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Editors

Editorial— "The End of the End of History?" Issue Two

Francis Fukuyama, and even his mentor Alexandre Kojève before him, warned of boredom, stasis, and homogeneity being characteristics of the "universal homogenous state" that would mark the end of history. As Fukuyama put it: in the post-historical period there will be neither art nor philosophy, just the perpetual caretaking of the museum of human history. And indeed, the phase of contemporary art has also been characterized in discussions over recent years as a reformatting of time into a perpetual present. The contemporary is the now that never ends, the art that circles itself at the tail end of history looking back on defunct ideologies, archiving and polishing them for a future that never arrives.

Something else also happened around the time of Fukuyama's proclamation. Because another side of the end of history might have to do not only with the collapse of a certain notion of humanist progress but also with a whole other shift in temporality that made it doubly unsustainable. And it also took its structure from the liberal tradition as well as the US military. It has to do with radical advances in communication technologies that we also call the internet. In fact, Fukuyama's mistake may have been in seeing a global Pax Americana in traditional geopolitical terms, when in fact the end of history is then not only the end of a certain era of political thought but also the beginning of a new phase of extreme spatial and temporal compression. It is marked by a perpetual sense of dislocation that alters the way we experience places and events, and by extension the way time and causality function—certainly not in terms of any accumulative continuity that would make historicization possible. Instead, everything happens as if simultaneously, even contemporaneously. We thought Fukuyama was talking about ideology, but it was also about how we stabilize an idea of one thing following another in the most basic sense.

So maybe the function of contemporary art is not so much to drift aimlessly in the melancholic haze-time after the end of ideological progress and humanist time. Instead, why don't we look at a renewed function of the contemporary arts as actually developing methods of training the body to withstand the stresses of temporal dislocation, of what is in essence time travel? After all, if the contemporary conditions of flexible labor and self-managed time are so truly unbearable, then forget about jet lag and try to think about astronauts who need to train their bodies to withstand the pressures of entering and exiting the atmosphere. Slowly and painfully, we may be learning how to disintegrate and reconstitute ourselves over and over again as we go to visit our parents in the motherland, take the kids to school, attend stupid conferences and openings, show up at work, get drunk, write a novel, all at the same time and with all limbs intact. It is not only about the violence of an endless economic now or the stresses of sitting in place imagining myriad scenarios in order to speculate on property values, but also about learning how not to fall apart while moving at

warp speed. If we can get it right, we will be untouchable to fascists. We will move so fast they won't even be able to see us.

The only catch is that speed might already have become an outdated notion. We thought we had to be moving fast in order to cover these long distances, but it might just as well be that the world is shrinking, and we are not in fact moving as fast or as far as we had thought. And we are not so much at risk of fragmenting into a cosmopolitan mess, but of actually being compacted. If space and time are actually compressing, then something totally outside of our control would actually be consolidating all of our fragmentary contradictions on its own until we are completely resolved as a single thing. And this resolved state of being might use the strong name of a nation, tribe, sect, religion, or race to crowdsource votes or as a talisman to ward off further invasions trying to beam in over YouTube or Skype. Some of us may be convinced by these names, because they are very real. And some of us may go to war over these names. Even while knowing that they are not at all what they claim to be.

The September issue of *e-flux journal* is the second part of a double issue on the end of End of History and the reemergence of origin myths. From Hungary to Russia to Egypt to Syria-Iraq to India to France to the UK to Norway and elsewhere in Scandinavia, to Japan, China, South Africa, and beyond, many of these emerging movements tend to look on the surface like the old fascism, but something is very different this time around, and it marks a profound change in the nature of representation in general, whether in a political or artistic sense.

—Julieta Aranda, Brian Kuan Wood, Anton Vidokle

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Arseny Zhilyaev

The Places of History

> The tradition of all dead generations weighs like a nightmare on the minds of the living.
> —Karl Marx, *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte*

Since Baudelaire's time, the artist has been imagined as someone rooted in the tradition of overcoming tradition. Artists have been obliged to keep abreast of fashion and spend their time in endless flânerie, thus resisting being stopped or captured in space. In the twentieth century, the public figure or activist was primarily a revolutionary, an adherent of the tradition of combating tyranny—at the extreme, an adept of permanent revolution. He or she fought against the limitations imposed by time, by specific historical periods, and this struggle was waged on behalf of a utopian future. The Bolshevik Trotsky wrote that he was always rooted in a tradition, but this tradition was called revolution.

The museum of the revolution and the museum of modernist art are meeting places for the politician and the artist fighting against the limitations of time and space; they are heterotopias that have paradoxically retained their importance despite the radicalism of certain twentieth-century thinkers who were opposed to any spatio-temporal capture. From this perspective, it is very important to study the transformations undergone by the Soviet museums after the victory of the proletarian socialist revolution. Their status cannot be reduced either to the modernist narrative of art history or to the avant-garde breakthrough into a future life free of social antagonisms. It would be even more inappropriate to interpret the museum experiment of the young Soviet state exclusively as a part of the propaganda policy launched by the Bolshevik party in the 1920s and '30s. Rather, we are dealing with a paradoxical phenomenon of avant-garde museology, a boundless museum rooted in the dreams of the radical Russian thinkers, starting from the cosmist Nikolay Fyodorov, who viewed the museum as a scientific launching pad for the future resurrection of dead generations and for space expansion, and continuing to the Marxist museologists of the '30s, who developed the concept of travelling museum laboratories for workers and peasants that were meant to help build the future socialist society as quickly as possible.

The discourse around the museum's status in the twentieth century was essentially a discussion of the limits of emancipatory projects. It simultaneously pointed to the possibility that an imaginary future could exist in a special way in the "here and now" of museum space, which resembles other heterotopias identified by Foucault, such

Unknown photographer, Red Presnya Museum of History and Revolution, late 1980s, Moscow. Installation view. Image from the personal archive of a museum worker.

Ozersky, Participants of First Russian Revolution of 1905, 1930. Archive of The Museum of Contemporary Russian History.

as the cemetery. And indeed, it is still assumed that capturing or recording any phenomenon (whether an event of public life or of art) in words or by placing it in a museum is tantamount to its death.

Clearly aware of this relationship, many members of the historical avant-garde called for the destruction of museums: “Stop showing dead artists!” In many respects, however, it has in fact been the extreme materialism of the museum, whose existence is focused on things—artifacts possessed of artistic significance, or documentary evidence of revolutionary struggle—that has indicated the impossibility of overcoming the museum in the modern world.

The museum manifests a particular form of life after death. The desire to reset history, a perpetual tarrying at the zero point, itself begins to produce its own history. And perhaps this type of life is, paradoxically, one of the few means of experiencing history as such.

> To identify the museum’s main theme, the lobby should be designed as a narrative of the central event of the Revolution of 1905, the December armed uprising.[1]The exploit of the Presnya workers was not useless. Their sacrifices were not in vain. The first breach was made in the edifice of the tsarist monarchy, a breach that slowly but steadily grew wider and undermined the old and medieval order. —V. I. Lenin[2]
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> At center: Ivan Shadr’s sculpture *The Cobblestone Is the Weapon of the Proletariat* or another sculptural group. The glass bays should be decorated with motifs invoking the fighting on the barricades in Presnya. Various artistic media can be used: color photographs, drawings on glass, colored mosaics, and so on.[3]
>
> On the left wall: V. I. Lenin, 1891. Photograph.

Structurally, the musem has to exit time and space to occupy a meta-position that would preserve stability, on the one hand, while also being maximally filled with volatile content. The very intention of displaying revolutionary or modernist art in the museum is extremely contradictory. Resisting contraction into a single image, revolution is, rather, an example of interrupting the historical narrative, of a sublime, un *imag* inable

experience (in the sense of being unamenable to capture in images). However, we know that there exists an extensive stock of images of revolution. The same can be said of modernist art, which is designed to capture the death of art again and again.

The museum operates in a specific way. It cannot claim to reveal the entire history of life or art. On the contrary, its deliberate insufficiency underwrites a full experience of history. As in the religious tradition, where apophatic expressions indicate the divine presence through negation, the museum points to historical experience itself through an obsessive, sometimes grotesque, exaggerated, and simplified representation of the history of revolution (whether in aesthetics or politics).

Just think: Can a bone from a mammoth really invoke in us the complex experience of humanity's millenia-long struggle for survival? We can have this experience only by recognizing the bone's extreme insignificance compared with the mass of matter that has undergone countless metamorphoses over that time. And Hitler's towel? The fact that the villain was a simple man of flesh and blood only throws into starker relief Hitler's deeds as a historical person.

> [I]n the nineties two profound social movements converged in Russia: one, a spontaneous movement, a popular movement within the working class, the other, the movement of social thought in the direction of the theory of Marx and Engels, towards the theory of Social-Democracy.
> —V. I. Lenin[4]
>
> On the right wall: N. A. Kasatkin, *Strike*. Pen and ink drawing.
>
> On the right wall: Report by an industrial inspector at the Prokhorov Factory on illegal meetings of workers there. November 23, 1895. Photocopy.

After the 1930s, Soviet official art no longer thematizes this gap, this interruption in tradition. It becomes part of everyday life and as such rightfully enters historical museums and, of course, museums of the revolution, but only as an ancillary part of the exhibition that is not entirely a work of art but is suspended, rather, between scholarship, art, and everyday life. In any case, that was how it was supposed to be, if we take into account the views of the Marxist experimenters in museology, who subordinated all material artifacts and art objects to an academic historical narrative about the struggle for the emancipation of the oppressed classes. At the same time, by virtue of its specific status, the museum of the revolution could exist only as an artistic and scholarly project: it was not intended to reflect the public life of postrevolutionary society in its entirety.

In such a museum, the image of the revolution was presented from a biased position, the position of the Party: here there could be no "objectivity," understood as the fullness and pluralism of the bourgeois museum of modernism. Moreover, the revolution, the sacred moment when Soviet history emerged, could find no other place in this history aside from the place of a revered idol that had forfeited its power. The Stalinist concept of museology dictated that the revolution should be situated in a strict institutional framework. Its character—sublime and resisting all capture—had to be reduced to a pretty, easily assimilable mythological narrative. This was the principal antimodernist artistic conceit of Soviet museology.

But for these same reasons the role of the conceptual artist was so important. He or she was an artist/curator capable of building the heterotopia of the museum of the revolution, of constructing a historical narrative about the interruption of the historical narrative—in other words, someone capable of fashioning an image of the revolution.

If we are looking for the socialist version of modernist art, the socialist version of the modernist museum, then it ought to be the museum of the revolution that we find. Paradoxically, despite all the conceptual differences, the museum of the revolution, when examined from the viewpoint of art, exhibits all the distinctive features of modernism—institutional attachment and containment within a museum building—as opposed to the avant-garde's project of smashing the borders between art and life. The advent of the socialist revolution made it impossible for most of the avant-garde artists to continue the prerevolutionary course of their artistic endeavors, which had aimed at destroying the forms of representation that were intrinsically bound to the old bourgeois regime. This was because after the act of revolutionary destruction and the final victory of the Soviets in the civil war, the bourgeoisie posed no threat any longer, and trying to provoke the burgeoning proletariat would have been pointless. This meant that the old art forms that had emerged in opposition to real life—that had served as artificial solutions to social antagonisms—had to dissolve within the socialist art that had already overcome all social antagonisms. This was the course chosen by the Constructivist and Productivist artists led by the theoretician Boris Arvatov. As for the museums that originally belonged to an intermediate zone between high art and mundane life, they started moving in the opposite direction. Free from the logic of "overcoming art" (up to the 1980s, the Soviet Union lacked the figure of the museum curator/artist, and exhibitions were organized by teams of museum employees whose names were never displayed publicly), museum staff could afford to experiment formally; while these experimental exhibitions did not bear the name "art," from today's perspective they can be recognized as a predecessor of the total installations and critical art of today. Such were the

Unknown photographer, Excursion group visits the Red Presnya Museum of History and Revolution,, c. 1930s, from the archive of The Museum of Contemporary Russian History.

experiments realized by the first Soviet museums of the revolution in Leningrad and later in Moscow, and by the sociological school headed by Alexey Fedorov-Davydov, who was the director of the Tretyakov State Gallery in the late 1920s.

Most of modernist art's radical democratic aspirations were already realized in laboratory form in Soviet museums in the '20s. And here it was primarily a matter of artistically visualizing the radical break with tradition, of overcoming the gap between viewer and artist. Immediately after the revolution, Soviet museums carried out a controversial experiment in involving workers in their activities. The abandonment of the pictorial genre (which engages only the eye) in favor of installation art (which involves the entire human body) was proclaimed.

> On the left wall: Activities of the Moscow Workers' Union, 1894–1898. Connections with industrial enterprises in Moscow. Diagram.
>
> On the right wall: Active members of the Moscow Workers' Union. Photomontage. a. M. N. Lyadov; b. S. I. Mickiewiz; c. A. N. Vinokurov; d. M. F. Vladimirovsky; e. E. I. Sponti; f. S. I. Prokofiev; g. P. I. Vinokurova; h. V. V. Vorovsky; i. A. I. Ulyanova.

Attempts were made to overcome the hierarchical relationship between copy and original. The creators of the first "ambient scenes" (which were essentially sculptural installations) eschewed authenticity in their choice of materials: pride of place was given to the historical narrative, which in turn defetishized the museum artifacts with which the nineteen-century bourgeois museum had been filled. Like modernist art, Soviet museum installations claimed to be scientific. The museum narrative was based on the Marxist interpretation of history, while the exposition was arranged with the psychological features of human perception in mind. Finally, like the best specimens of modernist art, Soviet museums strongly criticized speculative effects in the

Unknown photographer, Excursion group visits the Red Presnya Museum of History and Revolution, 1950-60s. Personal archive of a Red Presnya Museum worker.

service of ideology.

Museums of atheism, which laid bare the mechanisms of producing miracles for believers, can be regarded as the highest achievement of this kind. In general, exhibitions in these museums provoked a critical attitude toward the production of spectacles: an abundance of texts, statistics, and other food for thought prevented the viewer from dissolving into the aesthetic experience. Their mode of functioning was congenial to what, a short while later, the world would come to know as Bertolt Brecht's interpretation of realism.

By its very nature, the installation-based museum space cannot be regarded as an illusionistic space. Its essential organizational principle is the collage, although the collage's elements are subordinated to the overall storyline. At the same time, the museum of the revolution remained close to the avant-garde tradition. This was mainly reflected in the collective creativity practiced by the creators of the exhibitions, on the one hand, and the claim to the nonartistic character of their ventures. Museum exhibitions were not seen as artistic statements, and as a rule the names of their creators were not officially included in their titles. And unlike the modernist museum, the museum of the revolution provided an example of human freedom embodied in the space of society rather than the space of institutional aesthetics.

> On the right wall: Report by the Moscow Okhrana (dated November 10, 1896) on a strike by four hundred workers in the workshops of the Moscow-Brest Railway. Central State Archive of the City of Moscow, f. 16, op. 86, ed. khr. 121, l. 46. Photocopy of original document.
>
> On the right wall: List of workers at the Prokhorov Factory, arrested on January 28 and 29, 1898, for involvement in a strike. Photocopy of original document.

The relationship between the modernist museum and the museum of the revolution can be examined through Boris Groys's schematic for understanding the relationship between the curatorial installation and the artist-produced installation. Whereas the curatorial installation, according to Groys, corresponds to institutional freedom, and the curator is obliged to publicly justify the exhibition concept to civil society, the artist installation corresponds to sovereign freedom, which has no need whatsoever to justify itself.[5]

The tension between these two poles characterizes the attitude towards freedom in bourgeois democracy, where sovereign freedom explicitly extends to consumption, religion, and behavior in personal space, and to things that pose no direct threat to the prevailing order. Everything else is up for discussion, at best. Consequently, projects that play on the relationship between these two modes of artistically organizing space possess a demystifying, critical potential that exposes the mechanisms that produce hegemony in the Western world.

The modernist museum is the classic example of the curatorial installation. Viewers find themselves in a maximally neutral, white space where the curator shows them specimens of individual, creative, sovereign freedom, united by a concept that is acceptable from the viewpoint of institutional freedom (that is, from the viewpoint of the ruling class). The museum of the revolution is an example of an artistic installation produced by a collective proletarian creator who possesses sovereign freedom. Following Groys's thought, the curatorial installation ideally assumes the presence of a collective viewer. This collective viewer has great

Unknown photographer, Participants of the First Russian Revolution of 1905, c. 1930s. Archive of The Museum of Contemporary Russian History.

emancipatory potential, as he or she is free from history and any social obligations whatsoever. This viewer, however, is unaware of him- or herself and therefore cannot actualize this potential.

Like modernist art, capitalist society exists in a mode of permanent crisis. It constantly revolutionizes precapitalist systems of relations and its own internal contradictions, so its habitual state is an indefinite extension of the end of history. In popular culture, this is reflected in the constant expectation of the apocalypse.

By contrast, viewers at the museum of the revolution are rooted in the moment of history's beginning, whose collective subject includes both them and the exhibition's creators. The space where Soviet artists manifested their sovereign will merged with the public space where popular culture was produced. Ideally, collective class will and individual artistic will, directed towards establishing a new, just, democratic society based on equality, should have converged in this place. It is here that the creative imagination, among other things, gives rise to what in its utopian version could be envisioned as a total work of art produced by a society freed from oppression.

On the left wall: Organizers of Marxist circles in the industrial enterprises of Presyna, February 1894. Photomontage. a. E. I. Nemchinov, worker at the Brest Railway workshops, member of the Workers' Union, member of the circle at the Brest Railway worskhops; b. F. I. Polyakov, worker and member of the Workers' Union, organizer of workers' circles at the Prokhorov Factory and other textile enterprises in Moscow; c. K. F. Boyer, worker at the Weiheld Factory and member of the Workers' Union.

On the left wall: "They Parleyed at the Factory Inspector's Office," one of the first leaflets of the Moscow Workers' Union, February 1894. Photocopy.

On the left wall: "Comrade Workers!," a leaflet issued by the Moscow Workers' Union, 1894. Photocopy
On the right wall: S. S. Boym, *First Illegal May Day Meeting in Moscow, 1895.* Painting.

Besides the museum of modern art and the museum of the revolution, where else can a person come face to face with history? Or is the paradoxical life after death we find in the heterotopia the only mode of existence in late capitalism? I would also include among such places the urban spaces where today's protesters fight for their rights. The method of the Occupy Wall Street movement is quite similar to the practices developed by museum curators: physically inserting into a dead place—a place which nevertheless has the potential to produce emancipatory history—something that is alive today and capable of actualizing this historic potential.

Whether we like it or not, political action in today's world still requires physical, bodily presence. This fact, so painful for the Facebook generation, essentially defines the formula of the political today. "Copy, paste, go offline": this is the three-move combination that links aspirations for the future with the here and now of a particular public place. Only physical presence enables communication in the mass demonstration mode. This demand sometimes goes to almost religious extremes, a good example being the practice of the human microphone.

In the case of political action, the question of physical presence is the key, especially when it comes to "terrorist acts." It is physical presence in a specific place that poses the greatest threat to our current authorities. Place as the potential for material presence is the basis of future history and, therefore, of power. Aggression by authorities towards people who are merely present in a park next to a stock exchange is surprising, although for someone acquainted with the history of twentieth-century art, there is much that is familiar in this aggression.

No matter what a thing was before it ended up in the modernist museum, it was liberated there from all functional limitations, and it acquired the untouchable status of an artwork. The central question, which remains open, is whether current liberation movements can make the transition from the modernist museum's institutional freedom to the museum of the revolution's sovereign freedom.

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Translated from the Russian by Thomas Campbell

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1
Part of a collage from a handwritten curatorial book with a description of the main exposition of the Museum of the First Russian Revolution. Such books were part of the control system of the Soviet cultural services.

2
"Letter to Workers of Red Presnya District of Moscow," December 25, 1920, in Lenin, *Collected Works* , Vol. 31, 4th English Edition (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1977), 535.

3
Part of the same curatorial book on the Museum of the First Russian Revolution.

4
"A Retrograde Trend in Russian Social-Democracy," in Lenin, *Collected Works* , Vol. 4 (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1964), 255–285.

5
Boris Groys, "Politics of Installation," *e-flux journal* #2 (January 2009) https://www.e-flux.com/journal/02/68504/politics-of-installation/ .

Jonas Staal

To Make a World, Part I: Ultranationalism and the Art of the Stateless State

Ultranationalism and the "Deep State"

There doesn't seem to be a worse moment than the present to defend the project of stateless internationalism. The recent European elections of May 2014 showed the growing influence of ultranationalist parties on the political establishment; in terms of representation in the European Parliament, ultranationalist parties became the largest parties in France (National Front), Denmark (Danish People's Party), and the United Kingdom (United Kingdom Independence Party), while gaining substantial ground in Austria (Freedom Party of Austria) and Sweden (Swedish Democrats), and remaining relatively stable in the Netherlands (Freedom Party). They suffered heavy losses in Belgium (Flemish Interest), but this was due to the success of a slightly more moderate and competing nationalist party (New Flemish Alliance).[1] The next step for these ultranationalist parties has been to seek alliances and prepare to deliver the final blow to the supra-nationalist managerial project of the European Union. Their challenge is to convince EU parliamentarians from seven or more different countries to unite in order to, as Le Pen has said, make the EU "disappear and be replaced by a Europe of nations that are free and sovereign."[2]

The leaders of the ultranationalist parties seem to be in permanent competition to radicalize the discourse concerning immigration and failing economies, with the hope that their arguments will help reclaim national sovereignty from the EU. These arguments range from Marine Le Pen in France claiming that the Muslim community is the new anti-Semitic danger of the twenty-first century, to the Danish People's Party declaring that Denmark should be kept "Danish for the Danish," culturally as well as economically. Their main obstacle does not seem to be a strong international progressive counterforce, but rather their own incapacity to deal with each other's extremisms, leading to two prominent, competing right-wing blocks. One block organized itself into a coalition called Europe of Freedom and Direct Democracy (which includes the UK Independence Party, the Swedish Democrats, and, to the surprise of many, the Italian comedian Beppe Grillo's Five Star Movement), while the other block organized itself into the European Alliance for Freedom (which includes the National Front, the Freedom Party, and Lega Nord). The parties from both blocks attempted to collaborate, as this is the only way they could gain enough subsidies from the EU, but for now were unable to reach an agreement due to opposition against the anti-Semitic rhetoric of the National Front. This means that for now, the strength of the ultranationalists is limited to the UK Independence Party's group.

It is important to observe that at the very time that we are confronted with the rise of ultranationalism, we also face the growing influence of a set of structures which have emerged alongside and parallel to ultranationalist

Marine Le Pen, leader of France's far-right National Front (FN), delivers a speech in front of a poster depicting Joan of Arc and the slogan "No to Brussels, Yes to France" during a rally in Paris on May 1, 2014. Photo: AFP PHOTO / Pierre Andrieu.

movements. Whereas ultranationalism uses fundamental democratic rights to spread a thoroughly antidemocratic rhetoric steeped in racism, anti-Semitism, discrimination, and so on, these other structures develop out of democratic decision-making but turn against the fundamentals of democratic politics, such as accountability, legality, and transparency. The development of these structures follows naturally from neoliberal ideology, which incessantly argues for the abolition of the state altogether (while depending on the state to be "bailed out"). These structures are what former diplomat and Vietnam-War-critic-turned-professor Peter Dale Scott has called the "Deep State," a term he borrowed from Turkish analysts. The Deep State becomes apparent through, for example, assignments "handed off by an established agency to organized groups outside the law."[3] In the context of the War on Terror, writer and journalist Nafeez Mosaddeq Ahmed describes these practices that outsource decision-making to entities that are not accountable to the public as

> a novel but under-theorized conception of the modern liberal state as a complex dialectical structure composed of a public democratic face which could however be routinely subverted by an unaccountable security structure.[4]

In simpler terms, our age of mass surveillance by secret agencies in "democratic" countries, assisted by the massive amounts of data handed over by corporate entities such as internet service providers and social media companies to organizations such as the National Security Agency (NSA), has led to the rise of new political structures that fall outside the democratic control of people, and often even of politicians themselves. The rise of these political structures may at first glance seem opposed to the rise of ultranationalism, though in fact, they are mutually supportive.

