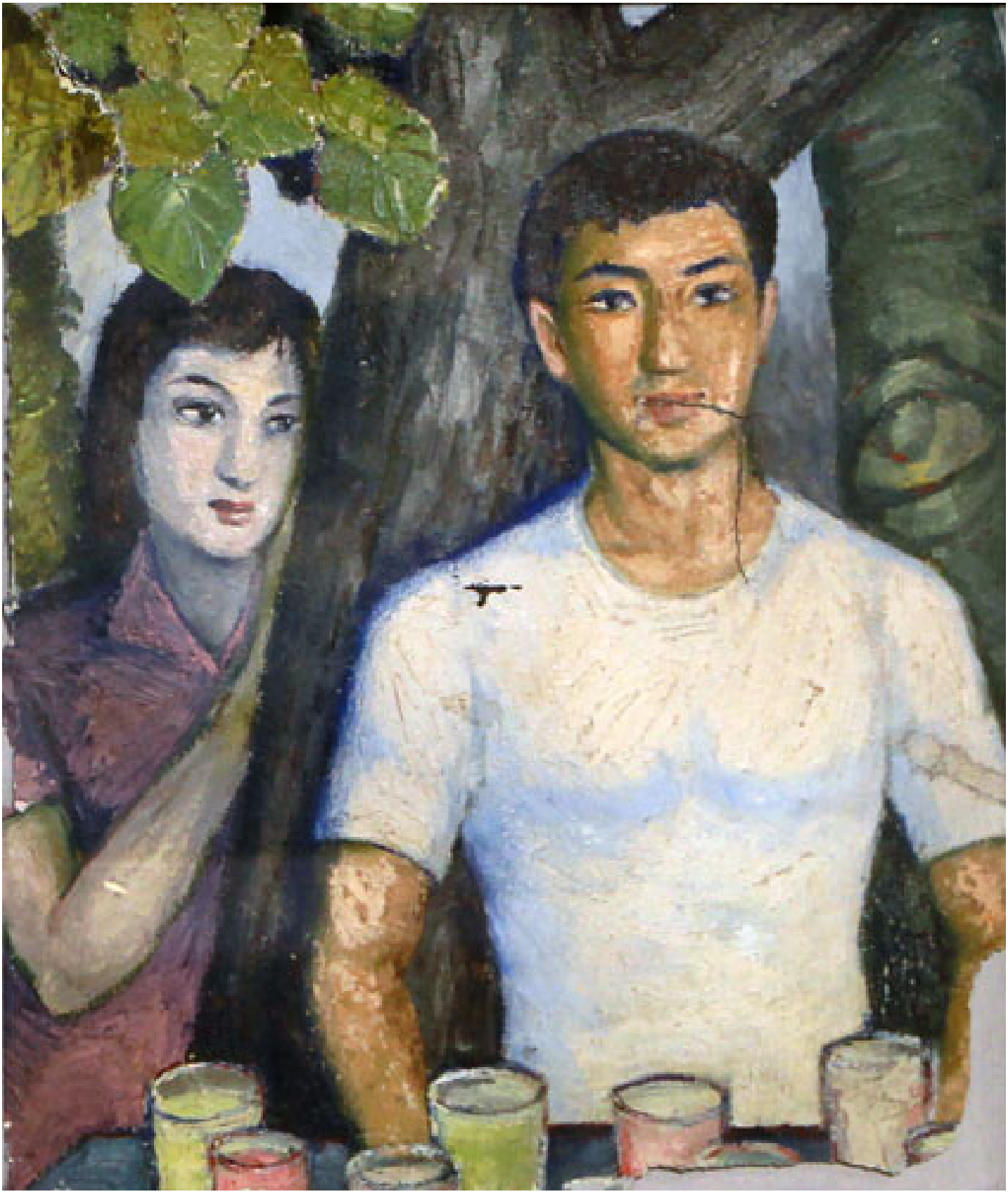
> In rational painting,[2] the figures are very mechanical. You cannot determine who they are. It is almost as if they have no relationship with reality. There was an appeal for "modernization" at the time, the pursuit of a sense of transcendence, a desire for entry into international modernization. This desire led to an affirmation of [the painters'] own cultural identity, an affirmation that was, to a certain extent, abstract rather than concrete. At the time, whether in oil paintings, ink paintings, or sculptures, there was always an emphasis on this internationality and modernity, and on one's own cultural identity. This was their basic affirmation of identity, and it made it so that the painter had to engage in surrealist methods of expression. There are so many art forms in the West. Why did these artists choose rational painting? They emerged from the old realist education, but this expressive form was more connected to the artists' pursuits, particularly to the cultural appeals of the cultural ferment of the 1980s and a new generation of cultured people.[3]], *Art World Magazine*, 2005.]

This appeal for artistic and cultural modernization has been the embodiment of Chinese intellectuals' sense of duty to nation and society since the early twentieth century. After the end of the Cultural Revolution, the state loosened ideological control, and interaction with international society on all levels was reactivated.

The Stars Art Group of 1979–80 emerged in a period of relative transparency and openness in the Chinese government following the end of the Cultural Revolution. Most participants in these events

> had similar family backgrounds, being either the children of high-ranking cadres (as they say in Beijing, "children of the big courtyard") or hailing from intellectual families. Though many of their families were impacted by the Cultural Revolution, from a certain perspective, they can be said to have enjoyed certain "privileges" as a class, one such privilege being that, when compared to average people, they could more easily gain knowledge from their families, and often enjoyed advanced access to various publications and news outlets that were new or perhaps tightly controlled or even "banned."[4]] (Nanjing: Vision Art Publisher, 2007), 22.]

On September 27, 1979, while the thirtieth anniversary of the People's Republic National Fine Arts Exhibition was being held at the National Art Museum of China, the Stars took over a fence along a small garden on the museum's east side, "Covering it in hangings of over 150 artworks by their twenty-three members, including oil paintings, ink



Zhou Maiyou, Water Seller, 1970. Oil painting, 61 x 62 cm.

paintings, pencil drawings, woodcuts, and woodcarvings."[5]

According to Wang Keping's account in *The Story of the Stars*, some large woodcarvings were placed on the ground, and some paintings were hung on trees. The poets of the literary magazine *Today* also wrote short poems, which were attached to the paintings. On the third day of the "Stars Art Exhibition," some thirty police officers cordoned off the east wing of the museum, where their artworks were being kept, and replaced the artworks on the fence with an announcement that was jointly signed by the Dongcheng District police precinct and the Urban Management Bureau. They confiscated the artworks and forbid the Stars from continuing their exhibition.

The artists held a meeting in the museum with Liu Xun, the chairman of the Artists Association, who was appointed to represent the Beijing government. The artists requested the return of their artworks and a public apology from the government. The artists marched on October 1, and later descriptions tend to cast the Stars exhibition as a political incident. But in fact, during the discussion and planning of the protest, most of the members of the Stars group chose to back out, and artist Huang Rui, one of the core members, was very hesitant about protesting, saying that "artists should succeed through art." Among the original twenty-three Stars, only eight participated in the protest. Huang Rui recalls:

> You could call it a peaceful protest, because we followed the police's directions. We only walked along Chang'an Boulevard for three hundred meters and then moved to the street behind Chang'an, walking past the three front gates—Hepingmen, Qianmen, and Chongwenmen. At Chongwenmen we turned the corner and arrived at the City Council building. We delivered our petition and dispersed … We never imagined we would achieve our goal. Not only were our paintings returned, we were allowed to continue the exhibition in Beihai Park. With the help of the protest, the first Stars exhibition was restored.[6]], in *Yuandian*.]