For example, in the Netherlands, Geert Wilders's Freedom Party—which, together with Le Pen's National Front, has been one of the strongest voices in the anti-EU and anti-Islam movement in Europe—was a product of the post-9/11 era. Wilders's argument for closing borders and forcing the return of Dutch-born Muslims to their "country

Geert Wilders, leader of the Dutch Freedom Party (PVV), cutting a star from the EU flag in front of the EU Parliament building in Brussels on May 20, 2014. He then unfolded the Dutch flag, as a performative act in support of a Dutch withdrawal from the union. Photo: ANP / Martijn Beekman.

of origin" comes from his belief that Muslims in Europe have become a "fifth column" (a term used to describe a clandestine military unit). Wilders claims that these Muslim "sleeper cells" are seemingly moderate, but in fact can strike against democracy at any moment.[5] It is no coincidence that Wilders, during one of his many fundraising visits to the US, took the opportunity to visit its military prison in Guantánamo Bay. Immediately afterwards, he stated:

> I ask the government to build a Dutch detention center for potential terrorists, modeled after Guantánamo Bay, in order to imprison the potential terrorists known to the AIVD [Dutch Secret Service] as a precaution … I would gladly lay the first stone.[6]

Just like his colleagues from the anti-EU block, Wilders propounds a phantasmatic, conservative utopia of the "homeland" as it once was and should become once more. Needless to say, these presumed origins of the Netherlands that are allegedly being lost never existed in the first place. Wilders's homeland that would close its borders, build its own Guantánamo Bay, ban the Quran, and prohibit the wearing of headscarves in public buildings may seem to limit itself to the territorial space where the "authentic" Dutch citizen supposedly dwells.[7] But it serves that *other homeland* just as well: political substructures that consist of the *homeland securities* of this world, which are increasingly gaining leverage over their own governments.

Recently, the European organization Statewatch published reports exposing the fact that the EU has invested large amounts of tax money into corporate research for the development of unmanned aerial vehicles, otherwise known as "drones":

> €300 million of tax-payers' money [was invested] in projects centered on or prominently featuring drone technology … [D]rones are being adapted for security purposes through research and development projects, all of which are dominated by European (and Israeli) defense multinationals seeking further diversification into "civil" markets.[8]

This investment, which the EU legitimizes as "research" (even though this is an obvious case of a supra-national structure subsidizing the security industry), encompasses all aspects of drone manufacturing:

> The European Commission has long subsidized research, development and international cooperation among drone manufacturers. The European Defense Agency is sponsoring pan-European research and development for both military and civilian drones. The European Space Agency is funding and undertaking research into the satellites and communications infrastructure used to fly drones. Frontex, the EU's border agency, is keen to deploy surveillance drones along and beyond the EU's borders to hunt for migrants and refugees.[9]

This is an example of the unaccountable structures of the EU merging perfectly with the interests of private lobbies—in this case, to produce equipment for the corporate-mercenary armies of the EU, of which Frontex has become the most notorious.[10] This subsidizing of drones is of a piece with other well-known operations of the Deep State: extraordinary rendition flights, which are carried out by "civilian" corporations; so-called "black sites," which are legal under the policies of friendly nations, even though such policies would be considered unconstitutional in the "homeland"; and the infamous black budgets, which remain outside parliamentary control and which help to sustain the mass criminalization of civilians worldwide.

Most importantly, there is a direct relationship between ultranationalism and the EU's unaccountable investments into drone technology. For citizens to outsource their agency to the structures of the Deep State, they need to have the will to do so; the fears stoked by ultranationalism create this will. These fears fuel the global extralegal structures that we are confronted with nowadays, and which undermine the celebrated

Cover of Eurodrones Inc. report by Statewatch. Design by Hans Roor at Jubels, Amsterdam, 2014.

sovereignty of the very states that ultranationalism swears to protect. These states become mere proxies for a war that we only know as "blank spots on the map."[11] Among all the unaccountable aspects of the EU project, ultranationalism proposes that *the worst* form of unaccountability should become the norm.

During the European elections, some political parties and commentators attempted to combat ultranationalism by making the contradictory claim that far-right parties only wanted to enter the European Parliament in order to stop it from "inside," so as to wrest back state sovereignty from the moloch of Brussels. But this strategy is nothing but an ideological cover-up for the fact that the ultimate consequence of ultranationalism is the annihilation of parliamentary representation altogether.

Maybe the best illustration of this comes from Wilders himself. Prior to the EU elections, opinion polls promised him and his party a large victory. Instead, his support among Dutch voters shrank—his party lost one of its four seats in the EU parliament. The explanation? His constituency refused to vote in EU elections: 65 percent of his previous voters stayed home and did not vote at all. Wilders won in the polls, but there was no one to materialize his victory. In other words: his constituency had already left the parliament, before he was able to abandon it for them.

Stateless Internationalism

The ultimate outcome of ultranationalism is the disappearance of the state altogether, and its replacement by power structures that do not recognize any form of democratic control by the very people these structures affect. Nor do these structures restrict themselves to what used to be known as national borders. This reality of globalism after the annihilation of the nation-state forms a dark and perverted version of that other dream of decentralized powers that reaches beyond the nation-state: the progressive project of stateless internationalism. The premise of stateless internationalism was echoed in the recent victories of "regular" political parties such as Podemos in Spain, which was initiated by the Indignados movement as a form of parallel political representation: a parliamentary support for street politics, bringing to mind the autonomous workers councils that worked in alliance with the Allende government before his toppling by the military.[12] But there are also stateless

entities that have continued demanding—in contrast to the ultranationalists who have abandoned parliament—the creation of new political structures altogether.

I will introduce here a number of examples of the infrastructures proposed by groups advocating for different practices of stateless internationalism. These examples are gathered from my work as founder of the New World Summit—an artistic and political organization that develops parliaments for stateless and blacklisted organizations—and as cofounder (with BAK, basis voor actuele kunst, Utrecht) of the New World Academy, where stateless political groups have developed collaborative projects with artists and students, exploring the role of art in political struggles for representation. The aim of the New World Academy is to investigate artistic practice in relation to the *stateless state*, with the concept of "state" referring as much to a condition as to an administrative structure.

New World Summit—Berlin (2012). Overview of the parliament of the first New World Summit in the Sophiensaele in Berlin, hosting nine representatives that spoke on behalf of blacklisted organizations. Photo: Lidia Rossner.

Before Subcomandante Marcos—twenty-year representative of the Zapatista Army of National Liberation (EZLN) in Chiapas, Mexico—stepped down on the day after the European elections, he argued that the struggle of so-called "local" and "indigenous" peoples today is the avant-garde of a war against the generic non-spaces that form the global architecture of neoliberal ideology. He refers to this struggle as the "Fourth World War," which has followed the Third World War (i.e., the Cold War). He describes this Fourth World War as radically decentralized, with the main adversary being the dispersed apparatus of the Deep State, which he considers a product of neoliberal doctrine:

> It is not possible for neoliberalism to become the world's reality without the argument of death served up by institutional and private armies, without the gag served up by prisons, without the blows and assassinations served up by the military and the police. National repression is a necessary premise of the globalization that neoliberalism imposes. The more neoliberalism advances a global system, the more numerous grow the weapons and the ranks of the armies and national police. The numbers of the imprisoned, the disappeared, and the assassinated in different regions also grows.[13]

In describing indigenous struggles around the world as the avant-garde of the Fourth World War, Marcos adopts an internationalist stance that acknowledges the peoples of this world as equal yet radically differentiated. Internationalism is thus fundamentally different from globalism, as its solidarities do not translate into a demand for a homogeneous structure of governance. Rather, in the face of countless "disappeared" and "assassinated" indigenous people (as Marcos refers to them), the demand is for *history as such*. For the inherent paradox of attempting to write a history of the victims of Deep State practices is that *deep history* is a history that is in a permanent state of self-erasure. As such, the Fourth World War is a cultural war: a war in which the stakes are the possibility of differentiated culture.

During the last EU elections, David Fernandez, a left-wing, pro-independence politician from Catalonia, stated that "We are the Zapatistas of the South of Europe," referring to left-wing Basque, Catalan, and Galician pro-independence movements. According to Jon Andoni Lekue, a representative of the movement Sortu (which, as part of the left-wing Basque coalition Bildu, just won its first seat in the EU parliament), the party is working towards a political concept of the Basque country as a *condition* that, as such, applies to all peoples of this world who struggle for the right to self-determination.[14] One of the founding resolutions of Sortu addresses the Basque situation mainly by stating the party's support for other independence movements worldwide, ending with the famous Guevarian phrase that "solidarity represents the affection of peoples."[15] The autonomy of the Basque country or the Zapatistas is thus a victory for the *possibility* of internationalism worldwide. This certainly does not mean that stateless internationalism sidesteps the concrete material struggle for a territorial space, and all the very concrete infrastructural questions of governance, security, and so forth that come with it. However, this space is not a goal in and of itself, but a space *through which* a stateless internationalism is articulated.

This is what—at least in theory (or better: all too often only in theory)—fundamentally differentiates the historical struggles for national liberation from ultranationalism.

Left: Subcomandante Marcos fights Captain America in the work of comic artist and Zapatista supporter Philippe Squarzoni, literally situating the Fourth World War in the context of mass media and popular culture (Les Requins Marteaux / Ferraille Publication). Right: Comic books are used by the Communist Party of the Philippines to educate peasants in dialectic materialism, adopting elements of what is regarded by the party as "cultural imperialism" to act against itself.

Whereas the latter regards separation from others as a victory, the former treats self-determination as one of many steps towards articulating an internationalist commons. That is not to say that national liberation movements cannot turn out to become expressions of ultranationalism, or that the struggles of other stateless entities cannot be easily forgotten once the goal of independence is obtained. The fundamental underlying idea here is if the concept of liberation and the concept of the state can coexist.

Fadile Yıldırım, a representative of the Kurdish Women's Movement, has attempted to deepen the conflict surrounding the role of the state within national liberation movements. "We started our struggle against the Turkish state," she has said. "But later we realized it was not just the matter of the repression of the Turkish state."[16] Yıldırım realized that there was a systemic inequality between men and women within the Kurdish struggle, which resulted in, among other things, restrictions against women becoming fighters. Women were expected to dedicate themselves to domestic work instead. Yıldırım concluded that "the enemy is not just outside, … we also have an enemy inside." The result was that "the Kurdish women's freedom movement started inside the national liberation movement."[17] For Yıldırım, national liberation is not a goal in and of itself. It is *within* this struggle that the very idea of the state as the endpoint of the movement for self-determination, freedom, and emancipation must be confronted:

> We Kurdish women saw that if we want to be free we have to be independent. We realized that women represent the first class of slaves, and also the first colonized class. So we said if the first class and the

> first oppressed sex in history and society are women, than history and society can only be liberated by women. We believe that female liberation is only possible in a society where there is no state, no hierarchy and no power, where these structures are overcome. If we look at other national liberation movements or if we look at the Soviet Union we see that all revolutionary organizations that could not manage to do their own revolution inside looked like the enemy.[18]

So whereas the forces of ultranationalism use parliamentary processes to dismantle the state in the name of the state and replace it with unaccountable corporate-style structures of power, Yıldırım defends the radical opposite. She attempts to save the idea of democracy—defined as radically differentiated and fundamentally equal peoples—by liberating it from the state.[19]

Scholar Dilar Dirik, a prominent voice in the Kurdistan Communities of Woman (KJK), describes the concrete practice of this liberation in relation to Rojava (Syrian-Kurdistan) as following:

> In the midst of the Syrian war, the people there created self-governance structures in the form of three autonomous cantons. These have 22 ministries with one minister and two deputies each, one Kurd, one Arab and one Assyrian, at least one of which has to be a woman. Several schools, women's academies, working, living, and farming cooperatives, and women's and people's councils have been established.[20]

The state, as both Yıldırım and Dirik claim, is a patriarchal construct, and as such, it is unable to recognize the right to self-determination and the equality of women, for the subjection of one class to another is inherent to the state's very creation.[21] It will come as no surprise that it is the stateless Kurdish movement in Turkey and Syria—with a central role given to women in the fighting—that is currently battling the Islamic State in Iraq, as the army of the autonomous region of Kurdistan, the Peshmerga, were incapable of forming an effective front by themselves. On the one hand, the Islamic State explicitly opposes the colonial borders of Iraq, and thus forces into public consciousness the history of foreign occupation, military intervention, and extralegal prisons that created the conditions for and in some ways legitimacy of the organization.[22] On the other, the Islamic State also functions—from the perspective proposed by Yıldırım and Dirik—as the unlimited patriarchal construct of the *total state* in the form of the ever-expanding caliphate. The performative gestures of Islamic State fighters publicly destroying their passports and thus allowing no administrative way back, as can be seen in their latest film *The Clashing of the Swords IV*, actually oppose statelessness and commit to one absolute and total state.[23] The fear of humiliation amongst Islamic State fighters that they might be killed by a woman is the fear of losing their martyr status: it means they would be infected by statelessness, and lose all privilege and status in the total state.[24]

Yıldırım's proposition to liberate democracy from the state embodies what the Concerned Artists of the Philippines consider the practice of the cultural worker: he or she who upholds discursive or pictorial histories through cultural practice, as an alternative to the powers that be which attempt to impose cultural amnesia in order to secure their rule. The cultural worker opposes the erosion of the *possibility* of history as such. This is a struggle that Professor Jose Maria Sison, founder of the Communist Party of the Philippines and the New People's Army, would refer to as the struggle of the cultural worker against cultural imperialism.[25]

However different the struggles of Marcos, Lekue, and Yıldırım may be, what they share is their defense of a self-determination that, while remaining stateless, is first and foremost a militant cultural struggle. They are the representatives of stateless states—of peoples that *precede* their administrative representation in the formal, recognized entity of a state.

According to Sison, the cultural worker uses the tools of art in order to uphold the narratives and convictions of those who are marginalized, dispossessed, and persecuted by the militarized state. He or she is an educator, agitator, and organizer, all in order to maintain and to enact—to perform—the symbolic universe of the unacknowledged state that is not so much an administrative entity as a collective condition. The long cultural struggle of the Filipino people has created a state in itself, a detailed network of references, histories, and symbols that define a people's identity far beyond what a state could ever contain. We are speaking here of *art's stateless state*.[26]

It is within this stateless state that we find the condition that may be understood as a "permanent revolution" of stateless internationalism—that is, the permanent process of collectively inscribing, criticizing, contesting, and altering our understanding of communal culture. The cultural work of stateless internationalism helps to reimagine and create new and parallel political structures.

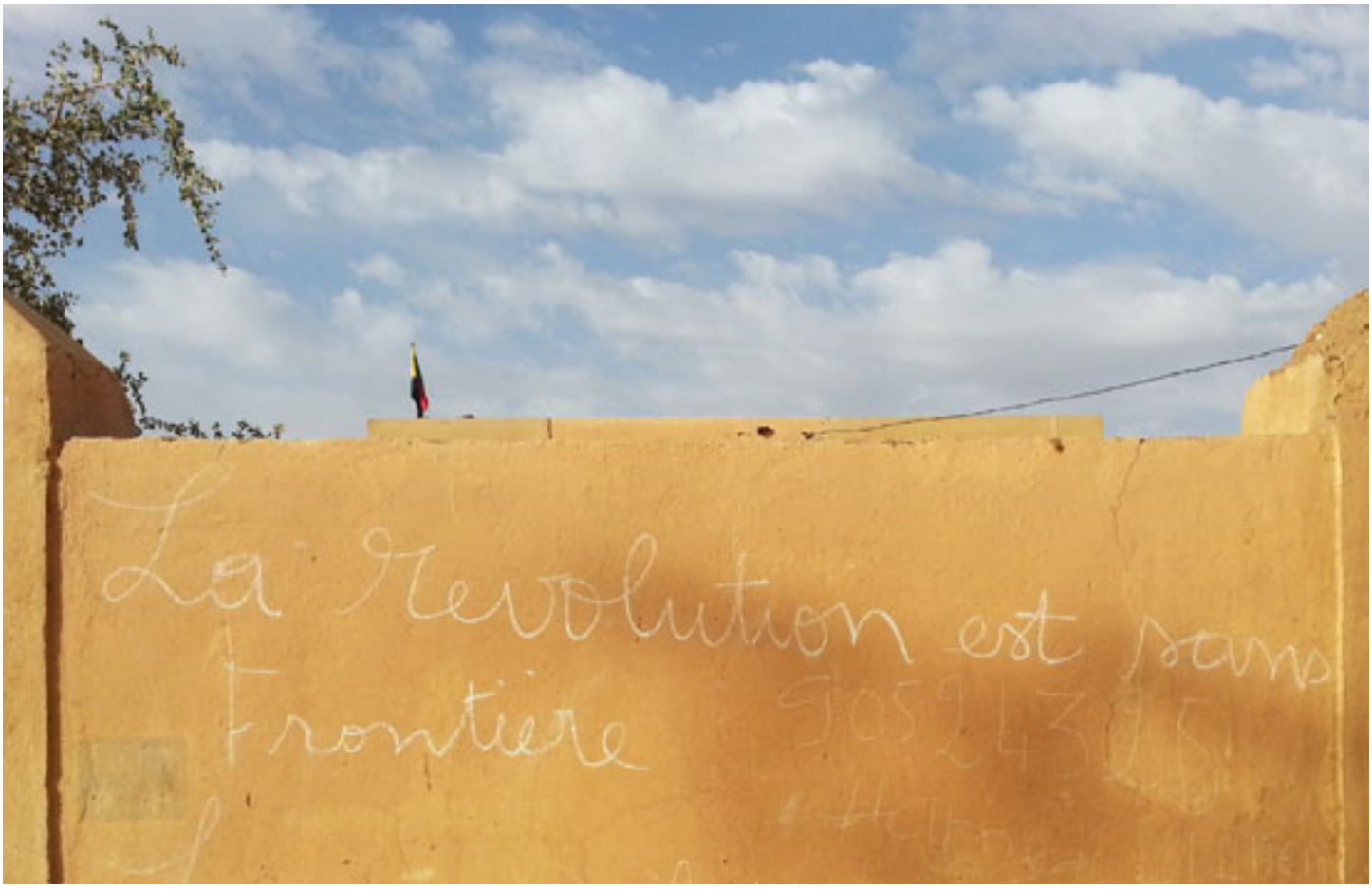
Professor Jose Maria Sison speaks on the concept of cultural imperialism at the New World Academy (2013). Photo: Ernie Buts.

To Make a World

We are witnessing two forms of statelessness: the rise of ultranationalism, which ultimately manifests itself in political structures outside of public control; and the resurfacing of stateless internationalism, a political struggle that attempts to redefine a common culture beyond territorial and ethnic demarcations. The latter has its historical base in movements of national liberation, but tries to think and act itself *beyond* the nation-state.

Around the time of the European election, writer Moussa Ag Assarid, the European representative of the National Liberation Movement of Azawad (MNLA) and previous contributor to the summit, contacted me. He was calling from Kidal, a city in the north of what is currently considered the state of Mali. In early 2012, the nomadic Kel Tamasheq people—better known as the Tuareg—led a rebellion in the north. The Tuareg, who have engaged in three earlier armed struggles against the Malinese state since the latter gained independence in 1959, had grown tired of failed treaties, a systematic denial of civil rights, repression, and violence. They are now demanding full independence. With the help of weapons taken from the crumbling Gaddafi regime, the MNLA, which consists of Songhai, Arab, and Fula peoples along with the Tuareg, declared two-thirds of northern Mali to be the independent state of Azawad. But a coup by Islamic groups, which included Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb, undermined the MNLA's control over the region and led France, Mali's former colonizer, to invade the northern region in order to "stabilize" it. The French were eventually replaced by the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali (MINUSMA), which is still ongoing.[27]

When I initially met Ag Assarid some years ago, I asked what exactly the homeland of the Tuareg was. As a response, he drew a large circle on a map, crossing through Algeria, Niger, Burkina Faso, Mali, and Libya—not a state but a *space*; although ruled under tribal policies and strict class separations, that the MNLA does not tend to glorify all too much today. So far, the Tuareg populations in several of these countries have demanded an independent homeland. In Mali, the recent declaration of the independent state of Azawad was the fourth attempt to declare independence since Mali was colonized by France in the late nineteenth century. Each attempt articulated a new state, because this is the



La Revolution est sans Frontière (2014), Moussa Ag Assarid. Photograph of a graffiti in Kidal, one of the largest cities of the newly declared state of Azawad.

language that geopolitics might understand and recognize as legitimate. But the attempt to speak in the language of states is the result of the historic colonization of the territory by the same army that now wishes to "stabilize the region": a self-replicating language of territorialization, separation, and administration. The *nomad state*—the nomadic parliament—might be a first articulation of a stateless state. Not a Deep State, but a liberation *through the state from the state*.

I received the call a day after the Malinese government declared war on the Tuareg once more. Fights had broken out in Kidal, and the MNLA had taken control of the city.[28] Ag Assarid listed for me the things they had won in the battle: camouflaged 4×4 trucks, an ambulance, and prisoners, who they released some days after. The only problem was that there was no one to report on the conflict; no media or journalists were present, and a media outlet had once told him that independence would only come if "CNN would broadcast you." He thus asked for phones with a large storage capacity that could film, photograph, and upload, ideally through a satellite connection. It was not in the concrete day-to-day fight that the MNLA was in need of help from outside: Assarid had once laughed while telling me how the Malinese army, which is unfamiliar with the rough northern territory, would at night mistake stones and goats for enemies, and out of confusion would start shooting at each other. As Assarid said, one hardly needs an army to defeat these opponents, since the terrain suffices. The problem was not liberation, but *representation*. Azawad is off the grid: most of its citizens are not part of any outside administrative entity, and thus cannot travel. Further, there is hardly any running water, electricity, or paved roads, let alone effective phone signals or internet.

Writer and politician Upton Sinclair wrote that the goal of the artist at the dawn of internationalism was not to "make artworks," but to make a world.[29] This is exactly what seemed to be at stake here: contributing to the conditions of representation after liberation—to the possibility of future history. Is that not the task of any cultural worker?

This is the art of the stateless state.

X

I would like to thank philosopher Vincent W. J. van Gerven Oei, Professor Jose Maria Sison, Jon Andoni Lekue, Moussa Ag Assarid, and Dilar Dirik for their advice in writing this essay.

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1
In Hungary and Greece, the paramilitary fascists (respectively Jobbik and Golden Dawn), with which even the National Front is unwilling to collaborate, gained strength.

2
Vivienne Walt, "Inside Job," *TIME*, May 26, 2014.

3
Peter Dale Scott, *American War Machine: Deep Politics, the CIA Global Drug Connection, and the Road to Afghanistan* (Lanham, Maryland: Roman & Littlefield, 2010), 2.

4
Nafeez Mosaddeq Ahmed, "Capitalism, Covert Action, and State-Terrorism: Toward a Political Economy of the Dual State," in *The Dual State: Parapolitics, Carl Schmitt and the National Security Complex* , ed. Eric Wilson (London: Ashgate, 2012), 53.

5
Wilders's chief ideologue, Martin Bosma, bases his use of the term "sleeper cells" on the Islamic concept of " *takiyya*," which says that Muslims can hide or deny their faith if they are at risk of persecution. Bosma distorts this concept to claim that European Muslims are hiding their actual intention—namely, to implement Sharia Law in Europe—until they have gathered enough strength to do so. See Martin Bosma, *De schijn-élite van de valse munters: Drees. extreem rechts, de sixties, nuttige idioten, Groep Wilders en ik* (Amsterdam: Uitgeverij Bert Bakker, 2010).

6
Geert Wilders, column at www.pvv.nl, October 30 2007, translated by the author. In the column, Wilders emphasizes that the model of preemptive detention is borrowed from the Israeli model of "administrative detention," which Stephanie Cooper Blum, attorney for the Department of Homeland Security, describes this way: "In 1948, when Israel achieved its independence, Israel adopted the British Mandate's Defense (Emergency) Regulations of 1945, which empowered the High Commissioner and Military Commander to detain any person it deemed necessary for maintaining public order or securing public safety or state security. In 1979, Israel reformed its detention laws and enacted a new statute: the Emergency Powers (Detentions) Law of 1979 (EPDL of 1979), which provided more rights to detainees than the prior regulations ... While the EPDL of 1979 only applies once a state of emergency has been proclaimed by the Israeli Knesset (Israel's legislature), Israel has been in such a state of emergency since its inception in 1948." Stephanie Cooper Blum, "Preventive Detention in the War on Terror: A Comparison of How the United States, Britain, and Israel Detain and Incapacitate Terrorist Suspects," *Homeland Security Affairs* vol. IV, no. 3 (October 2008).

7
In 2007, Wilders's Freedom Party proposed banning the Quran, which he has described as the "Islamic Mein Kampf" (Geert Wilders, "Genoeg is genoeg: verbied de Koran," *de Volkskrant*, August 8, 2007.) In 2010, a prohibition on headscarves in public buildings was part of the program of the Freedom Party in northern Holland.

8
Ben Hayes, Chris Jones, and Eric Töpfer, Eurodrones Inc. (Statewatch Transnational Institute, 2014), 9. See http://www.tni.org/eurodrones .

9
Ibid., 8.

10
"During the last two years Frontex has been a regular participant in forums promoting the securitisation of border controls in Europe, alongside groups lobbying in favour of corporate interests such as the Aerospace and Defence (ASD) association, which promotes the aeronautics industry as a strategic priority for Europe, and the Security Defence Agenda (SDA), a Brussels based think tank that provides a platform for the meeting of EU institutions and the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO) with government officials and representatives of industry, international and specialised media, think-tanks, academia and NGOs." Apostolis Fotiadis, "Drones may track migrants in EU," Al Jazeera, Nov. 11, 2010 http://www.aljazeera.com/news/2010/11/201011815402959447 5.html .

11
See Trevor Paglen's *Blank Spots on the Map: The Dark Geography of the Pentagon's Secret World* (London: New American Library, 2010). The phrase also brings to mind the frustration of Dutch journalists who attempted to acquire documents providing insight into the involvement of the Netherlands in the Iraq War. When the journalists finally received the documents, they were censored with white ink, thus making the censorship itself invisible.

12
I think it's possible to argue for important historical ties between stateless internationalism and the manner in which models of political emancipation and direct democracy are being developed within other acknowledged political parties such as Syriza in Greece, the international Pirate Parties that entered the EU parliament in Iceland and Germany, the rise of new Green Parties throughout the EU, and the Feminist Initiative in Sweden.

13
Subcomandante Marcos, "Tomorrow Begins Today" (August 3, 1996), in *Our World is Our Weapon: Selected Writings* (New York: Seven Stories Press, 2001), 118.

14
This is quoted, with Lekue's permission, from a personal conversation I had with him in Berlin in summer 2013 about the future of the state in progressive politics.

15
Sortu, "Foundational Congress: International Resolution," February 23, 2013 http://sortu.net/dok/international-resolution.pdf .

16
Fadile Yıldırım , "Women and Democracy: The Kurdish Question and Beyond," lecture at the first New World Summit, May 4, Sophiensaele, Berlin. See https://web.archive.org/web/20141006194737/https://www.newworldsummit.eu/locations/berlin/ .

17
Ibid.

18
Ibid.

19
Reflecting on the first Gezi Park protests one year after they broke out in Istanbul, philosopher Michael Hardt followed up on the rarely theorized practices of the Kurdish movement in relation to modern democratization movements, commenting that "An entire generation of activists across the globe has oriented its political compass toward Chiapas (home base of the Zapatistas). Why has so little international attention been focused on the Turkish Kurds?" Hardt continues: "Key to the current situation, as I understand it, is the fact that roughly a decade ago the stream of the Kurdish movement that follows Abdullah Ocalan radically shifted strategy from armed struggle aimed at national sovereignty toward the development of 'democratic autonomy' at a community level ... I can see a vague correspondence between the roles of Marcos and (Abdullah) Ocalan (the imprisoned founder of the Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK)), who is a kind of shadow leader that from prison periodically delivers somewhat poetic pronouncements that are interpreted by followers. The substantial and important point of contact, though, is the experimentation in village communities to practice a new kind of democracy." Michael Hardt, "Innovation and Obstacles in Istanbul One Year After Gezi," euronomade.info http://www.euronomade.info/?p=2557 .

20
Dilar Dirik, "The 'other' Kurds fighting the Islamic State," *Al Jazeera* , September 2, 2014: http://www.aljazeera.com/indepth/opinion/2014/09/other-kurds-fighting-islamic-stat-2014928753566705.html .

21
As Abdullah Ocalan has written: "When nationalism degenerated into secession and practically into a new religion, it became reactionary. The chauvinist thinking in nationalist terms, with its claims of superiority over other peoples and nations, became the cause of new hostilities. We now find wars between ethnically defined nations. As class struggles became fiercer, the capitalist class increasingly used these ideologies for their own purposes, hiding their true interests behind the mask of the nation." Abdullah Ocalan, *Prison Writings: The Roots of Civilization* (London: Pluto Press, 2007), 200.

22
Tim Arango and Eric Schmitt, "U.S. Actions in Iraq Fueled Rise of a Rebel," *New York Times*, Aug. 10, 2014 http://www.nytimes.com/2014/08/11/world/middleeast

/us-actions-in-iraq-fueled-rise-of-a-rebel.html?_r=3 .

23
See *The Clashing of the Swords IV* .

24
"The fact that Kurdish women take up arms, traditional symbols of male power, is in many ways a radical deviance from tradition … Being a militant is seen as 'unwomanly,' it crosses social boundaries, it shakes the foundations of the status quo. Militant women are accused of violating the 'sanctity of the family,' because they dare to step outside of the centuries-old prison that has been assigned to them. Because they turn the system, the patriarchal, feminicidal order upside down, by becoming actors, instead of remaining victims. War is seen as a man's issue, started, led, and ended by men. So, it is the 'woman' part of 'woman fighter,' which causes this general discomfort." Dilar Dirik, "The Representation of Kurdish Women Fighters in the Media," *Kurdish Question* https://web.archive.org/web/20141209183558/http://kurdishquestion.com/woman/the-representation-of-kurdish-women-fighters-in-the-media/115-the-representation-of-kurdish-women-fighters-in-the-media.html .

25
Jose Maria Sison, "Cultural Imperialism in the Philippines," in *Towards a People's Culture* , ed. Jonas Staal (Utrecht: BAK, Basis voor actuele kunst, Utrecht, 2013), 21. Full download here https://www.bakonline.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/12/NWA-Reader-1.pdf .

26
I have attempted to deepen the concept of cultural work as the rearticulation of the state through art in my introduction to the collected poetry of Professor Sison. See Jose Maria Sison, *The Guerilla is Like a Poet* (The Hague /Tirana: Uitgeverij, 2013).

27
The only proper reporting on the war between Azawad and Mali has been done by Al Jazeera, whose documentary *Orphans of the Desert* provides full coverage of the conflict since 2012, including interviews with representatives of the MNLA and with rival groups such as Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb. The webpage for the documentary includes regular updates. http://www.aljazeera.com/programmes/orphans-of-the-sahara/ For Security Council resolution 2100 of April 25, 2013—intended to support the political processes in Mali and carry out a number of security-related tasks—See http://www.un.org/en/peacekeeping/missions/minusma/documents/mali%20_2100_E_.pdf .

28
"Mali 'at war' with Tuareg rebels," *Al Jazeera*, May 19, 2014 http://www.aljazeera.com/news/africa/2014/05/mali-at-war-with-tuareg-rebels-20145181515268154 8.html .

29
"The artists of our time are like men hypnotized, repeating over and over a dreary formula of futility. And I say: Break this evil spell, young comrade; go out and meet the new dawning life, take your part in the battle, and put it into new art; do this service for a new public, which you yourself will make … that your creative gift shall not be content to make art works, but shall at the same time make a world; shall make new souls, moved by a new ideal of fellowship, a new impulse of love, and faith—and not merely hope, but determination." Upton Sinclair, *Mammonart* (San Diego: Simon Publications, 2003), 386.

Hassan Khan

“A Monster Was Born”: Notes on the Rebirth of the “Corrupt Intellectual”

In the late nineteenth century, a monster was born. This monster did not know what it was exactly. It knew that it needed to articulate, describe, prescribe, and communicate. It knew it was supposed to play a public role in the birth of a new historical order. It knew it had a precise function in the articulation of power within the transforming social order. This monster was a speculator of knowledge, a peddler of identities, a fantasist, a cunning operator, an extrovert with a bloated ego, a necessary structural regulator.

Almost a century and a half later, I now call the direct descendant of this figure the “corrupt intellectual.” It is not a very accurate term. However, I like it because it is polemical, because it describes and judges at the same time. After first using the term while speaking on a panel at Art Dubai, in 2010 I wrote an essay titled “In Defense of the Corrupt Intellectual”[1] in which I wrongly assumed that this figure was almost dead, and I saw value in resuscitating it as a counterweight to the forces of a market that consciously presents itself as ahistorical, a cycle of circulation where the spectacular becomes both currency and function. The defense I mounted was grounded in a loose analysis of Egyptian intellectual history and was an attempt at understanding the role and meaning of that figure in the formation of a social order. I now, due to the events of the past three years, clearly recognize that I was wrong to defend this figure. This essay is an attempt to rewrite a position without completely disavowing it. I still lean strongly on my previous analysis, although with the new recognition that calcified power structures are not as easily dismantled as I first imagined. This essay looks at the role of this figure in cementing, reaffirming, and producing a regime of power and subjugation. It attempts to provide some historical context, as well as to analyze the tools and methods of those I label as “corrupt intellectuals.” My intention in this essay is not to condemn this figure (although this figure is to be damned), but rather to chart out the stormy territories we are forced to navigate on a daily basis in our present reality. Needless to say, this moment of transformation involves a committed attempt to comprehend the complex and dangerous present as well as to sincerely propose possibilities.

The appearance of this figure is deeply entwined with the emergence of what is known as “the modern Egyptian state,” which most historians agree was formed over the long forty-three years of Khedive Mohamed Ali’s rule over Egypt (1805–1848). The years under Ali’s reign saw a concerted effort at creating a bureaucracy that organized and managed what it perceived as assets more efficiently. What implicitly marked that state as “modern” was in fact a side effect of the creation of its bureaucracy: the relationship between the population and its administration became more intimate and intrusive, and with time it became impossible to distinguish the border between them. The process of constructing this new relationship demanded a new discursive order that would help explain

and locate the subject and the regime.[2] In the second half of the nineteenth century, with the weakening of the Alawiyya Dynasty and the increasingly complex character of the state under British occupation (and then protection), the state apparatus began focusing on the production of a new asset: "Egyptian identity."

The story of how this asset was managed, regulated, sold, and bought over the following century is a tragic and complex one that I will not delve into here. However, it might be useful to roughly sketch out the present iteration of this construction, and the mechanisms through which this insidious strain operates, as it is indicative of a wider cultural malaise. Less specific and more dangerous than a local corruption, it contains something endemic to the idea of systems themselves.

In the period between the massive uprising of 1919 and the 1952 coup, the Egyptian state maintained a tense relationship with a segment of its subjects. This period was marked by an outpouring of public discourse, the spread of diverse political ideas (Islamism as a political alternative; nationalism, with its fascist and socialist connotations; various strands of Marxism), as well as constant demonstrations and upheavals. The rise of an educated cadre of functionaries working within the state (and sometimes in opposition to its hierarchy) necessitated a new framework that would regulate the relationship between this cadre of bureaucrats and the institutions and organizations they functioned within.[3] Polemical disputes around the definitions of "the nation" and "the people" were fought out on the pages of magazines, inside cafes, and in published treatises. In this charged atmosphere, power was denoted by the ability to impose a definition of the terms, but it is interesting to note that the terms themselves were not questioned. All players accepted and operated on the same playing field. Therefore, the system of power and its opposition were in conflict not over what the possibilities of a society could be as much as who was to control the definition of the nation itself.[4]

The "corrupt intellectual" refers to those functionaries, poets, novelists, museum directors, and artists who claimed to speak Egypt, those who shaped public discourse, established rules, coined terms, and justified the nature of things. Under their careful guidance, a social order was constructed. However, another order exists, seemingly invisible yet highly flexible and adaptable. It is this indefinable, unspoken order, which tensely shares the shared social space with official constructions, that interests me.[5]

What makes a discourse official in centralized systems is that it is structured upon one dominant foundational referent that categorizes what is valuable and what is not—regardless of its nature—and that effectively produces a fixed horizon of possible meanings that can only function within set parameters. In actual fact, even if the subject officially pronounces an allegiance to this official discourse, their actions, decisions, and daily routines stand in stark opposition to the very tenets of the discursive order. It may be that this paradox characterizes all social orders, but it is more marked and visible in places where a popular culture is strident, loud, and hysterical.[6] The rupture and the reconstruction that Egypt has experienced over the past three years can be understood as emerging exactly from this gap between a discursive and a lived order.

To further elucidate how these mechanisms actually develop and operate, it is necessary to consider the particularities of what I call "the crowd." The term is meant to be seen as the prime unit within a social order that balances the presence of the individual with that of the collective. In my previous essay, I defined the term in this way: "The crowd is where a seething mass with a unified understanding of its own presence is born, a conglomeration of frictions and tensions that manages to resolve itself into an identifiable entity." The "crowd" is a unified entity that is a site of conflict as well as resolution. It possesses self-consciousness and the ability to identify itself as a unit. This "crowd" is dense rather than simple, as its complex nature does not make it reducible to an image one can possess. Although it is a manifestation of the collective, it is not the representation of the collective, and is therefore more metonym than metaphor, i.e., it is part of the collective and not merely something that stands for it.[7] The corrupt intellectual, through writings, statements, and propositions, continuously strives to simplify, possess, and represent the crowd, insistently attempting to treat it as a metaphor rather than a metonym. However, the crowd's inherent complexity and density remain necessary for the construction of a regime of power. The shape of the argument, the terms of the rhetoric, and the elements of the metaphor need to be grounded in real experience in order to function effectively as a tool of power. To give itself a shot at history and to produce the necessary mystifications, the regime must rely upon what is "real" (i.e., historical and material conditions) at its core. Most insidiously, it manages to achieve this by denying the very complexity that it instrumentalizes.

It is the nature of this "density" to actually appear in some visible form on the surface of the "crowd." "Density" has a series of different registers. First, there are the various discursive regimes under which the crowd has historically lived and "the imprint" they leave on that crowd. This means that the crowd is historical and possesses an intuitive understanding of what surrounds it—an intuition that is not metaphysical but formed through the accumulation of lived experience over centuries. Paradoxically, this sediment of experience and historicity is precisely what ahistorical discourses need in order to refer to a constructed and eternally unchanging past that transforms into the future.[8]

The second property of the crowd is its detailed intensity, produced from the individual gestures of each single individual in the crowd and their personal history. This intensity communicates both the collective gesture and isolated intentions. Since it arises from the individual, it is also an expression of selfish desire and need. In that sense, the collective is the sum total of each individual in relation to each other, and individual desires and collective identification are always in a polyphonic tension, sharing space and contradicting each other.

Furthermore, since the collective is ruled by desires and intentions, it is not blind; it is capable of the self-consciousness, confidence, and willpower necessary to assert its selfish demands. As such, the crowd is just as able to generate powerful, creative, and even sublime mass resistance as it is to fall into xenophobia, mass lynching, and the schizoid neurosis of simultaneous self-aggrandizement and subjugation.

Finally, for the crowd to come into being, there has to be a state of consensus between each of these individuals. This density operates in two distinct fashions. On the one hand, it relies on a "discursive article of faith"—which is the sedimentation of the legacies of (failed) discourses (a mix of modern dreams and old superstitions, all of which have both opposed and legitimized the status quo). The discursive article of faith gives the crowd an identity. On the other hand, it is also the actual direct sociopolitical practice of these ideologies as forms of behavior that are often contradictory to the actual article of faith. In other words, we have a crowd that is a sort of battery of potential (the ammunition of the nation), yet its very characteristics are what allows it to be subjugated in the first place. And it is that contradiction, that delicate discursive operation, which the "corrupt intellectual" has identified and has become adept at managing with deadly skill.

In a sense, I am trying to point to the very basis of a daily experience of exclusion, definition, and self-regulation that latently operates in all discursive orders, based upon the contradictions of identity and crowd formation. To produce that discourse and to place it in the public arena, a language that resonates with the public must be used. Therefore, a space and a context is made available for the pronouncements of functionaries, for the opinions of journalists, for the banalities of official songsmiths, so that all acquire meaning. This a public space but it is not the space of the "public intellectual," who might be critical or raise pertinent questions. It is rather the space of the ideologue, whose pronouncements are essential for the transformation of the present into history. What I mean is that these pronouncements are aware of the crowd's specificities and they know how to address it effectively. As a result, they can describe what we all share (our public space) by arguing for a specific idea of what is happening.

If Egypt in 2011 experienced a moment of real rupture, it must have also been an attempt to disconnect from this system of discursive orders. So far, however, it is truly and bitterly ironic that this act of rupture has in fact managed to rejuvenate these forms of narrativizing. Forms that a mere three years earlier had become hollowed out and vacant have today regained significance. Why did this happen? I suspect there are reasons that reach beyond the usual answers (lack of education, lack of a political cadre, lack of collective experience). It is the public space constructed by those "corrupt intellectuals" (those demagogues, those ignorant theorizers of mediocrity, those self-satisfied complicit servants of power) that has maintained and safe-guarded a system of power after it has been shaken. They have reconstituted their discursive order by propagating a language of "stability," which includes terms like "the venerated patriarch," "the honored institution," and "Egypt Eternal."

Although "the people" continues to be an essential phrase in these formulations, it is only to bestow the people with empty honorifics and to address them as passive subjects.

It is possible to read the "rupture" in 2011 not as an event that occurred, but rather as a sort of manifestation or sublimation of an existing condition. As previously described, a social order that is messily divided between a practiced daily routine and an out-of-touch discursive regimen will reach a point where it can only represent itself in the form of mass action. At that moment, significant actions can indeed come to embody meaning, but what they embody is not a symbol of something that exists in society; it is rather an idea of what that could potentially be.[9] The gap between the rules and regulations produced by public discourse, and the actual implementation of these regulations in daily life, is exactly the space that is both full of promise and conducive to the renewal and reconstruction of the dominant order.

The corrupt intellectual is aware of this gap and thus deals in the market of phantasmatic ideas. He inhabits a world of agreements, between the intellectuals and themselves (for what role they should play), and between the different competing fantasies of what things represent or *stand for*. These agreements exist alongside the "master" set of agreements that make a social order possible in the first place. Official discourse backed by, and expressing, existing power structures acquires its significance through an implicit violence wrought on the total discursive field. It demands, orders, and fixes what surrounds it. A moment of rupture is the search for a new agreement. It is the demand for an agreement that would be more congruent with the structural changes that are taking place economically, socially, and culturally. In contrast, what happened in Egypt in 2011 is a prime example of an act of communication between subjects that accrues its power and exerts its transformative violence through its openness and lack of fixity. It therefore acts as an oppositional correlative (latent and awaiting fulfillment) to the unsublimated agreements that order and categorize our definitions. What this means is

that at the basis of both acts—that of subjugation and that of revolution—is a coming to terms with an unspoken yet essential component of historical experience. My argument is that our historical experience is constituted by a morphology of the agreements that order our social experience. The difference between both poles is that subjugation fulfills the desire for the sublimation of agreements on the level of phantasm, while communication attempts to fulfill that same desire on the plane of the "real." Phantasm is always more comfortable, as the symbolic world it constructs is distant and disengaged from the actual desires of each individual. The real is dangerous and conflicted. It is where desire has not discovered a symbolic language with which to represent itself and can therefore become unsettling and potentially transformational. Yet again, it is those double-faced sycophants, those slaves of order, those vampires of dreams, who manage to confuse these two opposing acts. Their role is to publicly express subjugation as an act of popular communication.

However, right next to every such pronouncement is an apparition of hope. We should never forget that there are at least two modes operating here: a parallel "social reality" that manages to exist under the tightest conditions, and the fact that that reality's appearance can shake the very foundations upon which the discursive regime is organized. In this parallel world, potentialities that can never be achieved under the existing discursive regime of power are possible and unconscious *and* exist in real time. And it is exactly because it is not labeled or celebrated that makes this parallel world so pertinent and powerful. We should not over-romanticize it. We should recognize that although this is a space of great potential, it is an amoral space that doesn't care about the well-being of the individual, but that strives to find a moment of correlation between the productions of the collective (with their latencies: whether the horror of collective hysteria, fear, and paranoia or the incredible power of the autonomous, anonymous, formal articulation of unknown realities) and the superstructure they live under.[10] What I am attempting to describe is not the power of the collective, as much as the very material ability of a condition to exist that surpasses the dynamics that attempt to produce and order it.

What interests me here is some sort of formalism rather than an expressionistic celebration of subjectivity. This is the space where collectively produced culture takes its material and sources from the existing structure and manages to produce forms that do not go beyond the narrow confines of a strategic maneuver within the field of their production, i.e., they are designed to fulfill their roles as entertainment, or as jokes, or as wedding songs, or as markers of territory. Yet at the same time, these forms almost unintentionally manage to escape the horizon of their functionality and take on an accidental formalism, in the form of songs, sayings, magic spells, or bodily gestures. These secret moments of formalism exist across all sectors in society and are not only the domain of the popular classes.[11] However, we are now at a moment where the narrative of class fulfillment itself has been shaken. The revolution did not shake it, but the revolution came as a development out of the narrative's actual collapse.

I still believe in the absolute significance of what happened in January 2011. It is almost a tribute to the power of that moment that the reconstitution of the dominant order is so extreme. The popular imaginary has been disturbed and longs for the calm, stagnant stability of the known. The revolution has therefore succeeded.

As such, any sort of politics invested in transformation and taking rupture as its starting point will have to take into account the resonance produced by making a statement within a closed horizon of meaning that has been determined by the functionaries of the dominant order. This is not to support the statements of these functionaries, but to realize that their historical density is constitutive of the idea of meaning itself, at least in our present context. To attempt to step out of that, to practice rupture, would be to recognize this idea of meaning for what it is. One must abandon claims of "liberation" and transcendent doxas of "progress." One must abandon the "people," "hope," "the dream," "possibility"—all in the name of the transformation itself.

X

"A Monster Was Born": Notes on the Rebirth of the "Corrupt Intellectual" was commissioned by the Liverpool Biennial and first appeared in the publication *A Needle Walks into a Haystack* (Liverpool Biennial, 2014).