The Aftermath of the Stars Art Group

This event is often viewed as the origin of contemporary art in China, and because of the exhibition's closing and the artists' subsequent resistance, it has often been considered an act of resistance against the government and its authority, an act full of political awareness. This "resistance" that is projected onto the event misconceives of resistance as reflection, which is problematic in the widespread discourse about contemporary art practice in China. Simple gestures of defiance have been frequently taken as a critical reflection, whereas individual gestures are more commonly linked to emotional release and intuitiveness and are regarded as lacking a rational understanding of the structural political problems of the time. However, this understanding of the event is flawed: the artists of the Stars Art Group did not consciously take to the streets due to opposing political views. The incident arose out of their hope to present their creations, and the fact that they encountered an obstacle.

The ruling party has always been able to grasp the standards of what kind of art is possible and allowed. The first Stars exhibition is such an example. Afterward, the artists were able to negotiate with the Artists Association for a second exhibition, and were officially registered with the Artists Association in the summer of 1980. The Second Stars Art Exhibition was held on August 20 of that year, causing a sensation. Roughly five thousand viewers attended every day, and the group's influence spread across the country. The next year, the Stars, with the help of Artists Association chairman Jiang Feng, held an exhibition in the National Art Museum of China. Originally slated to run for three weeks, the exhibition was extended for an extra two weeks. "Visitors totaled 160,000, with seven to eight thousand attending each day."[7]

Poet and critic Zhu Zhu writes,

> It is very meaningful that the rebellious stance of the Stars was not "anti-centrist" but actually oriented towards the center. Though the Stars encompassed an independent spirit and a will to self-expression, in terms of rhetoric they were still linked to ideology, forming—as the group's name implies—a kind of "response to the sun" hierarchal relationship. The group's determination to penetrate the walls around the National Art Museum shows their psychological or subconscious reverence and infatuation with the patriarchy. In any case, entry implied recognition by the system or by authority, the realization of their self-value. For them, the National Art Museum was a Bastille waiting to be destroyed, as well as a shrine of their dreams.[8]

After the end of the Cultural Revolution, the state was willing to relax controls on art and culture, and this lessening of pressure on art breathed new life into all manner of cultural activities. Meanwhile, the traditional concept of "officialdom as the natural outlet for scholars" continued to influence rulers and intellectuals. Intellectuals used criticism and newly opened channels for art and literature to appeal to the government to further engage in modernizing reforms similar to those they had carried out in the economic realm, in hopes that on this foundation could be formed a system that they could approve of and serve. On the other hand, the central party leadership, with Deng Xiaoping at its core, while

Zhu Jinshi, Gulou Self-Portrait, 1978. Oil painting, 56.5 x 43.5 cm.

promoting the opening of horizons and the development of the economy, had no choice but to confront the explosion of individual desire that followed the opening of the economy.

To control the pace of reform, radical and conservative factions rose and fell within the reform movement. Under these circumstances,

> central authorities carried out a series of activities: between 1979 and 1980, moving against Beijing's "Democracy Wall" and the calls in Shanghai periodicals promoting the use of true democracy to carry out reform of the system; from 1980 to 1981, moving against bourgeois liberalist tendencies in the literature and art worlds; from 1983 to 1984, moving against "spiritual pollution"; from 1985 to 1986, moving against "unhealthy tendencies," etc. In all of these interventions and policy fluctuations between tolerance and suppression, Deng Xiaoping occasionally recognized the conservatives' worries about ideas and social instability, and occasionally affirmed the reformers' view that self-expression was indispensable to reform.[9]

Hans van Dijk, an artist who came to Nanjing to study Chinese in the 1980s, provided unique insight into the shift in Chinese cultural policies after the end of the Cultural Revolution. In his essay "Painting in China after the Cultural Revolution: Style Developments and Theoretical Debates," he wrote,

> Deng Xiaoping's reform efforts brought society into a period of relative freedom. At first, his cultural policies appeared to be a major transition for the world of literature and art. After over 30 years of dogmatism and cultural isolation, the Chinese literary and art scene was about to be released from the Socialist dogma that art should serve politics.

He continued:

> This essay proposes, however, that in reality, Deng Xiaoping intended for art to continue its traditional role of legitimizing the nation-state, and to continue defining China's "state identity," though by means that differed from the Mao era.[10]

Van Dijk believed that Deng differed from Mao in that the national heritage that had been deemed "feudalist" and "elitist" under Mao had, under Deng, been revived and put to new use as a pillar for creating and supporting a new sense of national self-confidence. In the 1980s, as modern Western art and philosophical ideas were introduced into China, young artists began to avoid artistic experiments that had been banned by the government, forming an artistic movement with independent ideas. The conflicts that arose with the government's will highlighted the political tasks and roles that Deng wished to assign to art.

Wang Hui once wrote that the liberalizing policies of the 1980s served to liberate China from the constraints of the past and the trauma of the Cultural Revolution, but also revealed the bias of the worldview created by state ideology:

> For the generation that grew up after the Cultural Revolution, their guiding knowledge was knowledge about the West, particularly America (and as before, it was knowledge with another kind of bias). Asia, Africa, Latin America, Eastern Europe, and Southern Europe—these once-familiar societies and cultures—were virtually outside of the popular range of knowledge. In reflections and writings on the Vietnam War in the 1980s, the dominant position was not thinking about war and new international relations, but rethinking of the Cultural Revolution, to the point that vilifying the Cultural Revolution became the crux of this reflective morality.[11]] (Beijing: Sanlian Bookstore, 2008), 123.]

Descriptions from these two perspectives came to form the backdrop and conceptual foundation of Chinese contemporary art's emergence in China. Chinese contemporary art practitioners benefited from the state's initial atmosphere of openness, while being constrained by the state's wavering stance on the matter. But the two maintained a certain level of unity regarding expectations and goals. The state's openness was not unidirectional, and its suppression was not continuous.

Contemporary Art in China

Most Chinese contemporary art specialists believe that

> beginning in 1979, the art world spontaneously split into two camps—official and non-official art. The former continued with traditional Chinese painting, woodcutting, and oil painting rooted in Russian Socialist Realism. But in the non-official art circle, experiments in all manner of artistic forms became central. These experiments were all, to varying degrees, influenced by Western modern art.[12]

Zhang Wei, The Forbidden City, 1975. Oil painting, 19 x 26 cm.

But we have discovered that in the early days after the end of the Cultural Revolution, there was no clear divide between official and non-official art. There was active reflection within official art on the great pressure placed on artistic creation by the politics and ideology of the Cultural Revolution, and attempts were made in various directions to restore freedom in artistic creation and thinking.