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1
The first version of this text appeared in *How to Begin? Envisioning the Impact of Guggenheim Abu Dhabi* , a thesis project edited by Ozge Ersoy at the Center for Curatorial Studies, Bard College. A second version appeared in issue 18 of *e-flux journal* in September 2010. See https://pdf.e-flux-systems.com/journal/in-defense-of-the-corrupt-intellectual/

2
Under Mohamed Ali this production of discourse was driven by an expansionist ambition as well as the need to establish a dynasty.

3
The deeply orientalist views institutionalized within the educational and cultural system and initiated by the presence of mainly foreign "experts" who held the highest positions within the Egyptian bureaucracy in the first half of the twentieth century introduced another element to this system of definitions. Therefore what we had was a three-way argument around the nature of the state and its peoples.

4
In the future, this was to have dire consequences: the very idea of national liberation and independence was evacuated of any potential it might have had.

5
In the systems of power I am attempting to engage here, the regime and its opposition are closer to each other than they imagine, as they share a deep investment in strengthening an allegiance to a national identity regardless of what that identity is supposed to be.

6
It is important to note that this texture, this loud, strident hysteria, is not some sort of innate quality of the "people" but rather a very sophisticated transmutation of the material conditions those same people live under.

7
This seemingly minor difference in linguistics is actually highly significant and is the trademark of the discursive order that the corrupt intellectual produces—in service to the regime of power for which he deliberately produces this confusion.

8
Witness the rhetorical arguments that disingenuously portray injustice and subjugation as the eternal lot of the people. This argument gains credibility by referring to an experience that is innately known to be true, yet it is disingenuous because it portrays it as a static unchanging condition, while it is actually a highly nuanced, continuously mutating condition that has been met with (conveniently forgotten) unwavering resistance.

9
However, this is not the simple binary of ideals believed in and strived for on one side, and the reality of daily life on the other. Nor is it merely a simple moral hypocrisy. It's rather a structural property of the social reality that exists in a shared space we can call Egypt.

10
In a sense, this is the opposite of the dynamics of reification and alienation, the domain of phantasm. I know that I come dangerously close to populism here by proposing some kind of naive belief in the power of the collective to produce real experiences.

11
But it might be that the popular classes are the least invested in the dominant narrative (as it ultimately serves them the least), while the middle classes are instrumental in forging this narrative, and the wealthy classes directly benefit from it.

Miran Mohar

Why Neue Slowenische Kunst in German?

NSK and its groups never spoke the political language of the day. This, however, does not mean that we did not respond to aggressive nationalist politics. We did not want to fall victim to the phantoms of the past, being well-aware that the more that totalitarian and nationalistic symbols were pushed under the rug and prohibited, the more they assumed diabolical power. This was also one of the reasons why, in our paintings, Irwin juxtaposed the motifs and styles of modernism and contemporary art with totalitarian art styles and national motifs. We were aware that there is a wide space between regressive nationalism and "esperanto" internationalism, and that mere criticism of nationalism without reflection would not make it disappear. Interestingly, despite our iconography, we were not of much interest to ultranationalists in the long run. In fact, they were mostly quite disappointed and perplexed when they looked more closely at us. They attended the events of NSK and its groups because our iconography was apparently appealing to them, but its content did not meet their expectations and they did not know what to make of it. Because our artistic procedures and works did not contain a safe ironical distance that would be recognizable at first glance, we were subject, from the very start of our activity, to numerous accusations of being nationalists and flirting with totalitarian ideologies. In time, such reactions slowly died down and became very rare.

The NSK art collective was formed in 1984 in Yugoslavia by three groups active in the fields of visual art, music, and theater: Irwin, Laibach, and the Scipion Nasice Sisters Theatre.[1] Later, other groups joined in, among them the design group New Collectivism and the Department of Pure and Applied Philosophy. Crucial for NSK's operations and its development were collaboration, a free flow of ideas among individual members and groups, and the joint planning of artistic actions. In 1992, the NSK transformed into the NSK State in Time as a response to the radical political changes that were taking place in Yugoslavia and Eastern Europe at the beginning of the 1990s. In addition to organizing projects such as temporary embassies and consulates, the NSK State in Time also started to issue its own passports in 1993. Currently, there are approximately 14,000 NSK passport holders around the world.

The NSK State in Time came into being after the disintegration of the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, which was marked by wars in the former Yugoslav republics of Slovenia, Croatia, and Bosnia and Herzegovina, as a transnational reaction to the aggressive nationalisms spreading throughout the territory of ex-Yugoslavia.

As early as the beginning of the 1980s, Laibach and NSK triggered debates about nationalism by using German names, which clearly caused discomfort on the part of the authorities. Why the use of the German language for "new Slovenian art"? Why did the Laibach group take on the old German name for Ljubljana, today's capital of the Republic of Slovenia? Laibach, in particular, sparked lots of hostile

Neue Slowenische Kunst members and friends 1987, Ljubljana.

IRWIN, NSK Embassy Moscow, 1992, photo: Jože Suhadolnik.

reactions from the authorities throughout Yugoslavia. For some time in Slovenia, there was even a ban on the use of the name Laibach, carrying a mandatory fine equivalent to about 500 German marks. Here, I must explain that German culture had exerted a huge influence on Slovenian culture for almost one thousand years. But during World War II, Slovenia, like the rest of Yugoslavia, was under German occupation. Slovenians were subjected to aggressive Germanization and even prohibited from using their language in public. Large numbers of people were killed as hostages or perished in concentration camps. The role that this ultranationalistic and racist project reserved for Slavic nations was, at best, slave work in East European fields and factories. Thus, after the traumatic experience of WWII, the German language was understood in Yugoslavia as the language of the occupier, yet at the same time also as the language of high culture and philosophy, the language of Goethe, Hegel, Mann, and others. The use of German in the name "Neue Slowenische Kunst" indicated this double nature of our experience with the German cultural and national space.

Through our artistic procedures, we also wanted to provoke debate about national conflicts that were swept under the rug after WWII but erupted violently following the fall of the Berlin Wall, particularly in the territory of the former Yugoslavia. In socialist Yugoslavia, public discussions and reflections on national issues were taboo. Long-running national conflicts, from the Balkan Wars in the beginning of the twentieth century through World Wars I and II, were artificially frozen after WWII and then artificially provoked in the beginning of the 1990s by essentially the same politicians who played important roles in socialist Yugoslavia.

In the maelstrom of war in Croatia, when Dubrovnik was bombarded from the territory of the then Yugoslav Republic of Montenegro, Irwin was invited to participate in an international contemporary art biennial in Cetinje, Montenegro. We declined the invitation, explaining to the organizer that we did not want to be a factor of normalization in a situation in which the country hosting the biennial was conducting aggressive military operations. In this case, contemporary art was used as an

NSK, NSK State Sarajevo, 1995. Photo: IRWIN archive.

NSK Pavilion, XLV Venice Biennale, 1993. Photo: IRWIN archive.

Issuing passports to Bosnians during NSK State Sarajevo, 1995. Photo: IRWIN archive.

instrument of normalization in a national conflict that escalated into war!

The beginning of the war in Bosnia and Herzegovina closely coincided with the opening of our first NSK Embassy in Moscow in May 1992 and the founding of the NSK State in Time upon our return to Slovenia. In 1995, at the invitation of artists from Sarajevo, NSK travelled twice to the besieged city, where Irwin, in collaboration with the Ljubljana Museum of Modern Art and Sarajevo artist Jadran Adamović, organized an international collection of contemporary art (with works donated by European and American artists), which is now part of the collection of Ars Aevi, a Sarajevo museum of contemporary art in the making. When this collection was displayed in Ljubljana in 1996, we also organized, together with the Ljubljana Museum of Modern Art, an international symposium of artists and theoreticians titled "Living with Genocide," which dealt with the question of why the international art community could react and critically reflect the war in Vietnam, but failed to do so in the case of the Bosnian war.

Also, we have always been aware that contemporary art (irrespective of its declarative commitment to transnationalism) and nationalism are not necessarily mutually exclusive. There is no need to look very far to see this. The Venice Biennale is mostly still organized according to national principles, i.e., by national pavilions. When Irwin was invited to represent Slovenia at the 1993 Venice Biennale, we did not like the idea of us, as artists, representing a nation, i.e., the Slovenian state, so we set the condition that we would participate in the Biennale only if the NSK State was hosted by the Slovenian pavilion, i.e., only if Irwin was presented in the pavilion of the NSK State in Time. The Ljubljana Museum of Modern Art, as the organizer of this event, accepted our proposal and so we presented ourselves at the 1993 Venice Biennale as artists from the NSK State in Time.

At the turn of the century, the NSK State acquired unforeseeable dimensions. In 2001, Haris Hararis from Athens launched the unofficial NSK website NSKSTATE.COM, which became the central meeting point for NSK citizens. Around this time, it became clear that the citizens had begun to self-organize, both online and in the real world. They used the iconographies of the NSK State in Time and NSK groups as a basis for their own artifacts, actions, and responses. To mention only some of them: in the United States, filmmaker Christian Matzke opened, on his own initiative, an NSK library. In Reykjavik, NSK citizens organized the NSK Guard of Iceland and opened their own NSK embassy. We decided to support such initiatives, not to restrict them. In 2007, Irwin and NSKSTATE.COM began collecting these artifacts and named this phenomenon NSK Folk Art. These works, made in various styles and contexts, are often unpredictable responses to NSK's work and symbolism.

Today, the citizenry of the NSK State includes people from seventy countries around the world. They organize

IRWIN members interviewing NSK citizens in London, 2007. Photo: Haris Hararis.

IRWIN, Latest Information, 2007.

themselves via the internet and NSK "rendezvous," as they named their meetings in 2010. The First NSK Citizens' Congress, which took place in Berlin in 2010, showed that the citizens were willing to take the NSK State in their own hands. This year, citizen-artists organized the First NSK Folk Art Biennial in Spinerei, in Leipzig, Germany. The exhibition, which presented fifty artists from twenty-two countries, was seen by around twenty thousand visitors.

Another point to be made about the NSK State in Time is that a large number of NSK citizens come from Africa. Since 2006, about three thousand people from Nigeria have applied for and received NSK passports. This phenomenon is obviously linked to the fact that the huge majority of Nigerians cannot leave their country. Here, this contemporary art project bumped into reality. Of course, we explained to them that the NSK State is a state without a territory and that they cannot legally travel across borders with its passport because it is not an internationally recognized document. We also warned them that any attempt to cross international borders with this passport might have serious consequences, but at the same time, we did not deny them NSK citizenship.

Such a massive number of applications for NSK passports from Africa prompted us to start organizing interviews with NSK citizens from first, second, and third world countries. Among the reasons given for applying for the NSK passport, some of the interviewees stated that NSK citizenship enables them to belong to more than just one state and nation, that with the NSK passport they can at least partly overcome this limitation.

I see the NSK State in Time as an experiment that is opening up new spaces of social organization beyond the borders of nation states. The beauty of this project lies in the fact that its outcomes cannot be predicted. The NSK State in Time is an artifact which has taken on a life of its own, independent of its original creators.

X

Ljubljana, June 2014

Miran Mohar is an artist based in Ljubljana. He is a member of the IRWIN group and a co-founder of the Neue Slowenische Kunst, the graphic design studio New Collectivism and the Scipion Nasice Sisters Theatre. He is also a lecturer and vice-dean of the AVA, Academy for Visual Arts, Ljubljana.

1
Since the Neue Slowenische Kunst (NSK) art movement has long ceased to appear in the media as a collective, after consulting with my colleagues I decided to present my personal views on the issue of ultranationalism for this edition of *e-flux journal* through the prism of the experience of NSK and NSK State in Time, of which I am a cofounder.

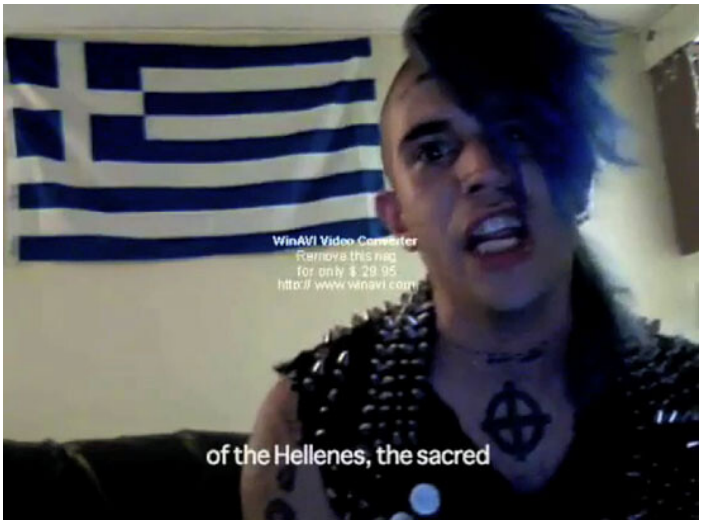
Sotirios Bahtsetzis

Democrisis: Notes on the Capitalist Imaginary of Europe

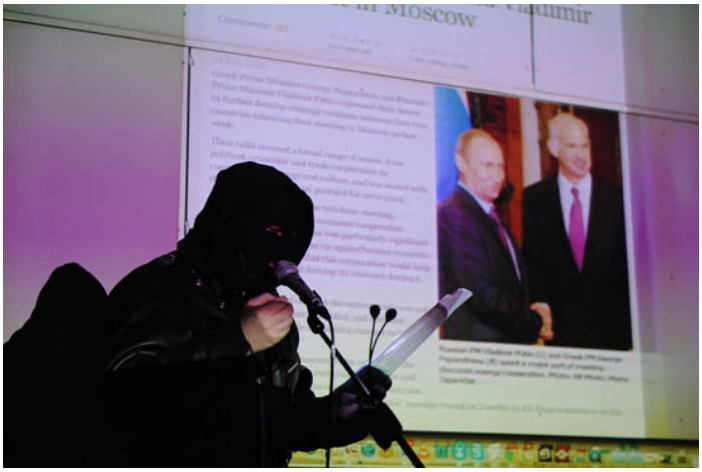
With his statement that "Eurozone voters have been blackmailed and betrayed," journalist and economist Philippe Legrain provided us with a concise account of the political situation in Europe a week before the May 2014 European elections.[1] Legrain's article suggests a direct link between the mismanagement of the sovereign debt crisis on the level of political discourse, and the rise of both xenophobia and Euroscepticism across the continent.[2] On a political and economic level, certainly the actual crisis management in Europe has failed to match up to the often contradictory rhetoric of political agents. However, some conclusions can be drawn regarding the ideological foundation of such rhetoric.

In reference to the Maastricht Treaty of 1992, which led to the creation of the euro as a common currency, French economist, writer, and senior civil servant Jacques Attali (a former government adviser and the first president of the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development) declared in a lecture about the European crisis on February 24, 2011 that making things more difficult within the treaty and less democratic for the member-states was in fact the absolute warranty for obliging every single member-state to continue being one. Attali implied that even if the European sovereign debt crisis had not been designed for this purpose, it was at the very least fomented with the aim of forcing a dubious unification process. According to an article published by *The Press Project* about former US treasury secretary Timothy Geithner's new book *Stress Test* (2014), "in 2012 German finance minister Wolfgang Schaeuble presented [Geithner] with a plan to kick Greece out of the eurozone. This, he said, would appease German voters and terrify Europe." This was the so-called Grexit Plan. The article continues: "According to Schauble's logic, a Greek exit would scare the rest of Europe enough for them to commit to providing sufficient financial assistance in order to prevent the system from collapsing."[3] A sovereign debt crisis has been deployed as a Trojan horse, not in order to advance a democratic process of integrating Europe politically, legally, economically, and culturally, but rather to create a powerful financial confederation entirely disjoined from national parliaments and democratic decision-making. And indeed, the European Stability Mechanism—the mechanism for managing financial crises in Europe—is under no juridical or parliamentary control, being bound instead to global casino capitalism. In his 2008 book *La crise, et après?*, Attali advocated a world government as a response to the problems that have emerged from what Richard Falk calls "predatory globalization."[4] In outlining this center-left, utopian vision for a global federation (much like the politically optimistic fiction of global governance suggested in *Star Trek*), Attali doesn't discuss the means for achieving such a noble goal. Along the same lines, Robert Cooper, an EU diplomat and a former adviser to UK prime minister Tony Blair, terms this global government a "post-modern cooperative imperium."[5]

What all these approaches have in common is an indirect



Kavecsproject, Black Circle Project, 2011-13.



Kavecsproject, Black Circle Project, 2011-13.

acknowledgement that democratic values and parliamentarianism are indeed in crisis. It is a crisis of how we understand and define the democratic heritage of which Europe is so proud. In November 2013, Roman Herzog, the former president of Germany, declared that the source of democracy in Europe is not classical Athens but Britain and Switzerland.[6] Although this statement might have offended philhellenes everywhere, it is a historical fact, analyzed by philosopher Giorgio Agamben. Agamben investigates the ways that power in the West, beginning with the first Christian Roman emperors, has tended to take the form of a divine *oikonomia*, that is, the dissemination of God's will into the factual world.[7] European politics is the outcome of the theological and political concept of the distribution of divine grace in the world (best exemplified by the British tradition of the "sovereign Dei Gratia") as well as its continuation in the current form of European governance, which philosopher Alain Badiou calls "parliamentarian capitalism." (Before Badiou, the great realist novelist Stendhal in 1830 called it "congregational bureaucracy."[8]) A devoted evangelical, Roman Herzog's views on the cradle of European democracy can be traced back to the Calvinist secular ethic, which, as Max Weber analyzed in his classical study *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, shaped the current sociopolitical order of engaging in trade and accumulating wealth for investment.

Herzog's argumentation introduces a fundamental question concerning Europe's present and future. And by "Europe" we are not simply referring to current European politics, or even to the European Union, but to Europe as an entity with a distinctive set of political, cultural, and social norms, values, and histories—which clearly go beyond any banal symbols such as the Eurovision Song Contest, InterRail, or a common design for EU passports. These fundamental values—such as connectivity, solidarity, and a respect for human rights, which, according to economic and social theorist Jeremy Rifkin, contribute to the European dream—shape a powerful political imaginary.[9]

Even if, as Agamben puts it, the theological-political concept of *oikonomia* is at the heart of the intertwining of the political and the economic, we shouldn't forget that when it comes to establishing a genealogy of European democracy, the Greek answer to the fundamental question of how to understand the world is of an entirely different nature. It is best articulated in the third play of Aeschylus's trilogy *The Oresteia*. Here, the hero Orestes appeals to the goddess Athena for help in solving an ethical and political dilemma: Do mortals comply with the ethical demands and primordial norms of the ancient race of the gods, or with the laws of the Olympians? Athena then does something no one has ever thought of before: she establishes a public court composed of the city's people. No god or any other outside authority will offer the answer—only the public court. Athena the goddess becomes Athena the polis. Here is the birth of democracy, in Athens in the fifth century BCE—the earliest known direct democracy in history, opposed to the Judeo-Christian (and Muslim) conception of an eternal law according to which man is subject to the will of God.

It is this political form of ancient Athens which, according to philosopher Cornelius Castoriadis, established the model of an autonomous society. This model is indeed far removed from Imperial Roman, the theocratic Middle Ages, the absolutist Baroque period, and the colonial Victorian age—world orders which still seem to direct the ideologies and beliefs of today's politicians. European policymakers cannot be accused of lacking historical knowledge or sophistication (as Herzog's statement indicates). However, many European citizens accuse them of lacking a progressive vision that could implement far-reaching changes to the reigning parliamentarian capitalism. Castoriadis terms this potential for autonomy and creativity "the creative imaginary," and he calls the enslaving and regressive forces of capitalism "the

capitalist imaginary."[10] Capitalism has introduced the fiction of instrumentalist reason as modern society's foundation, in order to put aside the foundational societal imaginaries expressed through various creation myths. Both constitute what Castoriadis calls the "imaginary institution of societies," that is, formative ideologies of the world and humans' place in it.

However, the dubious mixture of instrumentalist reason and residues of archaic thinking gives rise to movements which present us with a fiction of unity and solidarity based on "imaginary" identities, whether racial, ethnic, or linguistic. The semblance of harmony proposed by these movements—that is, the pseudo-religious and populist salvationist visions of escape, order, and perfectibility (how different are such conceptions from eighteenth-century enlightenment or nineteenth-century social thinking?)—brings to the fore the crisis of modern democracy. Indeed, the rise in recent years of right-wing ultranationalist and identitarian movements, which generally criticize and oppose the condition of the contemporary West while proposing the preservation of an ethnic and cultural identity based on specific geographies, is a result of the failure of the capitalist imaginary to hold its position as globalized society's founding narrative. We shouldn't regard such movements as simply an expression of resentment over the poor performance and mismanagement of policymakers, but rather as a systemic failure of the ideology such policymakers espouse.

For instance, it is generally accepted that the emergence Los Indignados in Greece, provoked by austerity measures in Southern Europe, has both radicalized leftist and autonomist movements, and also give momentum to so-called Third Position groups, ranging from right-wing autonomist nationalists to revolutionary national anarchists. As political theorist Kostis Stafylakis maintains, we are dealing with "a new ideological spectrum" and "unpredictable rearticulations that have taken place in the camps of both the Left and the Right."[11] Political scientists often maintain that Third Positionism is, in fact, an ideological mutation of the neo-fascist right. However, monstrous neofascist parties such as Golden Dawn in Greece are better understood as representing the reverse facet—the populist disguise—of mainstream neoliberal ideology.[12]

The metapolitical, post-democratic administration of European societies has facilitated the hegemony of the populist Right by failing to appeal to low- and middle-class strata across the European continent. Conservative populists, right-wing parliamentary coalitions, and ideologues from the late-'70s culturalist Right (leftovers of the Nouvelle Droite) have won the battle for ideological hegemony by addressing the "passions" of recently proletarianized and even lumpenized social strata.[13]

However, ultranationalist and identitarian movements cannot be sufficiently explained by the otherwise valuable

Kavecsproject, Black Circle Project, 2011-13.

theoretical approach of "post-democracy," that is, a wave of depoliticization that entails a refusal by citizens to participate in democratic processes as a reaction to feeling disrespected by the state and their representatives.[14] These movements also embody a deeply rooted and regressive "palingenetic myth," which, under circumstances of economic and social stability, remains inactive.[15] The systemic failures of globalized capitalism—not only its economic and social disasters, but also the inadequacy of its public rhetoric and the absence of any far-reaching political vision—disclose the system's foundation: a belief in technological rationalism and inevitable progress. In doing so, they make its imaginary vulnerable to all kinds of simplistic going-back-to-the-roots tactics and interpretations. It can be argued that attitudes such as xenophobia, anti-Semitism, anti-feminism, anti-immigrant hate, and homophobia formulate an imaginary identity on the basis of opposing the Other. In studying the above symptoms of the political, Lacanian political theory has introduced the idea that "the Other wants to steal from us our precious enjoyment."[16] In this regard, these regressive states, which come to the fore when the capitalist narrative of social progress is disrupted, represent various stages of foreclosure within the "capitalist imaginary." Ultranationalist and identitarian movements constitute the nightmare of the capitalist imaginary, which will hopefully force European society to wake up and embrace its creative double.