For example, Gao Xingjian's 1982 play *Absolute Signal* originally contained a description of the troubles of an unemployed youth, but in order to pass the censors, the play was changed to be about saving an unemployed youth. The subject matter of unemployment was considered negative and was unwelcome by the government and by the Ministry of Culture and its municipal governing bodies, which still monitor theater, films, publishing, and museum programs today. Such subject matter put its author at risk of being suspended, fined, and even deprived of future rights for expression. The play was eventually shown, and made groundbreaking experiments in language, acting, set design, lighting, and directing, gaining liberation in form. Likewise, some of the members of the No Name Group and the Stars Art Group chose to paint landscapes, still lifes, and abstract paintings in order to gain more room for artistic practice. But long-term constraints left these formal experiments and breakthroughs without fundamental conceptual momentum, so that in the end, they became empty or impossible to carry further.

The book *Research on the Beijing School of Painting in the 20th Century* explains that after the end of the Cultural Revolution, artists went into a creative frenzy and collective awareness was heightened, but organizational aspects did not keep pace with these changes. At the time, the Art Bureau of the Ministry of Culture was already established, and the Beijing Municipal Fine Art

Lin Zhaohua, Absolute Signal, 1982. Documentation from the play of the same name.

Photography Exhibition office was still working to organize exhibitions. But these organizations were limited in scope, and coupled with a lack of cohesive official character and reliable administrative measures, they were unable to adapt to the rapid changes in the objective situation. These various groups were just beginning to prepare for restoration and reconstruction, and in this situation, there emerged the phenomenon of artists spontaneously organizing their own art groups in order to satisfy their desire to hold exhibitions and exchanges.

The emergence of artist groups in this period can be traced back to the *New Spring Painting Exhibition* held at Beijing's Zhongshan Park in January 1979. This exhibition was arranged by Yan Zhenduo, Li Yuchang, and other young oil painters, and featured the Beijing oil painters Liu Haisu, Wu Zuoren, Liu Xun, Wu Guanzhong, Jin Shangyi, Yuan Yinsheng, and Liu Bingjiang, as well as some amateur oil painting enthusiasts who still held other jobs, such as Zhong Ming and Wang Leifu. The exhibition showed works by a total of thirty-six artists. The artists chose their own work, there was no censorship, and they set up the exhibition together, rotating work shifts and not arranging the exhibition according to rank. The atmosphere was relaxed and harmonious.

Jiang Feng, who had just been rehabilitated, wrote the foreword to the catalogue for this exhibition, in which he raised several issues: there should be "no censorship system for exhibitions"; artists should be able to "freely form artist groups"; they should "promote diversity of style, medium, and subject matter among artworks"; artworks "can be marked for sale"; and exhibitions should be "self-funded, with no need for government sponsorship."[13]

Ma Kelu, Zhongshan Park, 1975. Oil painting, 26 x 19.6 cm.

The questions he raised in this text represented sentiments shared among artists of the time, and some of the suggestions eventually became reality. In particular, his statement about "freely forming artist groups" was received with an immediate, enthusiastic response among young painters. The painters who took part in this exhibition began by establishing the Beijing Oil Painting Research Group. Many artist groups and research groups soon followed in Beijing. Some thirty such groups have been documented, with membership approaching one thousand people. Twenty-five of these groups were in frequent contact with the Beijing branch of the Artists Association.

A group of realist paintings that emerged in 1989 can be seen as a third wave of realism that differed from both Socialist Realism and the post–Cultural Revolution realism that engaged it in dialogue. The realism that emerged at this time did not magnify reality in life, but instead directly depicted reality in life. Yet it also expressed the negative, disoriented sentiments of life. The rock music, literature, and artistic creations that emerged after 1989 directly extracted fragments of reality from "homes," "the streets," "parks," "buses," and "corners," recreating the most common, public level of reality using the most direct, naked, and unadorned language. It was as if all of our lives could enter the painting, the song, the story. Song Yonghong and Liu Xiaodong were among the artists who engaged in a direct depiction of life on the streets, portraying the most mundane and uneventful scenes of family life, friends, and passersby. Song Yonghong once described the original intent behind his 1990s series that "openly" depicted "sex" in this way:

> Whether in life or in art, reality only leaves us with random fragments. No social event or artistic form, or the values they represent, can produce a profound and lasting effect on our minds. Thus, boredom becomes the truest perception of our current state of existence. So in my works, there often appears a cold, mocking, voyeuristic attitude of the onlooker, uncovering those countless boring, nauseating, yet inauthentic amusing scenes within common social settings, revealing the trivial, despicable, and ridiculous behavior in everyday life.[14]

What we are trying to understand is that what we view as "dissent" and what we see as unconnected to us or the object of our opposition, and this "other thread" that we do not care about, might actually come from the same source as the trajectory we are currently on.

What we are reflecting on is the lack of a diversity of narrative perspectives in the field of Chinese contemporary art, a situation that mirrors the lack of diverse perspectives in the research on China's history. The one-sidedness of the picture of the world and of this country drawn by state ideology is embodied in the magazine *Meishu* (Fine Arts), which was published between 1954 and 1966. In its first issue, the magazine, run by China's Artists Association (itself founded in 1949), published an essay on the "new Chinese painting movement." In its early days, while Socialist Realism was further crafted into ideology, *Meishu* promoted various forms of mass art, such as New Year's prints, panel comics, and propaganda posters, playing a major role in establishing the forms of art in the new China. Before the beginning of the Cultural Revolution, each issue contained discussions on Socialist Realism, selective introductions to Asian countries with similar ideologies and viewpoints, in-depth essays on art forms found in the Soviet states, and sustained attacks on the capitalist tendencies of European art. To this day, our understanding of artistic and cultural trends in the world, including in Asia, remains very one sided, even deficient.

Criticizing the Cultural Revolution has become the primary criterion for the legitimacy of art criticism in China, but this vilification has remained on the level of emotional release. It lacks rational, critical, and spiritual resources for analyzing and discussing the profound and lingering effects of the Cultural Revolution. The Cultural Revolution is often described as a break; it is rarely analyzed as an expressive form and organizational component of China's modernization process. Likewise, our tendency is generally to treat artistic creation from the founding of the party to the Cultural Revolution and the creation of the Artists Association in 1949 as the entirety of the art produced in this long period. Because of this art's emphasis on politics, this subject has for a long time been isolated due to certain abstract moral viewpoints. We have actively chosen to avoid it. It has gotten to the point that we are unable to fully penetrate the trajectory of art's modernization in China.

Song Yonghong, Night Flag, 1997. Oil painting, 150 x 110 cm.

Aside from attributing the process of modernization in China to our learning from the West, we have continuously failed to discover the internal logic and basis for such a development within our own history and traditions. We have thus failed to establish ourselves as a subject that was responsible internally and independently for what happened. We often describe ourselves and our transformation as entirely subject to external influences from the West. Through the repeated emphasis on the advanced status of the West and our own backwardness, we are unable to squarely face a modernization process that strays from a linear developmental model, and unable to confront the fact that the isolation, failure, and regression of the Cultural Revolution was actually a part of this modernization process. We have grown dependent on an allegorical view and experience of history that is a stair-step progression of movement. However, China was in fact projected along a track of its own modernity during the few decades before and after the Cultural Revolution. This perspective allows us to view China in a way that transcends the framework of a strictly national modernization, reactivating our subjectivity in the perception and understanding of the national history of art within an international, global scope, even though this subject is full of contradictions and shortcomings. In practice, we have never been able to admit the fact that we have our own subjectivity

Globalization and the Rethinking of Socialist Realism

Since 1989, in the field of art, Europe has never stopped thinking about the phenomena, challenges, and possibilities brought by globalization. Globalization is not something that is about to take place, nor is it an external phenomena. It is an accepted reality that has already become a part of people's work and life. This acceptance, however, is not passive. It is something that is constantly rethought, discussed, and criticized. Thinking about globalization has become a dominant line of thought in discussions of artistic creation and art theory.