One of the main goals of both progressive political discourse and interventionist art should be to reveal the hidden ideologies of such movements, instead of embracing an undifferentiated, wishful-thinking rhetoric of trivial enlightenment and benevolent altruistic commitment.[17]

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1
Philippe Legrain, "Eurozone voters have been blackmailed and betrayed. No wonder they're angry," *The Guardian*, May 15, 2014

2
"The European Union was often unpopular even before the financial crisis. But the long slump and eurozone policymakers' blunders have created a political firestorm. Support for the EU has plunged to all-time lows. Most Europeans now associate it with austerity, recession and German domination, with constraints on what they can do, rather than on how we can achieve more together. Anti-EU parties, often xenophobic and comprising reactionary extremists, are set to do well in next week's European elections. ... The crisis has shredded trust in mainstream politicians' competence and motives. They failed to prevent the crisis and have proved incapable of resolving it. They bailed out banks and their creditors while slashing spending on poor schoolchildren. They inflict suffering on others, while remaining largely unscathed themselves. No wonder voters are angry."

3
"Timothy Geithner reveals Schauble's plan to kick Greece out of the euro and 'terrify' the rest of Europe," *The Press Project*, May 14, 2014 https://thepressproject.gr/timothy-geithner-reveals-schaubles-plan-to-kick-greece-out-of-the-euro-and-terrify-the-rest-of-europe/ .

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Richard Falk, *Predatory Globalization: A Critique* (Cambridge: Polity, 1999).

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Robert Cooper, *The Breaking of Nations: Order and Chaos in the Twenty-first Century* (New York: Grove Press, 2004).

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Roman Herzog, "Man muss die AfD ernst nehmen," *Handelsblatt*, Nov. 21, 2013.

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Giorgio Agamben, *The Kingdom and the Glory: For a Theological Genealogy of Economy and Government* , trans. Lorenzo Chiesa and Matteo Mandarini (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2011).

8
Jacques Rancière, *Aisthesis: Scenes from the Aesthetic Regime of Art,* trans. Zakir Paul (London: Verso, 2013), 42.

9
Jeremy Rifkin, *The European Dream: How Europe's Vision of the Future Is Quietly Eclipsing the American Dream* (London: Polity Press, 2004).

10
Cornelius Castoriadis, "Imaginary and Imagination at the Crossroads," in *Figures of the Thinkable* , trans. Helen Arnold (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2007), 146.

11
Kostis Stafylakis, "Rethinking 'overidentification': activist practices in the context of the Greek Crisis," in *MediaImpact: International Festival of Activist Art* , ed. Tatiana Volkova, exhibition catalogue, (2011), 48. As Spencer Sunshine puts it, "The danger National-Anarchists represent is not in their marginal political strength, but in their potential to show an innovative way that fascist groups can rebrand themselves and reset their project on a new footing ... Like the European New Right, the National-Anarchists adapt a sophisticated left-wing critique of problems with contemporary society, and draw their symbols and cultural orientation from the Left; then they offer racial separatism as the answer to these problems." Spencer Sunshine, "Rebranding Fascism: National-Anarchists" *The Public Eye* vol. 23, no. 4 (Winter 2008) http://www.publiceye.org/magazine/v23n4/rebranding_fascism.html .

12
Golden Dawn took part in national elections in 1996, receiving 0.1 percent of the total vote. But in the 2009 elections, it received 6.97 percent of the total vote. Despite the fact that the majority of the party's MPs are under investigation for allegedly forming a criminal organization, the party's candidate in the 2014 Athens municipal elections received 16.12 percent of the vote. As journalist Kostis Papaioanou, author of the investigative book *The "Clean Hands" of the Golden Dawn: Applications of Nazi Purity* (2013) and member of the Racist Violence Recording Network (RVRN), maintains, "In our country [Greece] there is an extreme-right tradition that goes back several decades, to the civil war, collaborationism, and the dictatorship. This world and its political offspring have been scattered among larger electoral organizations during other periods; they were adrift and didn't have a prominent presence" (translated from the Greek by the author). See Kostis Papaioannou, "We are still at the beginning of the Golden Dawn story," *Propaganda.gr*, May 19, 2014 http://popaganda.gr/kostis-papaioannou-imaste-akomi-stin-archi-tis-istorias-tin-chrisi-avgi/ .

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Stafylakis, "Rethinking 'overidentification,'" 48.

14
Colin Crouch, *Post-Democracy* (London: Polity Press, 2004).

15
Roger Griffin, *The Nature of Fascism* (London: St. Martin's Press, 1991).

16
Slavoj Zižek: "You formulate your identity on the fantasy that the Other is the one who automatically wants to steal from you. These are the two basic fantasies: one is that the Other wants to steal from us our precious enjoyment, usually the fantasy behind the racist idea of David Duke—blacks, others, they want to ruin the American way of life. The other idea, like with the Jew, is that the Other possesses some kind of excessive and strange enjoyment, which is in itself a threat to us." Josefina Ayerza, interview with Slavoj Zižek, "It Doesn't Have to Be a Jew," Lacan.com, 1994 http://www.lacan.com/perfume/Zizekinter.htm .

17
To my mind, the *Black Circle* project conceived by Kavecsprojects represents an efficacious effort of this kind. For information on the project, see http://2012istheseasonfortreason.wordpress.com/2012/05/15/kostis-stafylakis-third-positionism-and-the-politics-of-greek-indignados-occupy-berlin-biennale-7-manipulation .

Eduardo Cachucho

Red Berets and Economic Accomplices

Over a Lebanese dinner in London, a Dutch friend and fellow artist recently told me about a leak in the Dutch press relating to Martin Bosma, a prominent figure in the Party for Freedom (PVV) in the Netherlands and best known as the speechwriter and ideologue of the notorious Geert Wilders.[1] The PVV is a right-wing political party that advocates for the withdrawal of the Netherlands from the EU and is attempting, together with Marine Le Pen's National Front in France and Nigel Farage's Independence Party in the UK, to create the first anti-European block in the EU parliament. The leak concerned Bosma's failed attempt to publish his book *Handlangers van de ANC-apartheid* (Accomplices of ANC apartheid), in which he tries to make a correlation between the political scene in the Netherlands and that of South Africa. Bosma frames South Africa as a country where the ruling African National Congress (ANC) is plotting an apartheid-esque reverse subjugation of its white minority population. He focuses specifically on Afrikaners and their not so distant Dutch past. Things become even stranger when he compares this fabricated South African setting to his homeland, where he claims conservative, right-wing supporters are being legislated into oblivion by an ethnically and culturally diverse Dutch left. Such an analogy reveals the far right's reinjection of naturalizing rhetoric into the political sphere. Bosma attempts to capitalize on the fear of the unknown, here represented by South Africa. He refers to Afrikaners as guinea pigs and to the rest of the masses, which he assumes to be supporters of the ANC, as lions.

Members of the EFF (Economic Freedom Fighters) are sworn into parliament wearing their miner's overalls and maid's uniforms, 2014.

Meanwhile, in the recent South African elections, a newly formed opposition party to the ANC, the Economic Freedom Fighters (EFF), won 6.35 percent of the vote, making it the second-largest opposition party as well as South Africa's youngest party. At their swearing-in ceremony in Parliament on May 19, the twenty-five

Nelson Mandela received the red Mercedes Benz from the East London factory workers.

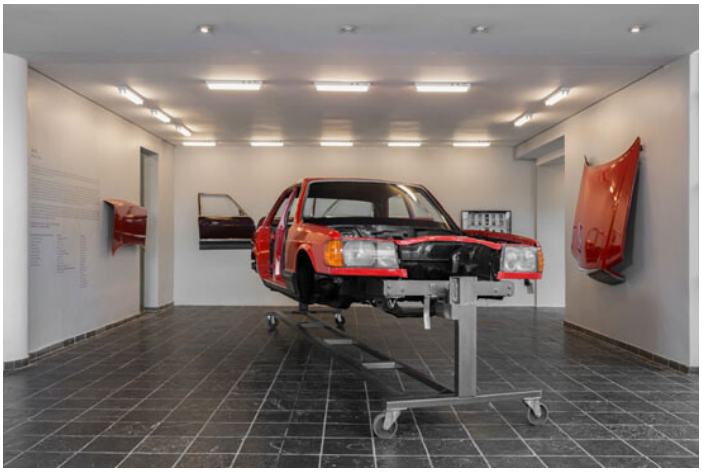
seat-holding members of the EFF were dressed in miner's overalls and maid's uniforms (in red, head to toe), representative of the uniforms that the majority of South African workers wear each day. This red also represents the blood of the fallen heroes and heroines of the liberation struggle.

In 1990, Nelson Mandela was presented with a red S-Class by the workers of a Mercedes-Benz factory in East London, South Africa. The color, "revolutionary red" was chosen by the workers. Upon accepting the car, Mandela said that its color would remind him of the blood spilled by South Africans in the struggle to end apartheid. Simon Gush and James Carins's video work *Red*[2] chronicles the story of the infamous red Benz, delving into a South Africa where labor relations were stalling across the country as oppressive apartheid legislation slowly began to unravel. The Mercedes factory faced fifty-two strikes in 1989, with repeated threats of closure by its parent company, Daimler Chrysler. The new labor laws that would come into effect in 1995 were only just being conceived, and the country's economic future had not yet been pinned to international capital markets. *Red* recounts the riveting events of a company and labor force trying to achieve an equilibrium of power relations where no such structures existed. Workers demanded better pay, better working conditions, and equal treatment irrespective of race.

Similarly, the main goal of the EFF is to redress inequality in South Africa by taking up the issues of "mine workers, farm workers, private security guards, domestic workers, construction workers, and unreasonably paid undergraduates." The party was founded in August 2013 by Julius Malema, the axed president of the ANC Youth League. The far-left EFF sees its political ideals departing from the ANC's collusion with international capital. One of its most important card-carrying members, Dali Mpofu, who is another defector from the ANC, links his own departure to the ANC's Freedom Charter of 1955.[3] In that year, the ANC sent fifty thousand volunteers into townships and the countryside to collect and document the demands for freedom made by the people. On June 26, 1955, the charter was read aloud to more than three thousand people at the Congress of the People in Kliptown. The charter, which called for democracy, human rights, land reform, labor rights, and the nationalization of key industries, was denounced as treasonous by the South African government at the time.

Mpofu felt that at the latest ANC congress held in 2013,

Simon Gush in collaboration with Mokotjo Mohulo, Red (Strike Uniforms), 2014. Upholstery materials.



Simon Gush in collaboration with Mokotjo Mohulo,"Red," 2014, Goethe Institute Johannesburg. Installation view.

the party departed, for the first time since its adoption of the Freedom Charter, from what the people had demanded. Yet this transition had arguably begun far earlier; since the advent of South Africa's democratic era in 1994, neoliberal tendencies spearheaded by the Ministry of Finance have caused land reform, labor rights, and nationalization to decelerate significantly.

In South Africa, where poverty and inequality are at levels unimaginable for a developed country—with a 24 percent unemployment rate that has remained relatively stable for the last twenty years, and the world's highest GINI coefficient (0.63–0.7)—these matters are serious indeed.[4] In the case of negotiations between the Mercedes-Benz plant and its workers, a far- reaching agreement meant that workers received pay increases, their community spaces were upgraded, and working conditions in the plant improved. The integrated solutions at the plant were so successful that it became one of Mercedes-Benz' best-run plants in the world, and it stayed strike-free for twenty-two years. This early experimentation and hard-fought success story did not get widely emulated in South Africa's democratic era. The recoupling of the nation's economy to neoliberal markets made negotiations such as these more rare. They simply took too much effort in a world economy in which it is more expedient to set up a new factory in another country than to work with what is at hand.

The EFF calls for the nationalization of mineral rights, land restitution without compensation, and union raises that are on par with the real costs of living. Some of its propositions echo the freedom demands of sixty years ago during apartheid rule. Yet the largely white-owned media in South Africa paints a picture of the EFF as a party of power-crazed lunatics who appear in Parliament, clad in red, as court-jesters for the entertainment of the rest of the population who do not subscribe to their ideology or economic ideas. The media in South Africa is largely owned by a handful of media firms that are backed in part by industry shareholders. As such, the media's output is imbued with neoliberal rhetoric. A few of these media houses are international players, owning shares in media outlets around the world. They thus hold considerable sway in distributing these views internationally.

During this year's national elections, *Red* was part of Simon Gush's solo exhibition—which was itself called "Red"—held at the Goethe Institute Johannesburg. The exhibition dealt with events in the year 1990, a moment in South Africa's history when the country's spirits were on an upward swing. Nelson Mandela's release from prison had just been announced, and an entire country was waking up from a state of repression.

For Gush, the project centers on the possibility of labor escaping a purely production-driven imperative and developing a more meaningful purpose, one that can help build identity and contribute to personal growth. The red Mercedes, built through cooperative resolve—workers devoted an hour of unpaid work each day to assembling it—became a symbol in which everyone in the country saw himself or herself. (For me, it is emblematic of the energy required to move South Africa out of an elite and racist system and into one of racial equality and democracy.) Soon after the red Mercedes was made, wage negotiations at the factory failed, leading to a wildcat strike and a factory occupation. Five hundred employees were dismissed for these actions, yet these tumultuous events led to this same factory becoming one of the most efficient of its kind in the world. It has won numerous awards for excellence in automotive manufacturing.

A work that Gush made in collaboration with fashion designer and artist Mokotjo Mohulo touches on the factory occupation. The work presents fictional workers' outfits made out of materials used in the Mercedes-Benz plant. It points to the possibility of converting work into

artistic output. During the factory occupation, workers used automotive materials from the factory to create makeshift beds and blankets. Gush and Mohulo's creation proposes a radical departure from what a worker is perceived to be. It proposes a future where work, artistic output, and emancipation are all intertwined—where there is a different relationship between work and nonwork, where the output of work has no definable goal other than a self-fulfilling relationship between an individual and his or her work. Here, the idea of work as a possible artistic output puts into question the notion of the "red uniform" as imagined by the EFF. While the EFF's parliamentary gesture shows clear allegiance to the worker, it remains constrained within the very model it is trying to criticize, one where workers are just another cog in the wheel of the neoliberal economy. Yet this symbolic gesture is in the short term a perfect rallying cry for mobilizing a South African populace which has had little symbolic power to cling to since the departure of Mandela from the political scene in 1999.

This brings us back to the decoupling of the freedom demands of the people and the new neoliberal route that the ANC embarked upon in order not to frighten foreign investment, a vital necessity after the apartheid government had almost bankrupted the country by pilfering the treasury for years.[5] In desperate need of international capital investment and loans from the IMF and World Bank, the new government implemented many neoliberal reforms, which it hoped would help break the stigma that had surrounded the country during the economic sanctions of the 1980s. It worked. International investment flooded into a country that had seen its connection to international markets largely vanish during the sanctions era. While this influx led to stellar economic results in the first decade of democracy, since then, South Africa's strong labor rights have been under consistent attack by market forces.

A year before being officially elected South Africa's first democratic president in 1994, Mandela opened the Cultural Development Congress by stating, "That which we collectively contribute to our national cultural identity will live forever, beyond us."[6] He argued for the importance of art and culture as tools for overcoming the apartheid weapons of minority rule, torture, detention, carnage, and massacre. Mandela envisioned a cultural sphere emerging in South Africa, not as a creative market of speculation, but one where social bonds would be reconstituted—perhaps a place where art could be seen as real work. What followed in his term as president was consistent financial support from the government for arts and culture, at a time when the national treasury was strapped for cash. Even under direct criticism, Mandela consistently defended the importance of the arts for South Africa's future. Since the Mandela era ended, South Africa's arts and culture budget has been consistently cut year after year.

Martin Bosma, member of the Party for Freedom, defends his position advocating art cuts, 2012.

In 2012, however, the Department of Arts and Culture took a considerable new policy direction. It invested €1.5m (R17m at the time) to renovate a space at the Venice Biennale and lease it for twenty years.[7] With South African artists becoming more prominent in the international market, and with homegrown art fairs emerging, the speculative art market has certainly made an impression on the Department of Arts and Culture. After a fraught first exhibition at the Venice Biennale in 2011, in which financial irregularities were rampant,[8] a more transparent process was developed for the 2013 edition. The South African art community has called for the Venice Biennale space to undergo further scrutiny to ensure that it becomes a more representative space for artistic output emerging from the country. A call for the 2014 edition has yet to be made public.

Parties like the EFF have helped to revisit the core neoliberal values that the South African economy was based upon twenty years ago, and bring this necessity into the media spotlight. In Jacob Zuma's inauguration speech on May 24, he called for the "radical socio-economic transformation of policies and programmes" during his upcoming term, a rather under-the-radar comment, but likely the first time that any mention of radical economic transformation has been made by a government official since 1994.[9] While the EFF and its demands are seen as a joke by the South African media, the ANC is actually listening, lest it find its majority of 62 percent slipping further in the next local elections two years from now.

And yet, 9,202 kilometers away in the Netherlands, a right-wing party ideologue has found it within himself to write a manuscript about a neo-apartheid state focused on subjugating its white minority population. "The Afrikaners, that's us," wrote Martin Bosma. "The Afrikaners of today are the Dutch of fifty to a hundred years from now."

Bosma claims that a progressive and culturally diverse society will be the downfall of the Dutch. South Africa, of course, could not be more different from the imaginary figure that Bosma has tried to make of it.

South Africa's conservative neoliberal policies have frozen it into a mire of inequality. Everyday people are getting poorer and more desperate, and the ruling elite find it unnecessary to invest in the cultural sphere in order to aid in social cohesion. Such funding is desperately needed after decades of brutal apartheid repression, yet it is hard to come by because there is no easily quantifiable connection between social wellbeing and economic development. The story of the "revolutionary red" Mercedes-Benz seems to have been forgotten. Or perhaps the subsequent economic success of the factory was too hard-won to be of interest in a world of fluid capital, where, for example, South Africa's currency has fluctuated wildly over the last two years.[10] The white minority, which is less than 10 percent of the population, is still in control of 90 percent of the stock exchange.[11] Indeed, it is the other 10 percent—or to be more precise, the 6.35 percent who cast their vote for the EFF—who can no longer carry on with the lies of a neoliberal agenda that promises and delivers growth, but into all the wrong pockets. This minority, for the moment, is not white. It is not made up of Afrikaners or British expats. It is largely made up of the disenfranchised black people of South Africa, who have been losing ground year after year in the international post-apartheid success story that is South Africa. Like its apartheid predecessor, the wealth that has made this success story possible is rapidly being taken away from the people who have helped produce it.

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Special thanks to Simon Gush, Jonas Staal, and Brian Kuan Wood.

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See https://vimeo.com/90423854 .

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Bilal Khbeiz

The Dead Afghani before the Camera and before Death

It seems that the pictures we watched on TV about the American war in Afghanistan are in great need of comment. These images needed the help of language in order to speak, and yet they also couldn't create their own language. To understand these images, we had to go back to our most primal instincts to say: this is the corpse of a child younger than four years old; that is a destroyed house; these are villagers and farmers standing at the ruins of their clay houses. Without these comments, we couldn't understand what the villagers were doing in a particular place no different from any other save for the fact that those standing there were pointing at it. The corpses torn apart and burned with bombs, even if rare, wouldn't point at the bombs to remind the viewer that the corpse was not a victim of a savage animal, a local fight, or an avalanche, for instance. Moreover, there was no possibility of recognizing how much time passed since the body was full of life. The few pictures presented to us of corpses did not explain what really happened, due to the small number of victims and the laziness of the press that the Taliban allowed to cover the war. All of that was there of course, but it still didn't explain the indifference when being confronted with this death.

When the Gulf War occurred, Jean Baudrillard described it as a war without a place. And since there was no place, its material results were not real, and did not raise deep concern. There is a real need for absolute evidence that proves that this war really happened, that all the victims really did die as a result. The deaths from the war in Iraq are in this sense the deepest and most severe deaths, where group funerals were organized for children who died from a shortage of medication and food. Images of these deaths in particular were capable of leaving an effect, enough to move something inside of us, so we could begin to realize the scale of the disgrace engulfing all those who are silent. And we could say that these children did not die from the shortage of medication, but as a result of the disgrace that made us accept turning them into a lesson that both sides of the war could send to the world. The great disgrace here is not symbolic, as some would understand Baudrillard to have suggested. Rather, the disgrace can be the only reason for their deaths. Without this disgrace, no one could celebrate their deaths to prove that there are children in Iraq suffering hunger, illness, or worse, and that we should listen to their cries. In spite of this disgrace, and maybe because of it, the luck of those Iraqi children who are still alive seems much better than the luck of the Afghans who died in the midst of a cynical silence.

There are other questions that persist in the face of these wars and the objections to them. For instance, why do we worry about the death of children and not of adults? Why do we use the death of children to oppose war? Are children the only victims? Are the deaths of their fathers not acceptable and understandable? There is a potential answer in Baudrillard's understanding of death not as fate, but as an encounter. More accurately, the definition of

Afghan men search for the bodies of people killed in a NATO airstrike in Logar province June 6, 2012. Photo: Reuters/Stringer

death as an encounter assumes that one who encounters death does so by seeking it. This is not the case for children of course, and if death was really an encounter, as Baudrillard would have it, it means that most of the dead had sought this encounter, and there is no need to feel sad for them. A person's destiny would be to seek this encounter, not only to eventually die. Only children do not seek, and this is why we should feel sad for their death. However, the deaths that occurred in Afghanistan are no different from those that occurred in New York and Washington on the morning of September 11. And these deaths cannot by any means be described as an encounter. So how can the sorrow for New York be deeper than it is for Afghanistan? Our fundamentalist or leftist imaginations can run wild with explanations for how ruthlessly the world decides what is acceptable according to race, religion, poverty, and wealth. But this is ultimately a lazy assumption that neglects the real reasons behind this unjustifiable discrimination.

What really provokes the world are images of life and not images of death. The image wants to anticipate what is to come, as it portrays the blood that has not dried yet, the body that life has just left, so that we can feel its warmth in our own bodies. The image also wants to say that the child whose body was shattered by bombs could have lived a long life if this accident had not occurred, a life with more possibilities than the lives of those who oppose death. The image should imply the life, and not the death, of the dead person, and make us aware of the tiny moment in between. The photos of the dead children thus seem more terrible than the photos of dead men. There is something in the photos of men that always indicates their resistance and their readiness to accept death, even in their final moments. This is when life is naked, as in the case of the lives of Afghans. However, when we glimpse the dust gathering on the glasses of a survivor of 9/11 in New York, we realize that the man afraid of death was in this case not ready to encounter it.

The Afghani prepares to meet death in two ways. First, the war on the Afghani is clearly declared, at least for those who followed the news. The second is that the Afghani starts the day without any idea of how it will end, as there are no fixed jobs, and the scarcity of rain alone might devastate the whole population. That's why the Afghani receives death naked—no differently than a few months or days ago. The American's time is divided into seconds, minutes, and hours, through working hours, the time to wake up, get dressed, and so forth. In this way, the

American declares an accurate sense of death and death's course, and will not be surprised. On the other hand, the Afghani who lacks these means knows that today is similar to yesterday, and that time has stopped. And the person following the news thus finds it impossible to accurately determine the Afghani's age, for they are either young fighters or old people whose lives have already ended.

There is another missing characteristic in the image of the Afghani, which makes his death old and indistinguishable. When the cameras photograph the ruins of the houses, one can't help noticing the destroyed children's toys and their burned beds, as well as the shattered furniture of living rooms: burned couches, chairs, and television sets. All these objects indicate the time of death, which has not yet passed, and the viewer senses that it has just taken place. This makes for a sorrowful death, and the feeling that it could have been avoided. On the other hand, the clay Afghani houses, which contain almost none of the contents mentioned above, wouldn't allow the viewer to decide the time of death. The image of death in the midst of these houses appears very ancient and old, similar to the way Osama Bin Laden invited us to follow him and join the people of caves and grottos.

What the photos of Afghans indicate is the time of those who own television sets, and watch those who stand naked before death. We feel we can't believe, in spite of the strong desire to, that there are human beings somewhere in the world who still live in such a way. During the 1996 "Grapes of Wrath" attack on Lebanon, Abbas Beydoun realized that the local and international media photographed the southern Lebanese with faces that did not express their age, clothing that did not indicate their bodies, and houses that did not specify the era they were living in. Beydoun commented sadly that these were not the southern Lebanese he knew, and that the media chose with cynical accuracy only the poorest people of the south living in the most primitive circumstances, just as cameras did in Afghanistan. Zahera Harb, a reporter for Lebanese television, thus became the heroine of the spectacle and the suffering of the southerners who were bombed by the Israelis, and who have not recovered even today.

In a similar way, the world did not cry for the Afghanis who died, because they did not own television sets. Their suffering produced only a few heroic journalists, who did not even deserve such an honor.

X

Translated from the Arabic by Walid Sadek

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Suzana Milevska

Agalma: The "Objet Petit a," Alexander the Great, and Other Excesses of Skopje 2014

> She just goes a little mad sometimes. We all go a little mad sometimes. Haven't you?
> —Norman Bates in *Psycho*

This essay is an *á galma* dedicated to the Macedonian government's project "Skopje 2014," which recently turned Skopje, the capital of the Republic, into a memorial park of "false memories."[1] Over the last five years, a series of unskillfully casted figurative monuments have appeared throughout Skopje, installed over the night, as if brought into public space by the animated hand from the opening credits of *Monty Python's Flying Circus*.[2] Figures from the national past (some relevant, some marginal), buildings with obvious references to Westernized aesthetic regimes (mere imitations of styles from periods atypical for the local architecture), and sexist public sculptures have transformed the once socialist-modernist city square into a theatrical backdrop.

More than ninety years ago, in a kind of a manifesto of anti-monumental architectural and artistic revolution, Vladimir Tatlin challenged both the "bourgeois" Eiffel Tower and the Statue of Liberty with his unbuilt tower *Monument to the Third International* (1919–25). Since then, discourses on contemporary monuments have flourished elsewhere in Europe ("anti-monuments," "counter-monuments," "low-budget monuments," "invisible monuments," "monument in waiting," "participatory monuments"[3]) but this debate has completely bypassed the Macedonian establishment.

The government's promise that the Skopje 2014 project would attract tourists and journalists to Macedonia has been realized, but for all the wrong reasons—in many articles, Skopje's city center is depicted as a kind of "theme park," and some of the newly built museums are referred to as "chambers of horrors."[4] In short, Skopje 2014 has become a laughing stock for the foreign press. According to critics, the city's abundance of public sculptures, monuments, administrative buildings, and museums has surpassed, in terms of *preposterousness* and pompousness, both Las Vegas and the Neutrality Arch, an oversized monument built by Turkmenistan's leader Saparmurat Atayevich *Niyazov* from 1985 to 2006.[5]

The citizens of Macedonia became aware of the scope of this large-scale urban project in 2010, only after it was announced, without any public deliberation, by the state-financed promotional video "Macedonia Timeless."[6] When the rudimentary animated video portraying the planned buildings and statues was first broadcast in February 2010, hardly anybody took it seriously because it resembled a kind of stage set (and was even accompanied

Warrior on a Horse, by sculptor Valentina Stevanovska, is cleaned in the Macedonian Sculpture Park Skopje 2014.

by dramatic music). In the midst of this adoration for the imaginary national past, there is hardly any space left for a consideration of the present, and none left for future generations' monuments. How was it possible to carry out such a massive building project in one of the smallest and poorest countries in Europe without ever consulting the public? The project, which was funded by taxpayers, cost over €500 million.[7]

The Name Issue: "State of Exception" and "Rogue State"

Official attempts to explain the purpose behind Skopje 2014 were unconvincing, as when the mayor of Skopje stated that the project was meant to serve as a kind of 3D history textbook that could compensate for the city's lack of history books. This is in complete contrast to Viktor Shklovsky's parable about historical monuments in post-revolutionary Russia; he wrote that they functioned "as a strange alibi for not telling the whole truth" or even "a quarter of the truth."[8]Skopje's abundance of monuments and public sculptures can be seen as an attempt to use ultranationalism to compensate for the incomplete and faulty national identity of the "rogue" state, an outlaw nation that does not comply with the international laws accepted by most other states.[9] After the dissolution of Yugoslavia, Macedonia—one of the states that was proclaimed independent in 1991—began having problems with its neighbor Greece.

The main source of conflict emerged when the first post-Yugoslav government in Macedonia decided to keep the name of the previously existing "Republic of Macedonia." More fuel was added to the fire when the Macedonian government decided to use symbols, such as a flag with sixteen sun rays, that were associated with Ancient Macedonia, even though Greece claimed to have the sole historic right to these symbols. Then in 1993, under pressure from the Greek government, the UN officially designated Macedonia as "the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia." This was later replaced by the unrecognizable acronym "F.Y.R.O.M." Negotiations with internationally appointed mediators ensued. During these negotiations, the Greek government proposed names like "Northern Macedonia" and "New Macedonia" for its neighbor to the north. The territory and culture of Ancient Macedonia, however, does not completely overlap with either contemporary Greece or Macedonia. For more than twenty years, this name dispute put Macedonia in limbo (e.g., waiting to be accessioned into the EU)—an ongoing,

normalized "state of exception."[10]

The difference between "rogue states," as discussed by Derrida, and "states of exception," as theorized by Giorgio Agamben, derives from two different interpretations of the "force of law." The concept of a "rogue state" deals with the possibility that one state declares another state unlawful according to international standards and intervenes in its internal affairs. The phenomenon of "states of exception," on the other hand, has more to do with the declaration by a sovereign power that the conditions within that country are so far beyond the possibility of governing according to constitutional law that exceptional rules need to be applied. A "state of exception" must be officially declared.[11]

In the case of the postponement of a resolution of the "name issue," both the "state of exception" and the "rogue state" enabled a long-term vacuum. The rule of law was bypassed, and Skopje 2014 (one of many questionable projects) became possible, first as an exception and excess, but soon as the norm.

According to Derrida, monuments, like tombs, inevitably announce "the death of the tyrant."[12] But what kind of void is filled by *Warrior on a Horse*, the twenty-five-meter tall *ágalma* that has "adorned" the main Skopje square since 2011? What were the real reasons for building a monument so obviously dedicated to Alexander the Great, yet generically titled *Warrior on a Horse*?[13]

Crowd protests against high electricity bills at Skopje 2014's triumphal arch Porta Macedonia, October 2012. Photo: Saso Stanojkovik

Ágalma and Collective Enjoyment in the Void

To build a monument is by definition to attempt to represent the sublime—that which is incomprehensible, bigger than us. Any monument offers a remembrance of a certain unperceivable and unrepresentable sublime. It commemorates incommensurability and incomprehensibility, as stated by the philosophers who contributed most to our understanding of the sublime, Immanuel Kant and Edmund Burke.[14] By definition, a monument is something negative—marking absence, the past, death, and above all a certain loss. In Skopje 2014, the celebration of unrecognized and incomplete identities, marginal heroes, and exaggerated victories from the past were used as strategies for inducing collective enjoyment, and ultimately self-delusion.

One of the most obvious historical interventions in Skopje 2014 is the erection of the monument *Gemid žii*, which celebrates the nationalist organization the Boatmen of Thessaloniki, also known as the Assassins of Salonica. This was an anarchist group active in the Ottoman Empire at the turn of the twentieth century. It did not shy away from murder or terrorist attacks. But rather than analyze the stylistic and aesthetic aspects of such built objects, more insight might be gained by formulating a psychoanalytical interpretation of the ultranationalist cultural policy of the right-wing neoliberal elites. This policy functions as a kind of ongoing election campaign—unfortunately a very successful one.[15]

Jacques Lacan used the term *ágalma* in his psychoanalytical discussion of the pursuit of truth. The *ágalma* was imagined as a certain unconscious truth that we seek and wish to find in analysis, and as a kind of agency, endowed with certain magical powers, intended to please the gods and thus to secure certain favors for its bearer. Lacan used the term *in connection with the object-cause of desire:* "Just as the *ágalma* is a precious object hidden in a worthless box, so the *objet petit a* is the object of desire which we seek in the Other."[16]

Likewise, the monuments of Skopje 2014, although expensive, are creatively and aesthetically worthless objects, yet they stand for something much more important: they become the empty signifiers of the sought-after identity that can complete Macedonia's incomplete contemporary identity. In a compensatory move, they reach back to antiquity, a time when Macedonia was praised and revered.

However, it is important to state that the *objet petit a* in Lacan's writing is the cause of desire, not its aim. For Lacan, what one possesses is not necessarily related to what the other lacks. The phallus emerges as "the only signifier that deserves the role of symbol," sometimes the *ágalma*, and sometimes "an operating libidinal reserve that saves the subject from the fascination of the part object. Hence, the importance granted to symbolic castration, a castration at the origin of the law."[17] Lacan based the concept of the *objet petit a* on Freud's concept of the "object" and on concepts developed by a number of renowned British psychoanalysts, such as Melanie Klein and her "partial object," and Donald Winnicott and his "transitional object."

For Winnicott, the "transitional object" (a term he coined in 1951) denotes any particular object to which an infant becomes attached and attributes a special value. Transitional objects, such as a piece of cloth or a teddy bear, originate when the infant is four to twelve months old—during the phase of the infant's development when the first distinctions between inner and outer reality become evident. According to Winnicott, partial objects come to include the entire sphere of culture because they straddle subjective inner reality and shared external reality.[18]For Lacan, the *objet petit a* is the object-cause of desire, the imaginary part-object that, as a kind of leftover or surplus of meaning, is "the remnant left behind by the introduction of the Symbolic in the **Real**." It "becomes the ultimate jouissance."[19]

According to Slavoj Zižek, the *objet petit a* relates to

> the lack, the remainder of the Real that sets in motion the symbolic movement of interpretation, a hole at the centre of the symbolic order, the mere appearance of some secret to be explained, interpreted, etc.[20]

When it comes to Skopje 2014, the introduction of the Symbolic—the identity—in the Real is the secret that needs interpretation through the monuments. This becomes the ultimate truth of the political reason behind the government's populist posturing, as was profoundly discussed by Ernesto Laclau in his *On Populist Reason*: "But the presence of the Real *within* the Symbolic involves unevenness: *objets petit a* presuppose a differential cathexis, and it is this cathexis that we call affect."[21]

The Triumph of Excessive Power and Surplus

When the pro-governmental journalists and other supporters of Skopje 2014 praise the project for quantity of built objects (e.g. by saying: "At least they built a lot") Zižek's explanation of the constitutive role of neoliberal

Saso Stanojkovik, Let them Eat Monuments, 2014. Participatory project with a chocolate multiple of warrior on a horse. Presented in the framework of the workshop Participatory Monuments, with Chto Delat, Face to Face with Monument, Schwarzenbergplatz, Wiener Festwochen, Vienna.

enjoyment comes to mind:

> It is this paradox which defines surplus-enjoyment: it is not a surplus which simply attaches itself to some "normal," fundamental enjoyment, because enjoyment as such emerges only in this surplus, because it is constitutively an "excess." If we subtract the surplus, we lose enjoyment itself, just as capitalism, which can survive only by incessantly revolutionizing its own material conditions, ceases to exist if it "stays the same," if it achieves an internal balance. This, then, is the homology between surplus-value—the "cause" which sets in motion the capitalist process of production—and surplus-enjoyment, the object-cause of desire.[22]

Zižek's conclusion wittily draws the connection between the Lacanian *objet petit a*, lack, and surplus in the context of capitalism's excessive power:

> Is not the paradoxical topology of the movement of capital, the fundamental blockage which resolves and reproduces itself through frenetic activity, excessive power as the very form of appearance of a fundamental impotence—this immediate passage, this coincidence of limit and excess, of lack and surplus—precisely that of the Lacanian *objet petit a*, of the leftover which embodies the fundamental, constitutive lack?[23]

The iconoclastic radicality of such a "void," a desiring machine that doesn't produce anything except the absence or lack behind such an emptied-out representation, is particularly important in the context of Macedonia's inferiority complex. Among many embarrassing diplomatic blunders of late, the most famous was committed by former minister of foreign affairs Antonio Milososki. In a 2010 interview with the *Guardian*, he stated that *Warrior on a Horse* was a way of "saying [up yours] to them!" This statement provoked ridicule from the local press, as well as calls for a new sculpture—of the minister's middle finger.[24]

One of the most symptomatic of all the monuments built as a part of this mega-celebration of failed, impotent diplomacy is the triumphal arch titled "the Gate of Macedonia." Usually, a triumphal arch is intended to both memorialize a past victorious event, and anticipate and enable future victorious events. A triumphal arch is a monument that supposedly has the power to collapse the time before and after the event that it celebrates; in a way, it consists of an open multitude of events—a list that can be endlessly rewritten. But the few events that have been marked by public gatherings at the Gate of Macedonia have not been so glorious: in 2011, the Macedonian national basketball team celebrated its fourth-place finish in the European Championship under the gate, and in 2012 the organization Aman gathered there to protest high electricity bills.

Recently, the triumphal arch and the other monuments in Skopje have been placed in spatial rivalry with a newly installed merry-go-round in the city's central square. The sculptures on the merry-go-round—of beggars, frivolous women with bare breasts (no female heroes were given monumental representation), bulls, fish, dancers, and trees turned into human beings—sit alongside militaristic historic figures, most of whom are riding horses and holding weapons. As capital investment flows into such problematic projects, art and cultural institutions are deteriorating. Artistic leadership is entirely overridden by the ruling party's taste, which is driven by political interests, ignorance, and an admiration for traditional values (read: figurative and representational art). Such a hypocritical situation is paralleled by frequent claims of a lack of funds—for example, when it comes to Macedonia being represented at international contemporary art events such as the Venice Biennale.[25]

But today's monument is tomorrow's ruin. We have already seen so many neglected and destroyed monuments from the socialist past. While Skopje 2014 claimed to address a lack of Macedonian identity in European cultural history, it has compensated for this lack by building the brand new triumphal arch. By adding ornaments and columns in neoclassicist and Baroque styles to existing socialist-modernist and brutalist architectural objects, Skopje 2014 has erased other memory fragments, such as Macedonia's antifascist past.

The Skopje 2014 project does not bear the signature of one individual artistic or architectural creator or a team. Instead, it feels like it emerged from one of the prime minster's nightmarish fantasies. In his speeches, he even refers to it as *his* project. The government and the prime minister have thus reimagined themselves as chief "curators" in charge of the *object petit a,* but the ugly box is still empty, devoid of the ultimate object-cause of desire.

X

This text was written during Suzana Milevska's term as Endowed Professor for Central and South Eastern Art Histories at the Academy of Fine Arts Vienna, a co-operation between the Academy and ERSTE Foundation.

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1
In ancient Greek, *ágalma* means " ornament" or "gift." It refers to images and statues that were used in temples as votive offerings to gods. "False memories," a well-known phenomenon from psychopathology, refers to trauma-driven, imagined events that show as real in the subject's memory.

2
Monty Python's Flying Circus, opening credits series 1-4.

3
See, for example, *The Contemporary Art of Trusting Uncertainties and Unfolding Dialogues,* ed. Esther Shalev-Gerz (Stockholm: Art and Theory, 2013); and Katarzyna Murwaska-Muthesius, "Oskar Hansen and the Auschwitz 'Countermemorial,' 1958–59," *ARTMargins Online* , May 20, 2002 https://artmargins.com/oskar-hansen-and-the-auschwitz-qcountermemorialq-1958-59/ .

4
See, for example, Adelheid Wölfl, "Im mazedonischen Geschichtsgruselkabinett," Der Standard, May 14, 2014 http://derstandard.at/1399507404886/Besuch-im-mazedonischen-Geschichtsgruselkabinett .

5
The Neutrality Arch is a seventy-five-meter-tall monument topped with a rotating, gold-plated statue of *Niyazov*. It cost anestimated $12 million to build. Recently, it was built even taller. See Richard Orange, "Turkmenistan rebuilds giant rotating golden statue, *The Telegraph,* May 24, 2011 http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/asia/turkmenistan/8533427/Turkmenistan-rebuilds-giant-rotating-golden-statue.html .

6
See http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iybmt-iLysU .

7
The project's finances are far from transparent, so the exact cost is difficult to confirm. But one statue, *Warrior on a Horse*, is estimated to have cost €7.5 million alone. Most of the statues and buildings were claimed to be of local significance, and since it was officially initiated by the municipal government of Skopje, the project could bypass any parliamentary discussion.

8
Viktor Shklovsky, *The Knight's Move* (1919–21), written in Petrograd, Moscow, and Berlin, quoted in Svetlana Boym, "Tatlin, or Ruinophilia," *Cabinet* 28 (Winter 2007–08) http://www.cabinetmagazine.org/issues/28/boym2.php .

9
Jacques Derrida, *Rogues: Two Essays on Reason,* trans. Pascale-Anne Brault and Michael Naas (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2005), 97. Derrida cites several authors who have examined the use of the expression "rogue state" in foreign policy, including Noam Chomsky, Robert S. Litwak, and William Blum.

10
For a discussion of the theoretical and philosophical interpretations of this dispute, see *The Renaming Machine: The Book,* ed. Suzana Milevska (Ljubljana: P.A.R.A.S.I.T.E. Institute,2010). This book is based on a cross-disciplinary curatorial project comprised of ten different events (exhibitions, conferences, and seminars) that took place in Ljubljana, Skopje, Pristina, Zagreb, and Vienna in 2008–2010. The book examines the arbitrariness of names, the problematic issue of equating names with identity, and the implications of the erasure of memory through renaming. In addition, for extensive research into the political arguments involved in the dispute between Macedonia and Greece, see Zlatko Kovach, "Macedonia: Reaching Out To Win L. American Hearts," *Scoop World*, Feb. 26, 2008 http://www.scoop.co.nz/stories/WO0802/S00363.htm .

11
Giorgio Agamben, *State of Exception,* trans. Kevin Attell (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 2005), 23. According to Agamben, the emergence of camps in the Nazi period signaled that the state of exception had become the rule, transforming society into an unbounded and dislocated biopolitical space. See also Giorgio Agamben, *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life* , trans. Daniel Heller-Roazen (Stanford: Stanford Univ. Press, 1998), 166.

12
Jacques Derrida, *Margins of Philosophy,* trans. Alan Bass (London: Prentice Hall, 1982), 4.

13
See Jasna Koteska, "Troubles with History: Skopje 2014," *ARTMargins Online* , Dec. 29, 2011 https://artmargins.com/troubles-with-history-skopje-2014/ .

14
In his "Analytic of the Sublime" (1790) from *The Critique of Judgment* , Immanuel Kant locates examples of the sublime not only in nature but also in the human condition. He famously argued that the sublime, unlike the beautiful, "cannot be contained in any sensible form but concerns only ideas of reason." Kant, *Critique of Judgment* , trans. Walter S. Pluhar (Indiana: Hackett Publishing, 1987), 99.

15
The ruling coalition that has been in power since 2008 (and that was recently reelected in parliamentary and presidential elections in April 2014) is formed by two major right-wing parties, the VMRO-DPMNE (consisting primary of officials of Christian-Macedonian descent) and DUI (consisting primarily of officials from the Muslim-Albanian minority).

16
The concept of *ágalma* was introduced by Lacan in the context of his writing about Socrates's "Symposium" in his Seminar VIII (1960–1961). See Lacan, *Le séminaire, Livre VIII: Le transfert* (Paris: Seuil, 1991) http://lacan.com/seminars2.htm . Lacan always insisted that the term *object petit a* should remain untranslated because the "a" in *objet petit a* stands for "*autre*" (other).

17
Lacan, *Le séminaire, Livre X: L'angoisse* (1962–1963) (Paris: Seuil, 2004).

18
Donald W. Winnicott, "Transitional objects and transitional phenomena: A study of the first not-me possession," *International Journal of Psycho-Analysis* 34 (1953): 89–97. See also Winnicott's *Playing and Reality* (London: Tavistock, 1971).

19
Lacan, quoted in Dylan Evans, *An Introductory Dictionary of Lacanian Psychoanalysis* (London: Routledge, 2006), 129.

20
Slavoj Zižek, *The Sublime Object of Ideology* (New York; Verso, 1989), 54.

21
Ernesto Laclau, *On Populist Reason* (London: Verso, 2005), 118–119. For a complex discussion of names, empty signifiers, and populist rule, see the chapter entitled "The People and the Production of Emptiness," 67–124.

22
Zižek, *The Sublime Object of Ideology* , 54.

23
Ibid.

24
Helena Smith, "Macedonian statue: Alexander the Great or a warrior on a horse?," *The Guardian* , August 14, 2011 http://www.theguardian.com/world/2011/aug/14/alexander-great-macedonia-warrior-horse .

25
See Suzana Milevska, "The Internalisation of the Discourse of Institutional Critique and the 'Unhappy Consciousness,'" in *Evaluating and Formative Goals of Art Criticism in Recent (De)territorialized Contexts* (Paris: AICA Press, 2009), 2–6 http://web.archive.org/web/20110428042855/http://www.aica-int.org/IMG/pdf/SKOPJEcomplet.pdf [PDF]

Keti Chukhrov

On the False Democracy of Contemporary Art

1.

Historically there have been two methodologies of resisting the complacency of the culture industry and bourgeois society's reliance on the judgment of taste. One was the modernist stance: it required extreme estrangement and abstaining from alienated capitalist reality; it turned the artwork into a piece, blocking perception, pleasure, or the judgment of taste, so that such work would exist in extra-social conditions rather than be perceived by a society that can never evade the capitalist economy and the cultural industry. This was the standpoint of Theodor Adorno.

Another position—the avant-garde one—resisted bourgeois culture and its traditions of connoisseurship via dissolving art within life and making life the matter of political and social transformation. Both stances reached their peak in 1960s and '70s. Contemporary art absorbed and comprised both of them. But today these legacies—albeit reenacted, reinstituted, and revisited all the time—nevertheless lose their social and aesthetic viability.

Such a decline has reasons: modernist reductionism and rigidity long ago turned into successful abstract art production. Formalist or abstract tendencies were not able to further revolutionize their methodologies in striving to detach the piece from perceptive pleasure. Moreover, formalism's once-extreme negative rigidity is now compelled to fit into the regime of the Kantian beauty object that produces the judgment of taste.

But what happened to the avant-garde's rhetoric? This is even more inconsistent. The historical avant-garde's openness toward life and politics happened to become the mainstream of critical but still institutionally commissioned art activity and resisting frameworks. This was motivated to a certain extent by the fact that the institutions themselves became self-critical, flexible, and often creative subjects of production—sometimes along with the artist or even instead of the artist.

We have to keep referring to the avant-garde because contemporary art continues to reproduce the belief in art's emancipatory and democratizing impact on social infrastructures. Meanwhile, according to Adorno or even Peter Bürger, if art's strategies of dissolution into life do not coincide with radical social transformation, then art's claim about its political engagement is not valid. Dissolution of art within life under the conditions of capitalist production is different from the same process occurring in the frame of a noncapitalist economy. Convergence with life forms without reinventing these forms in a really expanded social sphere means either creating autonomous communities (we have seen many of these since the '60s), or expanding into the living forms of capitalist production. In other words, applying the

avant-garde's rhetoric without expanded social change and the reconstruction of the economic machine (private property logic) just flattens and absorbs what John Roberts calls "art's infinite ideation."[1]

Art thus claims that it expands into the sphere of social transformation and genuine democracy. Yet paradoxically, art's ambition for direct social engagement and its self-abandonment loops back to the very territory of contemporary art, its archive machine, and its self-referential rhetoric of historicizing. Hence the question is: Are we really witnessing the anticapitalist transformation that excuses art's self-sublation and its dissolution in newly transformed life? This was the case with the Russian avant-garde and its almost eschatological attitude toward reality. On the other hand, when observing the endless propagation of contemporary art pieces pretending to be challenging in their play with forms and contexts, one might well understand the decision to abandon art production in favor of social issues.