However, the East-West dichotomy model of thought from the Cold War continues to persist today:

> We believe that these people have turned the goal of enlightenment into a substantive process, and so the concept of globalization they describe has become somewhat misleading. They all view globalization from a teleological viewpoint on modernity, viewing this globalization as the endpoint and goal of history, using existing historical models to shape our own history. But they have not realized that whether or not we are willing, we are already situated within the historical relationships of globalization.[15]], 482–511.]

The summary negation of the past has formed into an overly absolutist expression of history. It obstructs the possibility of viewing ourselves today through the lens of our own past and that of others.

[figure 2014_06_Wang-Fu-Jing-Fruit-Store-by-Zhu-JinshiWEB.jpg Zhou Maiyou, *Wang Fu Jing Fruit Store,* 1970. Oil painting, 19.5 x 13.5 cm.]

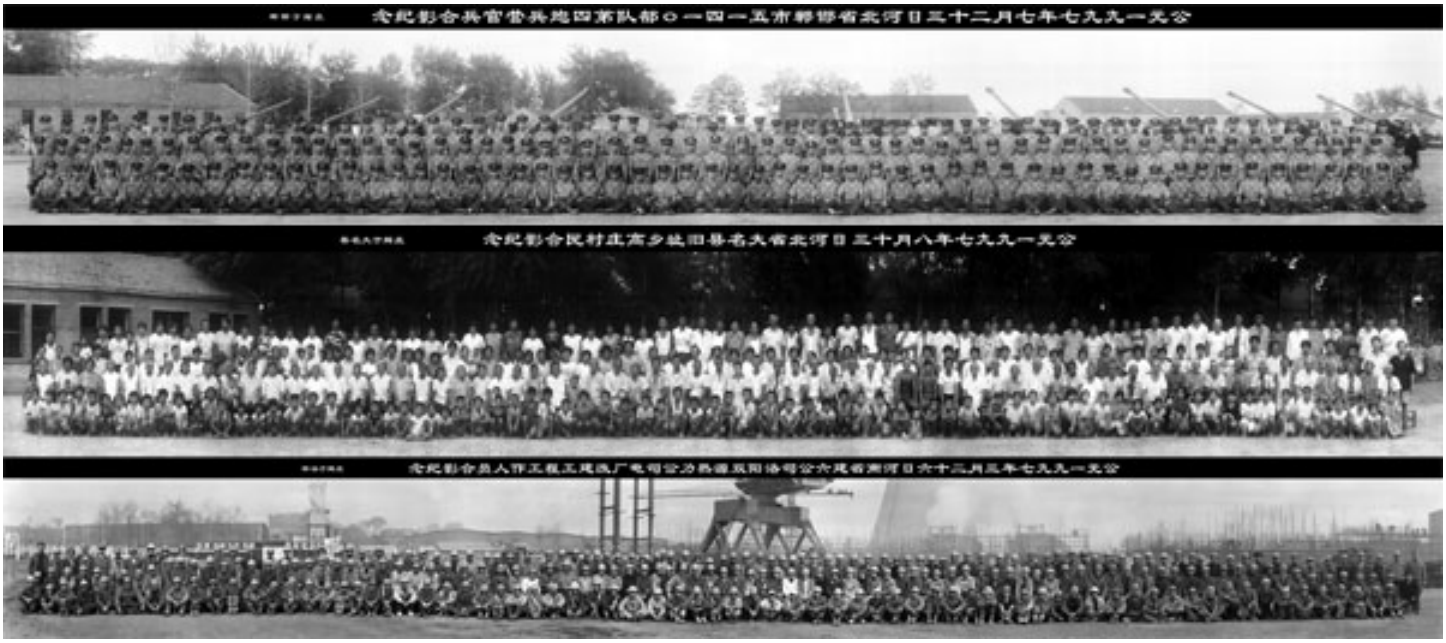
The rethinking of Chinese socialism that took place in the 1980s unfolded along a dichotomy between tradition and modernity, and its criticism of socialism's problems could not be extended to a rethinking of the reform process and the model it found in Western modernity. On the contrary, criticism of socialism became a means of self-affirmation in the post–Cold War era. China's socialist movement was a resistance movement as well as a modernization movement. It was carried out through the effort to build the nation and the process of industrialization. Its historical experiences and lessons are inextricably linked to the process of modernization itself. We propose to treat Socialist Realism as a dominant thread in our examination of modernity in China. Socialist Realism has always been intertwined with the appeal for modernization in China's evolution. Not only was the question of modernization in China raised by Marxism, but Marxism itself is an ideology of modernization. Not only was modernization a fundamental goal of the Chinese socialist movement, it is itself the main trait of Chinese modernity.

The concept of modernization in the Chinese context differs from the theoretical concept of modernization, particularly because the Chinese concept of modernization encompasses values that are oriented around socialist ideology. Mao Zedong's socialism is, on the one hand, an ideology of modernization, and on the other, a criticism of European and American capitalist modernization. It is clear that the politics of names is the politics of memory. Our Socialist Realist conceptual tradition took shape within a named reality, and it is within that named reality that it stretches into the present day. By bringing it into the light for examination, we hope that this is only the beginning of discussions and efforts to reconstruct the situation and in doing so, restore its complexity.

The Revival of Realism

In recent years, the revival of realism has begun to emerge not in painting but within the art world, in the calls, actions, creations, and appeals for art to intervene in society. Some artists have fiercely criticized the intellectual orientation of art. When confronting the harsh political reality and the worsening contradictions in society, some artists feel that art should engage more directly in social movements. Some artists reenact social reality in their

Song Yonghong, Riverside Landscape, 1998. Oil painting, 150 x 110 cm.



Above: Zhuang Hui, Hebei Handan 51410 Army Fourth Artillery Troop on July 23, 1997, 1997. 101×614 cm; Middle: Zhuang Hui, Hebei Daming County Relic Site Xianggao Villagers on August 13, 1997, 1997. 101×579 cm; Below: Zhuang Hui, Henan Sixth Contruction Co. Luoyang Dual-Source Thermal Power Co. Ltd Alteration Project Crew, March 26, 1997, 1997. 101×735 cm

works—particularly the reality of society's lower rungs—in the belief that through this reenactment, modeling, and recreation, the absurd yet real, harsh, and unforgiving social organizational methods and the aesthetics of the bottom of society and rural life can propose critical suggestions and solutions, and that in doing so, the artists themselves occupy the moral high ground. These acts and artistic standpoints often reject the intellectual side of artistic practice, and thus are unable to achieve substantive participation and intervention.

They also crudely exclude other forms of creation, forming yet another narrow definition of art. Through many years of political movements, including the Cultural Revolution, artists have been asked to equate themselves with workers, peasants, and soldiers in terms of their class affiliation, behavior models, and values. They have been told that their views and sympathies should lie with the people. The social intervention actions that have suddenly burst forth in the art world in the past few years—and artists have quickly described this practice as a form of creation in their artist statements and through collaboration with critics—reveal a certain hero complex in the minds of these artists, a certain desire to play the role of savior, an appeal to attract attention and a sense of being at the center through these actions.

To a great extent, artists today experience a powerful feeling of loss of position. Though they are all deeply involved in a particular project or creative process, there is always this feeling of being left undescribed, of being absent from the dynamic and guiding artistic discourse, a sense of dissatisfaction due to unknown origins. In fact, there may not exist an absolutely dominant artistic discourse. Looking at the current situation in China, there is a sense of acute presence and vividness in the various regions, artistic communities, and levels of artistic practice. This can be seen in various blog posts and reports on art websites.

Within a short period of time, a younger generation of creators enters into a honeymoon period of scrutiny, support, consumption, discussion, and description thanks to the novelty-seeking nature of the art system. Meanwhile, many artists who have been working since the 1970s, though they were once granted a certain amount of recognition from the art system—including being described as participants in one art movement or another, held up as the representatives or leading figures of their generations, included in international exhibitions on Chinese art, and lauded by collectors and the market—still face the threat of no longer being described.

Artists born in the 1950s and early 1960s generally face long-term anxiety about whether they will be able to appear on the covers of art history texts and in the lists of auction records. The attention fixed on them has not shifted to their works, despite the passage of time. Descriptions of these artists remain focused on the prices fetched by their work in the art market. There is little discussion and understanding that transcends this level. A considerable number of Chinese artists that reached the height of their artistic careers in the mid-1990s, such as Fang Lijun, Wang Guangyi, Zhang Xiaogang, and Yue

Cover of the periodical Meishu, 1957.

Minjun, are today icons of success based on extreme wealth and record-setting auction prices. But few have received a proper scholarly survey of their artistic career. Suffering from a lack of academic interest, in the past decade Fang Lijun has tried to organize touring exhibitions about his career in order to highlight his own position in art history and generate new waves of critical discussion about his works. These attempts, however, have only served to elevate the price of his works further. We could say that in the past three decades of Chinese contemporary art, there are so many works and ideas that have not been recognized.

For most artists who grew up in the 1970s and '80s and reached maturity in the '90s, the critical world's silence has left them lost, perplexed, and conflicted. They accumulated considerable capital between the early '90s and the 2008 financial crisis, and have made it safely into the new wealthy elite in a supposedly classless contemporary China. Interestingly, they operate within this class, using auction donations and other mechanisms to shape themselves into public figures of a sort. At the same time, they cannot escape the sense of loss that comes from being unable to gain the attention of curators and critics. Here, the development of art has lost continuity. One often sees artists such as Zhang Enli, Liu Xiaodong, and Zeng Fanzhi—all of whom work with international galleries and have exceptional market performance—circulate more among collectors, dealers, and the new rich than among the intellectual spheres of the art world.

As the art market began to flourish after 2000, contemporary art's self-consumption became a possibility, unlike in the '90s. Most artists and galleries who unconsciously followed supply and demand in their work were able to grasp within a short period of time the right to choose creations, present creations, collect creations, and even set the standards of creation, thanks to the economic order. To date, economic forces continue to be the strongest ruling power in the field of art.

Certain artists who once gained attention and were placed at the center of the artistic landscape in the '90s gradually lost this sense of centrality after 2008. Some of these artists have backpacked, setting out for distant places to take photographs and collect material. Zhuang Hui and Li Yongbin, for instance, have in the past several years spent a considerable amount of time travelling by public transportation or motorbike through places such as western China, known for its extreme conditions. This attitude invokes the "hard labor" of Mao's era, when intellectuals were called to go into rural or mountainous areas and learn from the working class. Li Yongbin even moved to a village outside of Beijing, seeking a kind of solitary state of being. There are also artists who have returned to the reality depicted in traditional Chinese landscape painting, travelling to the locations themselves in hopes of understanding the work of past artists and gaining new creative vision. Yin Zhaoyang, for instance, who became celebrated in the '90s for his paintings of youth cruelty, has shifted the focus of his painting to recreating compositions and aesthetics seen in traditional Chinese landscape paintings. Compared to the romantic view of art, the working methods of artists today and the ways they choose to participate in the art system are heavily realist in tone. The socialist significance of their arts stems mainly from the hopes that people place in art for progress and development.

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1
A form of realism, "scar art" as a movement attempted to draw closer to reality than the Socialist Realism of the time.

2
In 1986, Gao Minglu published an essay called "On Rational Painting" in the magazine *Meishu* (Fine Arts), in which he categorized some of the paintings that emerged in the first half of the 1980s as "rational painting," referring mainly to the analytical and critical tendency of those paintings, as opposed to intuitive and emotional expressions. Gao stated that realist painting was one kind of rational painting that involved both faithful depictions of reality and a humanistic spirit, as well as an aspiration for a "real" realism, a realism of critical reflection instead of a romanticized one.

3
Liu Libin, "Nan yi Wangque de '85 Yundong': Duihua Gao Minglu" [The unforgettable "85 Movement": A dialogue with Gao Minglu

4
Zhu Zhu, *Yuandian: "Xingxing Hua Hui"* [Point of origin: The "Stars Art Group"

5
Ibid.

6
Zhu Zhu, "Huang Rui Fangtan" [Interview with Huang Rui

7
Zhu Zhu, *Yuandian*.

8
Ibid.

9
Fairbank.

10
Hans van Dijk, "Painting in China After the Cultural Revolution: Style Developments and Theoretical Debates (Part I: 1979–1985)," *China Information* 5.3 (Winter 1991–92): 1–21.

11
Wang Hui, *Zhongguo "Xin Ziyou Zhuyi" de Lishi Genyuan* [The His torical Roots of "Neoliberalism" in China

12
Hans van Dijk, "Painting in China After the Cultural Revolution."

13
Jiang Feng, "Beijing Paintings At the Beginning of the Reform and Open Door Policy," in *A History of Beijing Paintings in the Twentieth Century* , eds. Shao Dazhong and Li Song (Beijing: Beijing Fine Art Academy, 2007). Text taken from the website.

14
Song Yonghong, Artist's Statement as part of a text by Lv Peng, "The Spiritual Comfort of Objective Expression: On Song Yonghong's Art," in *Song Yonghong* (Beijing: Beijing Art Now Gallery, 2006). 40.

15
Wang Hui, "Appendix 1: Answering Questions on Modernity," in *Zhongguo "Xin Ziyou Zhuyi" de Lishi Genyuan* [The Historical Roots of "Neoliberalism" in China

Daniel Birnbaum

Obituary for Sturtevant

It was already midnight when Sturtevant appeared at my Frankfurt apartment with flamboyant hair and dressed to kill. What an extravagant, outrageous lady! This was a decade ago, but for some reason I remember that it was 4:20 in the morning when she and curator Udo Kittelmann, who had brought her, finally left in a taxi. That was nothing special in those art academy days, when nobody ever wanted to go to bed, but her stories about playing tricks on Marcel Duchamp and embarrassing Andy Warhol with dirty jokes made quite an impression. Some weeks later she gave a weirdly robotic talk for the students of the Städelschule, where I was then director, and dismissed every question from the audience as too dumb to even consider. She had just opened a major retrospective at the Museum für Moderne Kunst, and was spending a few weeks in our German town. At that opening she was in the best possible spirits and treated me as a friend. Fans from all over the world had arrived, and I remember being introduced to critic Bruce Hainley, the true expert on her work. He was working on *Under the Sign of [sic]*, the brilliant book that has finally appeared and which anyone interested in Sturtevant's work should read.[1]], (Los Angeles: Semiotext(e), 2014).]