Another incoherence here is that while claiming extreme social openness and political commitment in the vein of the avant-garde's impact on society, contemporary art—de facto—in its economic disposition happens to be part and parcel of post-Fordist alienated production. In other words, in narratives it claims democratic and resisting values, but in reality it happens to be a nonsocialized, nondemocratic, i.e., quasi-modernist, realm in its means of production and sense. Resisting attitudes and constructed situations are often used in art as externalized, abstract, and formalized actualities rather than necessities stemming from the material and immanent bond with political constellations. Hito Steyerl approaches this condition from the other end. Considering the mutation that the avant-garde's aspirations of fusing with life have undergone in recent times, she observes the opposite effect of such a goal—life being occupied by art.[2] It is that very art that pretends to be dissolved in life, but de facto absorbs life into its all-expanding but still self-referential territory. The system of art believes in its social microrevolutionary democratic engagement. But since the social and economic infrastructure is privatized and not at all a commonwealth, social-democratic values happen to be declared or represented while the ethics contemporary art uses to deal with social space are rather based on the canons of modernism's negativity—which internalizes, absorbs, and neutralizes outer reality and its confusions, even though all this might be done quite involuntarily.

We all believe that contemporary art's new geographies and extended public impact make art venues truly public spaces. Nominally, this is definitely so. But while showing its openness and acceptability on the level of cultural event-making, the logic of inscribing into contemporary art's archive and history is far from being public and requires knowledge of the rules and regulations of such inscription. It doesn't mean that somebody is concealing such logic from social space, but that art functions in the above-mentioned two regimes: (1) open publicity and (2) the rigid rules of art's self-historicizing dating back to modernism.

One of the important symptoms of such a contradictory condition of contemporary art at present was the Berlin Biennale 2012. Its claim was that if the political and social ambitions of art happen to be socially futile, then the art territory—the art institution—should be occupied by efficient social practices not generated by art production. If the artist makes a political claim to social change, but artistic production is not able to accomplish it, then the decision is to find groups more efficient with social work and let them occupy the institution—thus attempting the collapse of the art institution in favor of its becoming a socially efficient tool. This was the standpoint of Artur Zmijewski, Polish artist and curator of the 7th Berlin Biennial.

However, even in this case, the resisting procedures were contained within the institution. And in the end, maybe involuntarily, a strategy such as Zmijewski's seems to be another strong gesture of classical modernist iconoclasm and reductionism rather than social expansion—not of an image, or of an art piece, but of an institution, internalized by that very institution. This happened with the modernist picture, which internalized the collapse of the image and its depth. Zmijewski's gesture is "anti-art" in terms of modernism's negativism, not the anti-art in terms of the avant-garde's productivism. Why? Because such a gesture represents an iconoclastic "revenge" on contemporary art as an institute and practice for being impotent in its transformative social potentialities, and therefore it is rather reminiscent of an anarchist, Dadaist act, than any kind of social engineering or engagement. At the same time, this standpoint of Zmijewski —namely, disclosing the inefficient references of contemporary art to its avant-garde heritage—might be more honest than an optimistic and positivist belief in the educational, political, or social efficacy of contemporary art at present.

Thus, maybe even against his will, Zmijewski in fact emphasized the thesis of Adorno according to which art's behaving as democracy is hypocritical in the conditions of a privatized economy. But he also tried to show that such a democracy unfolds in a hermetic, self-referential realm—self-referential because such is the logic according to which contemporary art history is being recorded. So, the life-constructing or even utilitarian act on art's behalf preserves its political and artistic impact only under the conditions of the politics of the radically expanded commonwealth. In any other situation, to demand that an artist or art institution influence social conditions directly compels one to conform to mainstream policies of liberal democracy and its social design. For example, the recent urban projects of pro-Kremlin image-makers, such as Vladislav Surkov, call for the

utilitarian practices of the historical avant-garde: fostering art's social efficacy and its participatory potentialities and uniting artists, architects, sociologists, and philosophers in the interdisciplinary project of constructing new urban and social networks. This represents quite an eloquent case for the appropriation of public and participatory art by the government—depoliticizing it and turning it into applied design.

Theodor Adorno, Self portrait, 1963.

2.

The discussion on reviving the dimension of aesthetics and aesthetic judgment in contemporary art was initiated by Rancière's *Aesthetics and its Discontents*[3] and has since led to doubts over contemporary art's claims of direct participation and social or political efficacy. Thus we are constantly pressed between a false openness of democracy and the reestablishment of an outdated notion of aesthetics. The question is whether the category of aesthetics can be applied in reference to modern and contemporary practices that were not conceived as aesthetic experiences at all.

The principal incoherence here lies in the fact that aesthetics in Kant's third critique applies to the notion of the beautiful—albeit universal, transcendental, disinterested, and shared by society's *sensus communis*, but still the beautiful—the dimension residing in sensitivity and not compatible with the cognitive, with the noumena—the conceptual.

As early as Adorno's *Aesthetic Theory*, the regime of aesthetic contemplation and the judgment of taste, as well as the dimension of aesthetics altogether, had to desert the artwork, the modes of its production, and the modes of our reflection on it. Aesthetic judgments were incompatible with the languages of contemporary art, inherited from avant-garde practices. Why?

Because even in Kant's critique, the beautiful is a counterpoint to the sublime. Already in early romanticism, the beautiful was superseded by the sublime: the sublime is the dimension that goes beyond the aesthetic contemplation—toward the extra-sensory and cognitive search for the idea, for the unknown, ineffable, unimaginable, non-perceivable, and so forth. Adorno's argument in *Aesthetic Theory* is that the Kantian cluster consisting of disinterested pleasure, the beautiful, and the judgment of taste does not stand for the universality of the artistic.

It is exactly for associating modernist and avant-garde practices with the sublime, for suspending the regime of the aesthetic, that Rancière rebukes Lyotard, Badiou, and Adorno.[4] One might argue here whether the horizontal, life-constructing social practices of the avant-garde could be associated at all with the category of the sublime. The sublime is often taken metaphorically as a synonym for metaphysics in art or as the Wagnerian kind of sublimity so fiercely criticized in works by Adorno, Nancy, and Lacoue-Labarthe. But in fact, the sublime in Kant's logic is knowledge about infinity—or about the borderline between knowledge and infinity—haunting a thinker and an artist. On the other hand, the sublime is what Lacan meant by the real and Deleuze meant by the event. It is something that is happening in its irreversibility, and artistic repetition then deals with clearing up that very incomprehensible thing that happened.

While following Kant's critique, the sublime should be understood here as a logical category, presupposing the cognitive, extra-sensitive capacity of the mind and its power to envisage its own limit in reference to the incomprehensible. The Russian avant-garde, guided by the idea of a new world and presupposing revolutionary movements as the medium of its achievement, was

definitely closer to the logical category of the sublime than to that of the aesthetic. But it is also important that the Russian avant-garde was the satellite of revolution, and therefore its goals were not confined to art's dissolution in the social field but were aimed at the invention of new social dispositions in accordance with what happened in the realm of real politics.

When referring today to the political efficacy of the practices of the Russian avant-garde, many interpretations overlook the works' eschatological dimension. It is generally believed that there were some esoteric themes developed predominantly by Malevich, but that other artists—such as Sergey Tretyakov or the LEF and Proletkult members—simply went public. This is a simplistic attitude toward the Russian avant-garde's social activism. Even for such figures from the Productivist circle as Alexander Gastev or Boris Arvatov, the artist's goal—while it might have been to converge with life or even shift art production toward utilitarian values—had to merge with life such that this life would be a new, non-utilitarian life. This demand is often forgotten in discussions of art's sublation by activist creative practices. It is true that the art of the Russian avant-garde aspired to reject itself for social experience. But the social experience itself had to be aimed at something in some sense sublime—sublime, because the political aspiration for a new socialist order made life non-utilitarian.

Returning to the issue of aesthetics under conditions of contemporary post-aesthetic production: Why is Rancière so optimistic about aesthetics if contemporary art production is often so remote from aesthetic values? Rancière, relying on Kant, makes a convincing effort to prove that Kant's analysis of the extra-aesthetic, of the sublime, is not detached from the realm of the aesthetic and the judgment of taste. That's why he disagrees with Lyotard, for whom the sublime object is something that cannot be grasped by the mind: hence the ungraspability of the idea, of the sublime that can only be transposed into art via extremely negative, transgressive experiences.[5]

According to Rancière, Kant's argument with respect to the sublime is the following: when confronting the sublime, the inability of imagination to represent for the mind what the mind, with its aspiration for sublimity, requires from imagination only confirms the power of the mind. It means that unlike imagination, the mind is still able to envisage and even incorporate the unimaginable and unthinkable, i.e., the sublime as its limit—as the mind's limit. As Rancière insists, for Kant, the mind still keeps itself as the supreme moral background for the development of the imagination, no matter how limited the imagination is. So the mind that knows about the negative and the unimaginable intersects with sensitive experience and compels the imagination to expand itself. For Rancière, this means that no matter what the divergences from aesthetics could be in the history of contemporary artistic production, aesthetic judgment is still the most politically viable tool to govern art, but also to account for art's universality.[6] The proximity of the unknown or unimaginable does not annul the aesthetic dimension. In *The Aesthetic Unconscious*, Rancière extends this argument, insisting that Freud's interpretation of the unconscious did not presuppose any entropy of a Nietzschean type or any nihilist void "irreducible to logos." On the contrary, Freud's unconscious preserves the capacity of differentiating the "figured beneath the figurative and the visual beneath the represented."[7] It keeps the repository for the work of fantasy. Rancière quotes Freud's statement from his "The Moses of Michelangelo," where Freud refuses to ascribe the power of art to the sublime:

> Possibly indeed, some writer on aesthetics has discovered that this state of intellectual bewilderment is a necessary condition when a great work of art is to achieve its greatest effects. It would only be with the greatest reluctance that I could bring myself to believe in any such necessity.[8]

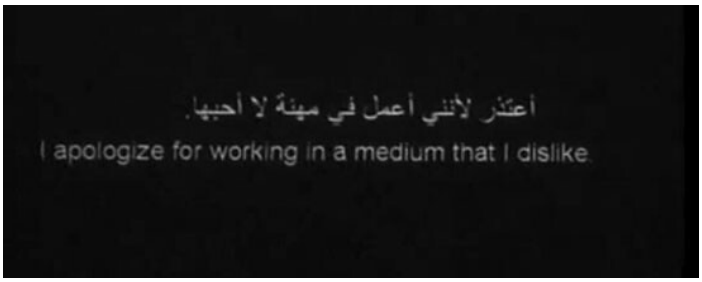
Thus for Rancière, art remains in the grip of the experience of the sensuous difference—no matter how strong the influences of the idea, the ethical, the ideological, the unconscious, or the catastrophic can be on it. In *Aesthetics and its Discontents*, he fiercely argues with *Inaesthetics*, in which Badiou posits that art is a procedure of truth that unfolds as the transmitting of the infinite into the finite, and where the goal is the infinite, the idea, the evental. Badiou's inaesthetics is really counter-aesthetics, not in the name of abandoning art, but in favor of bringing it to further intensity and precision.

An important point that Rancière emphasizes in his pro-aesthetic argument is that Schillerian "free play" characterizing a work of art can only be perceived via the immanence of an art piece. It is precisely such immanence of "free play" that constructs the dimension of the transcendental, connecting the empirical and the transcendent. The transcendentality of aesthetics is universal because it is shared by the community through the judgment of taste.

In this argument, Rancière does justice to Kant when proving that Kant's concept of the mind (the inaesthetic category) rather draws the incomprehensible and the sublime to the territory of the sensuous, placing it on the imaginary "picture" contemplated, so that the sublime is comprised in the frame of what is meant by *Aussicht*.

But while extrapolating this Kantian disposition on contemporary art, Rancière abandons Adorno's "pessimistic" standpoint, which, though apologetic about the immanence of form in art, nevertheless separates the art piece from the aesthetic dimension. Adorno calls

Kant's disinterested pleasure "castrated hedonism."[9] For Adorno, the artwork's immanence is the extremity of artistic methodology that distills into form. But the form's immanence in Adorno's interpretation means the same as the spirit means for Hegel. Adorno's form is a reified idea—the idea that in capitalist society, the artwork dialectically sublates itself in favor of an artistic form or methodology that becomes its own idea. It is true that Kant's aesthetics does not make an incommensurable split between the aesthetic and the sublime. But what is clear is that art since then and especially since modernism had to question and doubt a *sensus communis* of society (the claim of aesthetics and of the judgment of taste to the common and universal) that was neither ethically nor economically common. And it was precisely social alienation that brought about the inability to claim as valid the notion of aesthetics as the dimension of the common and the general. Whether alienation was aestheticized and brought to the extreme, as in modernism, or resisted via tools of de-alienation, as in the avant-garde, the dimension of aesthetics (which Kant described as neither cognition nor desire) was historically redundant for the art of modernity, compared to the many features constructing what the sublime could stand for: the idea, the uncanny, the transgressive, the subversive, the conceptual, and so on.



Rabih Mroué, I, the Undersigned, 2007. Video still

So what art has lost in the long run of its modernist, postmodern, and contemporary stages is not aesthetics at all. Nor is it the direct force of transformation. Such a force belonged to the political avant-garde, i.e., to revolution, for which the artistic avant-garde could only be a satellite. Moreover, it is a delusion that aesthetics has ever been art's chief value and can now "save" practices that are deprived of aesthetic specificity.

If we look back at art history, this self-rejection of aesthetics in favor of open eventualities and contingent intensities was always there. If anyone were to ask Adorno whether the classical Viennese music school was aesthetically more valid than the new Viennese music, he would never define pre-modernist music as more aesthetically viable. That is because for Adorno, any artwork was seen as a dialectical struggle with matter and the idea by the subject, whereas the aesthetic dimension is manifested instead in the perception of art or even its digestion, rather than conception and production. And if we refer back to aesthetics, we should have in mind that aesthetics is a discipline about perception. It does not unravel the genesis and genealogy of art production and the intentionalities of the creative process.

Probably it was Nietzsche who most articulately showed the correlation between the realm of the sublime (the tragic) and the artistic (aesthetic). And in this case, the sublime is not at all something elevated or pathetic, but rather the limit of human rational comprehensibility, of emotional endurance and social protection.

In his *Birth of Tragedy*, Nietzsche gives interesting dimensions to the notion of "aesthetic play," a term which he borrows from Goethe but which initially comes from Schiller. Here, aesthetic play counteracts catharsis and physiological satisfaction for the audience, and is quite far from the Kantian understanding of aesthetics. Aesthetic play is the tragic event's performative paradox; it is not epistemologically different from the sublime, but is rather the paradoxical reaction to the tragic event's sublimity. It is literally an artistic and maybe an absurd "play" being unexpectedly unfolded in the proximity of the tragic event. And that is actually what tragedy is—playing when playing would be most out of place or absurd, quite similar to Socrates's performative speech in Plato's *Phaedo*, when Socrates eloquently philosophizes with his disciples despite his inability to speak—half of his body is already paralyzed by poison. Among the few artists who have dealt with these issues recently are Rabih Mroué in art and Lars von Trier in film.

3.

If the avant-gardist sublation of art was in the name of something more important than art—something that therefore art should aspire to—today, this tradition has been transformed into the loosening of art in the name of its fusion with middle class creative activity—democratic, available, accessible. Art is as permissive as ever in its all-inclusive observations, comments, documents, experiences, forms of activism, and creativity. In this case, democracy becomes synonymous with reducing the artistic dimension to the very flow of mundane needs, as if those who happen to be detached from culture do not posses the capacity to experience the dimension of the non-mundane, non-utilitarian, or to grasp the dimension of the general, the category which is as artistic as it is ethical and political. But strangely, while contemporary art practices tend to simplify or flatten many experiences that constitute the conditions of the existential (which does not at all mean that they are dissolved into existence and identified with it empirically), the ethical, or the evental—contemporary art as institute—becomes on the contrary very complex, refined, and selective in terms of

Allan Kaprow, Women Licking Jam Off a Car from the happening "Household," 1964. Photo: Sol Goldberg

contextual, technological, and discursive packaging. In allowing any piece that involves practice, activity, or experience to be an artwork, contemporary art demonstrates utter democracy, but in its demands of "packaging" this material—without which it would be impossible to get into contemporary art's archive—it is surprisingly undemocratic and exclusive.

Contemporary art's impact becomes all the more contradictory when it simultaneously self-resigns as art and aims to educate the public. This kind of education often deals with demonstrating the tools of criticality in the open social sphere, which is a noble goal, unless such activity is in the end still framed as artistic per se and absorbed into exhibiting practice as an artwork. The problem of many art activist practices is that they claim two standpoints simultaneously—social work, and this social work being art; teaching the public to be critical, and identifying this didactic practice with teaching the public "art." The logic here is as follows: I refuse to make art in favor of social activity, and since social activity is more important than artistic work, we should not care whether what we do is art. But since I am an artist, what I do, even though it is not art, goes into an art archive that sublated itself in the name of social work and then commemorated such sublation in an art institution as an art piece. And society understands this non-art as the art that is being socially active and democratic.

Such an approach rests on the premise that the majority of people who do not make art are better suited for loose, quasi-creative practices, and hence for them that art should not demonstrate complexity and intensities they are not able to grasp.

Complex art is considered bourgeois. It needs skills, connoisseurship, and culture that can only belong to the socially privileged. Therefore, when dealing with zones of the socially unprivileged, art should reject its artistic features: complexities, paradoxes, involvement. But it is here that the argument lies. If art is about refined aesthetic difference and taste, if it is reduced to skills needed for its perception, or skills acquired by long-term education to produce it, then such an argument has reasons. But if art is seen via existential, evental, and ethical dimensions, then it is not coincident with education, or dependent on social advantages or taste. Art's complexity turns out to be about those issues that are embedded in anyone's personal or social life, in acting in it or reflecting on it.

Lisl Ponger, "The Vanishing Middle Class," Secession, Vienna, 2014. Installation detail showing different monopoly gameboards the artist has collected.

So when participatory or socially engaged projects denigrate art in the name of non-art—yet are looked upon as democratic art practice—they often ignore that those whom they integrate into education or participation might be able to think and act in terms of ethical, artistic, and general dimensions no less than any artist or thinker. Ignoring this point, they underestimate many capacities of human life that are not reduced to skills and education.

Hence the paradox: the more democratic art tends to be, the less open it is to those who constitute the *demos*.

It is interesting to compare this situation to the Russian Productivists' going public when they collaborated and communicated with the workers and peasants at the factories and collective farms. Sergey Tretyakov, who visited numerous collective farms to write reports, preferred instead to become educated and learn from the workers what labor under the new social conditions meant. He would partake of the proletarian culture rather than teach the workers or document their being deprived of certain privileges—cultural or political, since the proletarians were considered to be the subject of history, its evental sourse. Therefore, the life and labor of proletarians could be associated with the revolution (the sublime?) and become a field of study and desire at the same time. Strangely, the disposition was the same with the Russian critical realism of nineteenth-century social democracy—to learn existential and ethical lessons from the socially unprivileged, rather than teach them, label them, and thrust them into the panopticon of social precariousness.

Today, the problem facing many contemporary art practices—also due to their very close proximity to institutions and their commissioned framework of production—is that they have fallen out of classical aesthetics, as well as what stood for non- or post-aesthetic extremities (the sphere of the sublime). I.e., they have fallen out of modernism's canon of innovative rigidity as well as the avant-garde's utopian horizon, but they have also failed to return to the practices of pre-modernist realisms, because contemporary art languages cannot help but decline the dimension of the event; they consider the anthropology of the event to be the outdated, almost anachronistic rudiment of art. Meanwhile, what has become so important in the highly institutionalized poetics of contemporary art are the languages of self-installing, self-instituting, self-historicizing in the frame of what constructs contemporary art as territory. The context in this case is not historical, aesthetical, artistic, or even political, but is rather institutionally biased. So that the

subject of art is neither the artist, nor artistic methodology of any kind, nor the matter of reality, but the very momentum of institutional affiliation with contemporary art's progressive geographies . This brings us to a strange condition.

Today, art is predominantly an institute, and contemporary art is the embodiment of this condition of hyper-institutionalization, in which art practice itself is subsequent to the institution, while some time ago art practice anticipated in its contingency the institutional tools of recording it. I say "institute" and not institution, because it is no longer a question of bureaucracy governing creative practice, but rather of creative practice. Or it is a piece of art not being possible without first internalizing contemporary art as institute, implicitly posited as its principal and primary motivation for production.

To put it in a simpler, even crude way: art withers away if it doesn't take interest in what is beyond the limits of art. This "beyond" can be the sublime, the real, existence, or even "the signified," once denounced by so many modernist and postmodernist practices. But paradoxically, to deal with non-artistic realms, with reality and existence, art needs extra-existential—specifically, *artistic*—means (which doesn't imply that they should be aesthetic at all).

Yet the paradigmatic condition of today is that art's real, or its Other, and its sublime is the contemporary art institute itself.

X

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1
John Roberts, "The Curator as Producer: Aesthetic Reason, Nonaesthetic Reason, and Infinite Ideation," *Manifesta Journal* 10 (2 010): 51–57. "Now cognitively and epistemologically, this is true: artists have no special native attributes that distinguish their skills from non-artistic skills. Artists are not the possessors of inherent powers of creativity; … And this, indeed, is the great liberatory thrust of the twentieth-century avant-garde and modernism, to which Benjamin's writing on the author as producer contributed. Art's possible meaning, function, and aesthetic value is necessarily bound up with its democratic distribution. But if these conditions of production and distribution have altered the intellectual landscape of art, this does not mean that what artists do is no different from what non-artists do. Artists may imitate and borrow from the skills and attributes of non-artists, but what artists might make of these skills and attributes is necessarily very different from non-artistic practices. For, if art is above all what opens itself up to infinite ideation (Friedrich Schlegel), artistic practices necessarily set out from a place very different from non-artistic reason."

2
Hito Steyerl, "Art as Occupation: Claims for an Autonomy of Life," in *The Wretched of the Screen* (Berlin: Sternberg Press/e-flux journal, 2012), 110. "Nowadays, the invasion of life by art is not the exception, but the rule. Artistic autonomy was meant to separate art from the zone of daily routine—from mundane life, intentionality, utility, production, and instrumental reason—in order to distance it from rules of efficiency and social coercion. But this incompletely segregated area then incorporated all that it broke from in the first place, recasting the old order within its own aesthetic paradigms. The incorporation of art within life was once a political project, but the incorporation of life within art is now an aesthetic project."