Many artists were there to pay her homage. Michael Riedel arrived with a white lily that he placed on the table in front of Sturtevant without uttering a word. Those were the days when Riedel was confusing German audiences, drawing them into a world of echoes, afterimages, and replicas. Using strategies of doubling and inversion, he created a kind of parallel universe—simulacra that were never merely mechanical copies but rather creative restagings of entire exhibitions by others. Sturtevant seemingly had no clue what the flower on the table signified or who had put it there. All the same, in an articulate conversation with Hainley the year before, she had succinctly spelled out what our present artistic condition is all about and how it makes art like hers (and Riedel's) pertinent: "What is currently compelling is our pervasive cybernetic mode, which plunks copyright into mythology, makes origins a romantic notion, and pushes creativity outside the self. Remake, reuse, reassemble, recombine—that's the way to go."[2]

I remember reading this conversation later and realizing that Francesco Bonami and I definitely should have included her in our "Delays and Revolutions" that formed the center of the 50th Venice Biennale, and started with Warhol's screen test showing a wry Duchamp (1964–66) and his doubling of the screen in *Outer and Inner Space* (1965), and culminated in works by Cady Noland and a vast gallery full of Richard Prince's rephotographed Cowboys. How could we have overlooked Sturtevant in this labyrinthine meditation on repetitions, duplications, and simulacra? Unforgivable! I didn't know her personally then, but I had seen her work as early as 1989 at Christian Leigh's legendary "The Silent Baroque" at Galerie Thaddeus Ropac in Salzburg. A few years after this extravaganza Leigh himself disappeared mysteriously, like

Sturtevant contemplates her Warhol Flowers, from 1990. Installation view of "Sturtevant: Image over Image," Moderna Museet, Stockholm, 2012. Courtesy: Moderna Museet / Asa LundEn.

Duchamp's original urinal, now known only as a photograph. The last sign of him I can remember was a ghostly portrait in the *New York Times* and a story about some vanished artworks and his own disappearance. No one knew what happened to him, not even Sturtevant, and to me his strange fate become part of her simulacral art, with all its enigmas and uncertainties:

> Dear, dear Christian, with his keen and intense face—so clever, so fast, so funny, so bad. He played out fantasies in the murky art world that would have played out better on the dramatic stage. He was a super talented guy, with critical panache, who made twisted turns that sucked him up—and that was that. As for where he is now: Maybe he's a master samurai in Tokyo.[3]

After years of studio visits, openings, and hilarious dinner parties, I feel that I did know her well, and yet so much remains uncertain. Very little is known about her background, and she officially only used what we all assumed was her last name. Her best friends called her Elaine, and I started doing that too. Was she really turning ninety this summer, as the obituary in the *New York Times* claims? Many years ago, this maze of ambiguities prompted Pop art historian Tilman Osterwold to write, "Perhaps everything that was ever written about Sturtevant is wrong. Perhaps that is her strategy."[4]

Some basic facts seem certain: Sturtevant made her debut in 1965 with an exhibition at the Bianchini Gallery in New York presenting Warhol's silkscreen prints of flowers. A plaster figure offered a clothes rack full of other paintings by male colleagues Frank Stella, Jasper Johns, Robert Rauschenberg, and Roy Lichtenstein. The general reaction was not one of enthusiasm. Some of the artists were pissed off, others took it calmly. Predictably, Warhol was the coolest and invited Sturtevant into the factory to use his original silkscreen and other tools to create perfect replicas. At some point, after being questioned over and over again about his process, Warhol famously replied: "I don't know. Ask Elaine." On the whole, Sturtevant was dismissed by the critics, and in 1974, after years of frantic activity, she decided to stop producing exhibitions. She turned to tennis. This was to give the "retards" time to catch up.

It wasn't until this last decade that the institutional world finally caught up—she was given large institutional shows in Frankfurt, Paris, Zurich, London, and Stockholm. As Fredrik Liew, the curator of the Moderna Museet exhibition, pointed out, we should remember that her debut exhibition was made several years before Roland Barthes's essay "The Death of the Author" (1967) and Michel Foucault's "What is an Author?" in 1969, two texts which are often invoked to make sense of her art. The critical literature that would give Sturtevant her intellectual framework was not written yet, so no one can accuse her of simply illustrating philosophical ideas formulated by others. She really was ahead of her time. The Moderna Museet, with its history as a key institution for Duchamp, Warhol, and the whole Pop era, was the ideal place for a large exposé, and we made the rather extreme decision to open the show with no other artists' work displayed in the entire institution. There were no originals in the museum, only repetitions. Needless to say, the artist was pleased.

Sturtevant's repetitions never look back, they look ahead. They have nothing to do with revival and return, nothing to do with nostalgia, but are instead turned toward the future: repetition as difference, repetition as production of the new. Here repetition is the opposite of recollection. As Sturtevant was well aware, Kierkegaard, in his essay *Repetition*, had already made this clear: "repetition and recollection are the same movement, except in opposite directions, for what is recollected has been, is repeated backward. Repetition, therefore, if it is possible, makes a person happy, whereas recollection makes him unhappy."[5] Jacques Lacan characterized this essay as "so dazzling in its lightness and ironic play, so truly Mozartian in the way, so reminiscent of *Don Giovanni*."[6] That lightness is also Sturtevant's. Her most recent video pieces, works like *Elastic Tango* (2010), which no longer repeat individual colleagues' art, seem so much a part of our moment that they could have been produced by an artist in her twenties. There would be nothing strange in presenting a recent video of hers with works by Simon Denny, say, or Helen Marten.

"The current moment was yesterday," she told me, always one step ahead of the rest of us. The artist who most stubbornly questioned our notions of originality turns out to be one of the truly original ones. How is that possible? I don't know, ask Elaine.

Sturtevant takes from Claes Oldenburg in her 1967 show "The Store," New York. Both the show and the postcard design appropriate Oldenburg's initial 1961 show "The Store." Photo: MoMA Library Collection.

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1
Bruce Hainley, *Under the Sign of [sic*

2
"Sturtevant Talks to Bruce Hainley," *Artforum* vol. 41, no. 7 (March 2003).

3
Ibid.

4
Quoted in *Sturtevant: Image over Image* (Cologne: Walter König, 2012), 42.

5
Søren Kierkegaard, *Repetition, A Venture in Experimental Psychology by Constantin Constantius* , trans. Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1983), 131.

6
Jacques Lacan, *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psycho-Analysis* , ed. Jacques Alain-Miller, trans. Alan Sheridan, (New York: W. W. Norton, 1998), 61.

Ekaterina Degot

A Text That Should Never Have Been Written?

Timing is everything.

When I was commissioned to contribute to the Manifesta 10 exhibition catalogue1 with a text on the political meaning of Russian art, Russian lawmakers had already passed legislation against "homosexual propaganda," but Crimea had not yet been annexed.

Once the annexation became fact, it was finally clear that it would be impossible to write such a text, as if the Manifesta in Petersburg were just an ordinary exhibition in yet another ordinary country (albeit one with shortcomings). I decided to distance myself from the project.

When Manifesta's curator Kasper König answered public demands to boycott this year's festival by saying he would be upset if Manifesta was "misused by political actors as a platform for their own self-righteous representation," it became clear to me that precisely what I had to do was "misuse" this platform— though not to address the political significance of Russian art, but to rather address the political significance of Manifesta 10, scheduled to open in Saint Petersburg on June 27.

It is still unclear whether it was the right decision to write this text in the moment it was written. Subversive positions are fragile and context-dependent. They are always at risk of turning into legitimations. If and when this text appears in print, the situation may well have changed. Timing is everything.

—Ekaterina Degot

As I write these lines, parts of Eastern Ukraine seem to be following the Crimean scenario of "annexation on demand of the local population," but World War Three has not yet started. Russian officials deploy notions like "foreign agents," "fifth column," and "national traitor," but these figures haven't yet entered the criminal code. None of my close friends have been arrested, at least not yet. A purely Russian equivalent of Wikipedia or an alternative payment system to Visa and Mastercard have not been set up. The Ministry of Culture of the Russian Federation has suggested only to support those phenomena in contemporary art that cater to the government's call for patriotism and non-European distinctiveness, but Manifesta's funding has not yet been cut. Manifesta will take place, but it is as of yet unclear whether it will be subject to censorship or self-censorship.

With every passing second, the situation slips further into the abyss and the future becomes ever more uncertain. Only one point is clear: things are very bad indeed.

Are things so bad that Manifesta 10 might be considered a positive, "civilizational" event no matter what its content, by sheer dint of taking place in a country plummeting into the abyss of militarist aggression, obscurantism, and proto-fascist nationalism? Could it be that the fast-paced conservative revolution in Russia will save not just the reputation but also the very identity of contemporary art? Or is this simply untrue? Representations of contemporary art in authoritarian contexts have become more and more frequent since the 2000s. Perhaps they rather call into question the very foundations of the discipline at large. Slavoj Zižek has said again and again that the eternal marriage between capitalism and democracy has ended, but perhaps we must say the same of the supposedly eternal marriage between contemporary art and progressive thinking?

The liaison of critical theory and visual art dates back to the 1990s, and is not without its material motivations, not least through the sheer amount of money circulating in the latter sphere. Art understands itself as an exclusive zone of oppositional thinking, which, after 1989, became a refuge for the idea of communism (an idea that simultaneously lost its contours in reality). Here, every artwork benefits from a "presumption of criticality," and what's more, a criticality from the left. This presumption extends from artworks to institutions, the more contemporary of which were shaped in the 1990s through a system of big international exhibitions usually funded from municipal budgets. Manifesta is a perfect example. The main know-how developed in such exhibitions, one might say, is a certain "opportunism" of critical agency (to speak with Paolo Virno). Critiques are not only tolerated but encouraged and funded by the very entities under criticism.

Although only one of Manifesta's earlier editions took place in a former communist country, it is very much the product of 1989, when there was a simultaneous discovery of new markets and new resources of all varieties, including those of the human and the cultural kind. Manifesta usually works with "developing" artists from "developing regions" (such as Eastern Europe, as well as political problem zones or economically depressed regions of the deindustrialized "old" Europe). Both are developing in the direction of the global market and post-industrial capitalism, if at all. This much is clear for countries, but "development" in this sense also concerns artists. For many, critical, post-objective, "biennial art"—be it "ephemeral" or activist in questioning art's autonomy—is little more than an extended stage for transitioning to the private market of galleries by the age of sixty at the very latest. Critical art corresponds to a "career phase" in the artist's biography and in art at large—the phase that today draws the most media attention. It is followed by a "phase of capitalization," when biennials won't be interested in you anymore (unless you are very old, forgotten, and worthy of being rediscovered) but during which you'll have a relatively comfortable life in galleries and at art fairs—impregnable to curators and critics.

In recent years, Manifesta has become one of the main stops in the "career phase" for artists and curators—a showcase for a new, defetishized art market whose clients are no longer private collectors, but rather a non-buying public. The money is almost never only private but also federal, municipal, or corporate, and works are no longer sold as unique objects but are more often than not made on commission and as a part of a series or edition. Self-referentiality is displaced by a thematic and didactic principle, upholding the image of art as something socially necessary (at the very least for getting municipal funding, one might add). This is also a zone where the autonomy of art has been, if not overcome, then at least given a new critical meaning, since the majority of biennials are based on some form of site-specificity. It is a strange market whose own ideology and practices have incorporated the critique of art's autonomy and even the critique of the market as such, working under the oblique influence of Soviet experiments from the 1920s, albeit seen through the European and American neo-avant-gardes after 1968.

However, it is precisely the market and its ideology that stands at the center of the biennial system, notwithstanding its non-commercial status.

The object of fetishization is no longer the commodity, but one of the market's most central self-proclaimed features, namely freedom, understood primarily as the freedom of choice from a plethora of offers and options. This is precisely why all biennials always present a diversity of something (diverse media, diverse artists, diverse countries and continents, and never a monographic exhibition, for example), relegating the idea of "multiculturalism" to a market ideology of culinary choice. Just as biennials fetishize consumer choice, they also enshrine a form of entrepreneurial freedom on the part of the producer. Big exhibitions create executive jobs for independent (free) curators, who are free to choose venues, titles, and a team of collaborators. In other institutions, all of these elements are usually stable and given in advance, but in biennials, they belong to the zone of curatorial authorship. Free curators personify the holy cow of free choice, and it is a principle they follow as the highest ethic of their profession.

The dominance of the ideology and rhetoric of freedom in Manifesta and analogous biennials raises the question of how such freedom manifests itself in un-free or insufficiently free contexts. When bureaucrats prevent curators from deciding upon creative questions themselves, they inevitably fail to understand the rules of contemporary art and fall prey to ridicule; even during the earliest stages of preparations for Manifesta, the foundation made a point of releasing a special statement assuring that the Hermitage "understands" the idea of a curator's creative freedom. But the fetishization of free

choice also fetishizes the process far more than its result; if the curator made an original choice but then was prevented from presenting that choice through an act of censorship, the choice itself (which can always be announced in the press) becomes all the more significant. This whole system of mutually beneficial relations between several social and political groups is based on a mutual understanding shared by all sides involved of the rules of the game.

there. But institutional curatorial careers in Russia have never been and are still rarely recognized abroad, even with a drop of several rungs in the career ladder.

In post-Soviet Russia, contemporary art has been legitimized differently than elsewhere—not through its critical function or its social rhetoric, but in a more traditional way, as an exclusive commodity—strengthening the logic of inequality constituent of this country. Its most naive version is

The two-headed imperial eagle presides over the gate of the State Hermitage Museum, Saint Petersburg.

Initially, the assumption could have been that this machine of harmless, opportunistic subversion would work in Petersburg just like anywhere else. Indeed, that would have been the case, had the Russian state agreed to tolerate harmless criticism in return for economic benefit. In many senses, that is how things were until very recently, and Russia seemed to be one of the many possible territories of contemporary art. In fact, as it turns out, the country's inclusion was very fragile and hardly existed at all. The aforementioned "career globalism," as typified by Manifesta, has included Russia even less than the international market. Until recently, Art Basel included one Russian gallery and a smattering of Russian artists here or

literally an expensive commodity for rich collectors. Its more sophisticated variant is exclusive knowledge for an intellectual elite: to appreciate a socially oriented work of contemporary art, you have to belong to a sophisticated international community.

The Hermitage plays a special role in all of this with its orientation toward "high art" and its collection of treasures. The museum's identity was always based on gold, be it that of the Scyths or of the tsars, and in that it was special. In terms of class, it stood in opposition to the typical Soviet museum with its documents and its

ideological pictures, a space both didactic and anti-fetishistic by nature. In Soviet culture, the Hermitage and other palaces in Petersburg were rare zones for "the rhetoric of wealth," which the conservative logic of public opinion conflated with the zone of "high art." As a "museum of wealth," the Hermitage could and still can afford to look down upon the uneducated, including uneducated politicians.

The initial assumption was that the Manifesta in Petersburg would take place in such an enclave of autonomy founded on real and symbolic wealth, and all political calculations were made accordingly. The Hermitage's authority would serve to shield attacks on contemporary art, whose source was not yet the state, but last year largely originated from Russian Orthodox fanatics and Cossack activists. This calculation differs at the root from all previous editions of Manifesta, which usually preferred to work with "interesting poverty" rather than "interesting affluence" (when actually there is enough poverty in Russia and Petersburg to go around).

Actually, it may well be that the choice of the Hermitage, with its legendary wealth, as the location for the tenth anniversary edition of Manifesta seemed like an even more interesting challenge than Manifesta 9's former industrial hangar in Genk. This is a bit like the question radical leftwing Soviet artists and theorists posed themselves in the 1930s when they felt that their paradigm of militancy had exhausted itself. As they formulated it, what was at stake was the search for the humanistic basis of the classics of art, and their search for universality and truth as opposed to tendentious political tasks. One might imagine a similarly risky conservative turn with a goal of unearthing the true roots of contemporary art before and beyond its instrumentalization through creative capitalism in the context of Manifesta 10. Its curator Kasper König's creative biography makes him an important figure of contemporary art "before Manifesta," a protagonist of the heroic "Western" autonomy of art from the epoch of the Cold War.

Such a reading of the conservative "Old Masters" through the conservatism of modernist practices of artistic autonomy might have given weight to a productive self-criticism of Manifesta and its routinized "progressivism." However, unfortunately for all involved, the Russian state has undertaken its own ultra-militant conservative turn in both domestic and foreign policy, and they have discredited or at least problematized the artistic dimension of transgression in that direction, running the danger of instrumentalization from the Right. To explore the underestimated emancipatory and humanist potential of classical museum heritage might be a bold gesture in a context where a certain type of black-and-white and conceptual documenta-art is considered mainstream, but it takes much greater boldness and political *doigté* in a country where the heavy authority of classical painting is invoked as an argument and a weapon against everything contemporary, even against the once contemporary and political meaning of those very same paintings.

Admittedly, Manifesta has always been part of neoliberal urban transformations with the silent consent of all parties involved, and its curators are usually very good at maneuvering and defending their interests and those of the participating artists. But is Manifesta ready to mirror that situation when an experimental "conservative" exhibition suddenly begins to resonate all too harmonically with ultraright-wing cultural policies initiated by the state? Is there something available to describe this, like the language invented by non-conformist artists of the Soviet Seventies, indicated by the untranslatable term *nevlipaniya*, which roughly means "how not to put your foot in it"? Over the last years, Putin's Russia has unexpectedly turned to realizing a project of perverse decolonization and liberation from Western influences, including that of modern art and even more post-modernism (with the latter term constantly used as an accusation by the authorities). In official documents from the Ministry of Culture, full of sympathetic quotes from Max Nordau, the author of the term "degenerate art," such work is now presented as a mix of "black humor, cursing, porn, and mediocre shamanism under the slogan of innovation."

While earlier editions of Manifesta often declared their social engagement, they were rarely able to engage a local public in the broadest sense, imagining that critical art would find its audience in the new precariat of a post-industrial age. In reality, the "career" art of Manifesta addresses the instances of that career; it caters to curators and institutions. The Hermitage edition of Manifesta is a clear departure from this model, but the audience it addresses—tourists from the Russian provinces and foreign passengers from Baltic cruises who usually visit the Hermitage—will be hard to mobilize for critical thinking, let alone resistance. Such an audience is far too deeply stuck in the register of enlightened nationalism and the admiration of wealth that the Hermitage evinces. In the new political configuration, a turn toward this audience does not come dangerously close to the populist context, but rather threatens to "put its foot into" the triumphalist aesthetics of the opening ceremony at Sochi. The tenth-anniversary Manifesta, planned as a transgressive aesthetic gesture, may well prove full of such political pitfalls.

When contemporary Russia's president rejects "Western values," many in the West misread this as a radical critique of capitalism and reacted with professions of sympathy. However, the point is that the negation of West in this case also negates the inner critique of the West. That is, both critical thinking and post-classical art find themselves beyond the law. If we are dealing with a fundamentalist cultural revolution, isn't the reference to the Old Masters and the classical museum context a "step toward" the Russian state, as it demands that artists comply to

standards and taboos of "high art" as opposed to contemporary culture? From the perversely poignant perspective of this new Russian ultraright-wing conservativism, the critical character of contemporary art's gestures embodies the "propaganda" (of homosexuality, the Western way of life, tolerance, and multiculturalism), while classical art embodies their aestheticization. In general, the state has no problem with the "aestheticization" of LGBT clichés (for example, in pop music) or of "Westernness" in design or architecture, and the Russian avant-garde was also successfully domesticated (and instrumentalized as a symbol of Russia's eternal glory) in the opening ceremony of the Sochi Olympics. On the other hand, isn't today's allegedly "progressive" art producing too formalist a language (even if it is a critical language with a left-wing vocabulary) to be immune to instrumentalization? Today's soft dictators wear Armani suits, watch American sitcoms, tolerate some nice contemporary art, and even, why not, read and assimilate Slavoj Zižek's critiques (or at least their adherents do).

In a way, the Russian cultural authorities who suddenly became archaically and ridiculously anti-modernist and turned Manifesta, no matter how it would appear, into a heroic deed, made things look simpler than they currently are. Since Vladimir Putin goes so far as forbidding state employees to ride foreign cars and take their holidays abroad, why not just ban any foreign art outright? Under aesthetic censorship (that agrees to make some exceptions for "export" situations), international contemporary art is a protest act by definition. But in a broader context it is not, and has not been for decades. The world we live in is more complex than that. There is no guarantee of emancipatory potential in contemporary art, and neither are there specific forms that would assure us of the correct political behavior of their creators, let alone their owners. Increasingly, we hear of such a thing as a left-wing rhetoric (and maybe not even just a rhetoric) of the right wing, and we see contemporary-looking (and maybe even contemporary-thinking) art that embraces nationalism and dictatorship. There will be such examples—from the Russian context—at Manifesta, although it seems through an oversight rather than programmatically. There are no rules anymore, and each case has to be taken separately; the relatively safe common ground of contemporary art is shifting. And this incredible complexity is the only hope left.

X

Translated by David Riff

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