3
Jacques Rancière, *Aesthetics and its Discontents* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2009).

4
Ibid. See the section "Antinomies of Modernism," 61–107.

5
Ibid. See the chapter "Lyotard and the Aesthetics of the sublime: A Counter-reading of Kant," 88–107; 93–94.

6
As mentioned above, Adorno rejects art's universality.

7
Jacques Rancière, *The Aesthetic Unconscious* (Cambridge, Polity Press, 2009), 62.

8
Ibid., 84, quoted from Sigmund Freud, "The Moses of Michelangelo," Standard Edition, 13: 211–12.

9
Theodor Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory* (London: Continuum, 2002), 11.

Knut Asdam

Nationalism: Persistence and Political Upkeep

The world is out of joint. With the resurgence of nationalisms on an international scale, we can re-phrase Shakespeare's comment to relate to any thought of the "world" from an internationalist perspective. There are resurgences of nationalisms across the globe and in my European context. Countries such as Russia, Ukraine, Hungary, Greece, have resurgences of extremist nationalism. Some of these movements are unapologetically neo-Nazi—such as the Jobbik party in Hungary or the Golden Dawn party in Greece. At the same time, there is a more mainstream, populist nationalism emerging in Western Europe exemplified by the recent European Union elections. Some of these populist groups are more centrist and some are more right wing—from the Progress Party (FRP) in Norway, to the National Front in France, to the UK Independence Party (UKIP). But all are gaining prominence by riding on nationalist narratives, anti-immigrant politics, and rampant xenophobia. This forms a dramatic political situation in a Europe that is grappling with political and economic change. From my perspective, though, nationalisms have formed ghost narratives that have followed the political everyday throughout my life. Partly that is due to growing up in a world strongly formed socially and politically by the fall-out of fascist Europe on both sides of the Atlantic —like the cold war dynamics and the invoked horrors of the third Reich or Stalin's Russia, and partly it is due to the persistence, of the narratives of the "national" from the mid eighteen hundreds onwards. However, while nationalism was seen as shameful and kept in the shadows when I was a child, it has crept gradually back into the main political narrative over the past thirty years.

There are two important aspects to the growth of nationalism in Europe that I think are decisive: one is the role of populism, which invokes a narrative of nationalism acceptable to the middle class by blurring the borders between centrist politics and more extreme forms of nationalism. Some have seen the centrist nationalist parties as a firewall against the formation of more extreme parties. But one can also argue that they form a bridge for the normalization within the main stream of xenophobic nationalist opinion from the far right wing. Another important aspect of the political development is the restructuring of extremist nationalist movements into a network of extended participation and communication using social media (as was clearly the case in Anders Breivik's attacks in 2011.)

Nationalist extremists are usually presented as the other to society's mainstream. Because of these groups' professed antidemocratic values, outspoken xenophobia, racism, and use of violence, they are seen by the mainstream population and the press as having an ideology that is incompatible with society at large. However, the ideology of these extremist groups shares certain traits with the more mainstream "soft" nationalism. This populist brand of nationalism circulates within the *democratic* political field. For right-wing extremists, the

national narrative gives the political field its meaning; the nation-state is the anchor of their culture, which is seen as ancient and rooted in the land. Similarly, for populist nationalists, the national narrative gives the *democratic* political field its meaning and purpose, and provides a historical anchor for mainstream national culture. In Norway, for example, there is a widespread belief in an "innocent," soft nationalism that celebrates the "good" aspects of Norwegian society. This "innocent" nationalism is directly connected to a narrative of the Norwegian nation—which is of course a political narrative. In both the extremist and populist nationalisms, the national narrative is seen as the central productive logic of society. These forms of nationalisms have structural and ideological differences (totalitarian vs. democratic), but both forms give the nation a primary political and ethical status in relation to the state. At the same time, both ignore the obvious historical fact that the idea of the nation-state is political and not the source of culture in and of itself. I will come back to this.

Viewed historically, the claim of cultural origin to a national identity seems irrational since national identity is seen as being rooted trans-historically, beyond many configurations and political ownerships of the regions at stake. It is incredible to witness the historical coup of the nationalist narratives that became dominant in Europe in the mid-1800s. But this is exactly the point: the emotional, foggy idea of a cultural meaning or origin, which itself only exists within that narrative and only temporarily within social history, enables the nationalists to use an emotional power in their political performance that is unsettling because it is unclear. With nationalists, you are presented with an authority without clear borders or a clear foundation in the material social world. If you look at Europe, an "oldish political continent," most nation-states are actually young—less than 200 years old. And what preceded them looks like a disintegrating fabric of states, political regions, city-states, and empires, all of them claiming some authority outside of themselves: through royal lineage (often fabricated) or historical fantasies. But all of the political narratives and claims were also marked by realpolitik and real effects upon their populations in the form of political and religious decisions, wars, and famines. So, as much as the national narratives were based on silly myth, the histories derived from these claims of authority grow into a stark reality. Such realities developed forms of culture and exchange, as folk culture and changes in language incorporated and changed from the experiences that people lived through. These experiences were of course influenced by political decisions and definitions. The nation-state only promotes culture that it sees as relevant to its self-representation, it is not the source of the culture itself, even though it will influence it. What is apparent for anyone who looks at history is that the old cultures of Europe are not bound to the idea of the nation-state and also not based on a singular people in any one single parcel of land. Rather, the history of European cultures is a history of movements of people, goods, genes, and cultures. The borders, names, and configuration of states at play continue to change and change again every century. The cross-fertilization or conflicts from migratory reality is nothing new. This is of course what has created the food, music, habits, and many of the political changes of our collective history. The same also happened here in Scandinavia.

For example, my father grew up in the medieval Norwegian town of Trondheim in the 1940s and '50s. He was a bit of a street kid who spoke in slang made up mostly from words used by Eastern European Jewish people. He wasn't aware of that at the time and there weren't many Jewish people in Trondheim then, but the terms would have come to him through the cultural migrations of pre-World War II Europe. Likewise, his family was regarded as typically Norwegian, but if you looked under the surface, you would find French Huguenot and Sami in the mix. Being a coastal seafaring country, exchange has been at the basis of Norwegian existence as a region and in its various political arrangements. So why then is the idea of the national so strong in Norway and in other places in Europe, if it is only one narrative among others in our many histories? What is it with nationalism that makes it so persistent even today?

Is there something behind contemporary European nationalism other than the slow aftereffects of nineteenth-century nationalist movements that emerged in part as reactions to older empires or feudal states? Part of it is due to the ricochet effect of our own colonialisms. Let us not forget that European countries also colonized each other. The effects are still clear in cases like Northern Ireland, Norway, or the Baltic states. Northern Ireland exists as the result of English colonialism, Norway just made it out of 500 years of Danish and Swedish rule 100 years ago, and the Baltic states have been colonized by Sweden, Finland, and Russia. All of these countries are next door to each other. Given these situations, nationalism was in many European countries, like in other parts of the world, seen as synonymous with liberation from a colonial oppressor. It gave a rationale to political liberation, which could have had a different form, but in this case was the constructed myth of a unified national identity. This placed nationalism in a privileged position in the emerging states. Subsequently, the narrative of nationalism, rather than the material reality of the actual national political state, was seen as essential to the upkeep of political authority and power. This was a time when nationalism was indeed populist to an even larger extent than today, and engaged majorities in several countries.

Europe has been through many political restructurings since the 1800s, including two world wars, a cold war, and the creation of a pan-European political entity, which is today the EU. The political landscape in which nationalist groups operate today is very different than fifty or 100

Christian Krohg, 17 mai, 1893, 1893.

years ago. If we look at the current situation, how can we understand the new structures and functions of the nationalisms and fascist groups that have emerged? There is an interesting relation between the ultranationalism we see today and the international nationalist blogs and networks—through which are shared anything from how to make and buy weapons, to transferable ideological texts, and instructions on how to organize. It is a paradox only in a sad theoretical manner that ultranationalists are in fact working from transnational networks.

This is one of the things we learned from Anders Breivik's terrorist attacks in Oslo and Utøya in Norway in 2011. He was a loner in everyday society, but extremely well connected via the internet to right wing virtual communities, and also planned his attacks by buying parts

Knut Asdam, Untitled: Archive (Migration), 2010-. 3500 A4 color photocopies and print outs from computer files; Installation size variable.

necessary to make his weapons more lethal online: one part from Poland, another part from the US, and so on. Like other nationalists today, he used an international scene, albeit a partly virtual one, in order to hit national goals. This again was intended as an international participation. His focus was an attack against the Norwegian multicultural social democracy, but his manifesto was intended as an international contribution—addressed to people with similar concerns with regard to their local environments. At the time before the attacks, the personal isolation and virtual community had made him invisible to Norwegian media.

Just a couple of months before his attacks, I listened to a new radio documentary that claimed that the right wing in Norway had shrunk down to a handful of people whose identities everyone knew. While the virtual connectivity of Islamist radical groups had been widely observed and discussed, society as a whole hadn't understood that the far right had also gone through a similar restructuring. Even though several researchers attempted to sound the alarm about a structural change in the Norwegian right wing, the media, the politicians, and the police relied on an outdated method for identifying fascist groups based on how they operated in previous decades. They totally missed their target. It was no longer sufficient to look for people who were in fact hanging out together, working as a group in physical space and making the occasional local action or demonstration. Fringe groups, like many other parts of society, had turned to remote political participation, where essential information and goods are shared by server, not by hand.

The right wing is also far more professional than before, not only in their organization but also in how they work and communicate to the popular opinion. They have attained better political skills and strategies aimed at not alienating possible sympathizers. As one Norwegian researcher put it: "There are less drugs and there is more structure." Being more professional, they also seem more ambitious for real political power. The right-wing discussions are also increasingly crossing class barriers. While previously, right-wing groups were often linked to some rural working class environments, and were actively recruiting local youth that were struggling socially. The more efficient communication through the internet and more streamlined messages make right wing groups involve and communicate with people across different class layers. Already blinded by presumptions that a terrorist attack would come from Islamist radicals, those searching for the Norwegian right wing were not able to see past their own expectations. The media was able to talk about new Russian extreme fascist groups running tattoo parlors in Oslo simply because they were so easily spotted. But the same journalists, commentators, and researchers weren't able to see the homebred son of a career diplomat from the rich west side of town who posted images of himself on a website that translates to something like "mrhandsome.no,"[1] but who was also buying up huge quantities of fertilizer and who had in fact developed a substantial right-wing web presence.

Today, in mainstream discussions in Norway, the focus continues to be on issues of integration and immigration, not on new fascist and nationalist movements unless it happens abroad. It is clearly easier to talk about a problem *out there*—like the seemingly more traditional fascists in Ukraine or Russia—than to see how fascism functions on your own turf. The radicalization of Islamist youth is a problem, but equally dangerous are the new forms of right-wing extremism. The daily focus on immigration in the news as a political narrative of crisis, and as something that is new, also contributes to building social anxiety around the idea of the nation when the nation is seen as a signifier of what has been—something that evokes safety and history.

How is it that nationalism commands so much attention in the discussions we have, and has become such a growing force in EU politics, even with moderates? The narratives of nationalism show clearly that culture is as much a contested field as anything else since nationalism attempts to claim culture for itself—a claim that is usually met with a counterclaim by non-nationalists. Typically, these claims center on music, literature, flags, buildings, and even landscapes. The argument goes that nationalism is the identification with a culture, and what distinguishes that culture from others. It allows a kinship with cultures that are close to one's own. It has a local emphasis. However, Europe is full of conflations of old cultures and nationalisms that don't leave behind a coherent narrative—either politically or in terms of peoples' culture. Again, the moment you look closely at nationalist narratives, they collapse, and this vulnerability must be suppressed in order to sustain a narrative that imagines the nation as a sort of cultural truth. But we miss the point if we focus on this as only a lie and construct, because the rise of nationalism is symptomatic of a vacuum in people's

political worlds.

The problem in Europe at the moment is twofold. First: There are no alternative narratives that appear on the popular front. The growth of the populist and nationalist right fills a narrative vacuum previously occupied by ideological and class-based narratives: people no longer seek refuge in narratives of capitalism or communism, and the sense of solidarity through unions and socialism, previous societal and transnational anchors, has eroded across Europe. There is also less difference between the political parties that have a reasonable chance of gaining political power. This increases the sense of a lack of alternative political narratives as people face larger economic or political superstructures like global free trade or the EU—which feel out of political reach. And this is why, secondly, people feel alienated by the ambiguity and opaqueness of the EU as a political superstructure that strongly affects people's everyday struggles, but fails to offer people a sense of influence in decision-making processes.

Even though I am positive about the potential of the EU as a long-term project for the political development of Europe, it has serious structural problems that make it a distant bureaucratic political voice to many people. It feels unreachable, unapproachable. Power sits too far from home and seen from an individual country, the EU appears to have a democratic deficit. Furthermore, there are still huge social and economic discrepancies between different member states, leading those with less to feed their working youth into wealthy states. It also leads the states that have more to cling to what they have. Given the above and the fact that there are twenty-six million unemployed in the EU today, it is unfortunately easy for the right wing to assemble protest narratives using bizarre and unfounded nationalist myths. One can only hope that perhaps in future generations we will see people disenchanted with the narratives of nations and nationalism, seeing them as the empty shells they are. But this raises another question: Where are new alternative narratives going to come from? With what new content are we going to fill the vacuous shells we are left with?

X

Knut Åsdam is a filmmaker, installation artist, sculptor, and photographer. Expressed in diverse forms, the main interest of Asdam's work remains a concern for contemporary society and its psychological and material effects, and the toll of everyday life. Asdam investigates the usage and perception of public urban spaces, including their structures of political power and authority. These concerns often relate to themes of dissidence and to analysis of space in terms of desire, usage, and history. Asdam's work has been shown at Tate Modern; Bergen Kunsthall; Tate Britain; Boijmans van Beuningen Museum, Rotterdam; Venice Biennial; Kunsthalle Bern; Istanbul Biennial; FRAC Bourgogne; MACRO, Rome; Museum of Contemporary Art, Oslo; Manifesta 7; Moderna Museet; MoMA P.S.1, and Musee d'Art Moderne de la Ville de Paris, among others. Feature articles on Asdam's work have been published in *Artforum*, *Grey Room*, *Le Monde Diplomatique*, *Untitled Magazine*, and many more.

1
See http://mrhandsome.com/.

Edit András

Vigorous Flagging in the Heart of Europe: The Hungarian Homeland under the Right-Wing Regime

Nationalism is not just in Hungary's backyard, it is in every corner of the house from the basement to the roof. It gets inside with the air and has completely soaked through the orifices of the building: the front door, the windows, the chimney, the front yard. For this reason, Kriszta Nagy, a Hungarian painter who exhibited her work last spring at Godot Gallery in Budapest, feels she has no other option than to paint the leader of Hungary on bedsheets and tablecloths. She explains the reason for her fifty-seven Pop portraits of Viktor Orbán: "The prime minister sleeps in our bed. He is on our tablecloth."[1]

Kriszta Nagy, Viktor Orbán, 2014. Photo courtesy of Gábor Kozák.

Nationhood is constantly and vigorously flagged: national symbols are everywhere. Even protesters and activists opposing the regime's politics feel a pressing need to take back the national symbols—currently appropriated for official use—because those not regarded as Hungarian enough are excluded from the notion of the nation. Among other tools used for building nationhood, the reproduction of the nation's visual culture is constantly recruited. Hungary's authoritarian regime, with its centralized, highly controlled system, is replicated in the administration of the arts. It is hard to grasp this complex and overwhelming phenomenon.

Flagging Nationhood in Everything Sacred and Profane

After reconfiguring electoral rules in favor of reelection, and pursuing an aggressive, populist campaign amidst apathy, the right-wing regime won the Hungarian election on April 6, 2014. Now, it is finalizing what it began building in the previous mandate. According to the party's program, this can be condensed to just a single sentence: "We continue." Concerning the arts, the goal is to achieve a traditional, conservative, Christian culture, conveying a historically rooted image of a strong and proud Hungary.

Policemen protect the monument of Nazi Occupation under construction in Freedom square, Budapest. Photo: Gabriella Csoszó / FreeDoc.

Living Memorial is a memorial project coordinated in part by Free Artists. Ongoing project since March 23, 2014. Photo: Gabriella Csoszó / FreeDoc

Fidesz, the ruling party in Hungary, used this image on its billboards for the European Parliament elections. The message "We are sending word to Brussels: Hungarians demand respect" stood beside the portrait of the prime minister—the same portrait that is replicated fifty-seven times in Kriszta Nagy's paintings. Victor Orbán regards the EU as a colonizing power. "Bravely" talking back to the colonizer is presented as the main task of the charismatic leader of a nation that is the heart of Europe. The idea is to project an image of a tough, resistant nation-state within the EU, using EU money, with the attitude of the heroic outlaw who robs from the rich and gives to the poor. In reality, the meaning is slightly, but crucially, altered from the fairytale version: "To rob from the external rich and give to the internal rich."

Funded by European money, the newly inaugurated football stadium and the Puskás Ferenc Football Academy are literally in the backyard of the leader's residence in his hometown of Felcsút.[2] They are emblems of the current cultural politics, which prioritizes sports, especially football, at the expense of the arts and education. "Politicians can, when waving the national flag, advocate sporting policies, so that the flag-waving of sport itself becomes another flag to be waved"—thus states Michael Billig, who coined the term "banal nationalism" to indicate that nationalism is not removed from everyday life, but is constantly flagged through banal habits.[3] According to Billig, this is how the phenomenon is omnipresent in Western, affluent countries. He points to sports and its relation to masculinity as some of the habits that enable the established nations of the West to be reproduced.

Nationalism is flagged literally on public buildings as well. At the Hungarian parliament, the Székely (Szekler) flag is now commonly hoisted next to the Hungarian one, while the EU flag is missing, clearly demonstrating that neonationalism has reached the mainstream. The message is that minority communities of ethnic Hungarians living abroad (for example, the Székelys in Transylvania, Romania, which once belonged to Hungary) are now being reclaimed by the Hungarian government—a quite disturbing and destabilizing message in the time of the Ukrainian-Russian crisis.

Another guiding principle of the current administration is Christianity. Football stadiums are to be consecrated, as was the case with the Felcsút soccer stadium last Easter. However, this revival of religious sentiment in a generally secular postcommunist country inevitably comes together with a variety of prospering new religions, among them shamanism and the cult of pagan Hungarian mythology. All of these religions can now apparently coexist without any conflict.

The revival of the symbolic imagination of Hungary as Regnum Marianum has been combined with the cult of the Turul, the mythological bird of ancient Hungary (and later the symbol of Greater Hungary in the revisionist ideology of the interwar period, following the Trianon Peace Treaty in 1921). Thus, the four-meter-high statue of the Virgin Mary, erected on the Cortina Wall of the Buda castle, facing Pest on the other side of the Danube, is also in peaceful coexistence with the many Turul statues around the capital and throughout the Hungarian countryside.[4]

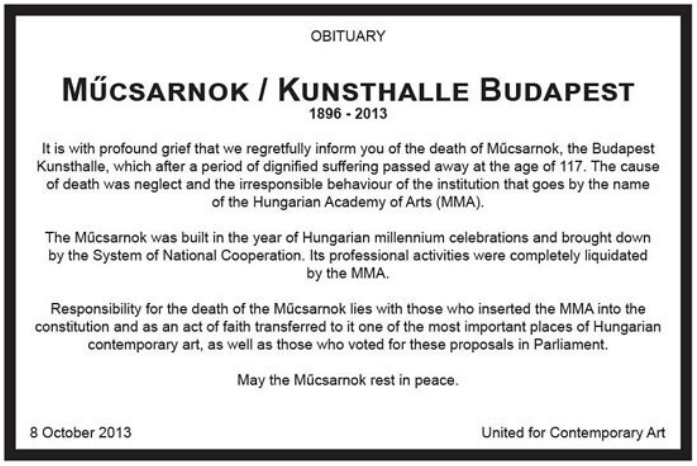
A statue of an eagle swooping down on the angel Gabriel—personifications of Germany and Hungary, respectively—has now been erected in Freedom Square in Budapest. It sets the regime's historical genealogy and holds utmost importance for its symbolic politics. The statue, which is supposed to commemorate the Nazi occupation of Hungary, stirred a heated debate about monuments dedicated to historical events, which are

The monument of Nazi Occupation, erected in the middle of the night on July 20 in Freedom square, Budapest. Photo: Gabriella Csoszó / FreeDoc.

usually erected based on wide social consensus. However, the opposite was true in the case of this statue: in Hungary, the politics of memory is a "muscle politic."[5] Hence, the prime minister does not mind stating that "the artwork is precise and immaculate from an ethical point of view, and also from the point of view of its form as [well as] the historical content it articulates," in an open reply to an art historian who wrote him a letter (the exact contents of which is unknown), presumably emphasizing the highly sensitive nature of the controversial monument.

According to the government's website, the monument pays tribute to "all Hungarian victims, with the erection of the monument commemorating the tragic German occupation and the memorial year to mark the 70th anniversary of the Holocaust." However, activists as well as historians and social scientists in the Hungarian Academy of Sciences regard it as a falsification of history, because the monument does not differentiate between victims and perpetrators and does not acknowledge the Hungary's responsibility for its participation in the Holocaust. Near the place that had been designated for the monument, a counter-monument called "Living Memorial" was set up by a small group including members of the grassroots organization Free Artists.[6] People put personal objects and stones there and started conversations about historical traumas. Since their defeat in the latest election, leftist and liberal politicians have been criticizing the monument to their own advantage. Moderate politicians regarded the constant protests as hysterical and untimely, while the ruling party completely ignored the debate. In the middle of the night on July 20th, the monument was erected despite the ongoing protest. If anyone among the conservative supporters of the government was to have any doubt or hesitation in supporting the monument's erection, an ideological guideline is available in the form of the PM's "private letter."[7]

Furthermore, the rhetoric of the ruling party is based on the idea that the socialist period was illegitimate and that the previous government did not accomplish the political transition the country needed. The current administration picks up the political thread from March 18, 1944, the day before Hungary, as they claim, lost its independence with the Nazi occupation of the country. Given Orbán's view that this independence was not regained until 1989, the socialist period is thus erased from the country's history.



OBITUARY

MŰCSARNOK / KUNSTHALLE BUDAPEST
1896 - 2013

It is with profound grief that we regretfully inform you of the death of Műcsarnok, the Budapest Kunsthalle, which after a period of dignified suffering passed away at the age of 117. The cause of death was neglect and the irresponsible behaviour of the institution that goes by the name of the Hungarian Academy of Arts (MMA).

The Műcsarnok was built in the year of Hungarian millennium celebrations and brought down by the System of National Cooperation. Its professional activities were completely liquidated by the MMA.

Responsibility for the death of the Műcsarnok lies with those who inserted the MMA into the constitution and as an act of faith transferred to it one of the most important places of Hungarian contemporary art, as well as those who voted for these proposals in Parliament.

May the Műcsarnok rest in peace.

8 October 2013 United for Contemporary Art

Műcsarnok leaflet used in the protest at Kunsthalle, Budapest, Oct. 8. 2013. Photo: Gabriella Csoszó / FreeDoc

Raining Money at Vigadó, Budapest. Demonstration co-organized by Tranzit Action Group and Free Artists, March 14. 2014. Photo: Gabriella Csoszó / FreeDoc

Museums as Fortresses of the Nation

The new right-wing government realized that museums, as privileged spaces of national self-representation, had to be more closely controlled, since they were perceived as too cosmopolitan and independent. Some institutions dared to argue against bureaucratic decisions, as was the case with Imre Takács. Takács opposed the moving of the Esterházy collection to the Esterházy Palace in Fertőd. After Takács's resignation, the Museum of Applied Arts fell into a state of interregnum, not an unusual condition in the local art world. One of the Ministry of Culture's first measures following the spring 2014 election was to delegate the task of the "professional, organizational, and operational renewal" of the Museum of Applied Arts to László Baán, director of the Museum of Fine Arts. At the time, Baán already controlled the three major art museums in Budapest. His promotion was quite extraordinary, especially considering that he has no training in art history. One by one, museums were taken out of the hands of professional directors and were placed under his authority.

The Hungarian National Gallery, located in the Buda Castle, was annexed on August 31, 2012 by the Museum of Fine Arts, a storefront museum that receives lavish financial support at the expense of other museums struggling to survive. A smaller but highly important museum of strategic interest, the Ferenc Hopp Museum of East Asia Arts, also fell prey to Baán. After the reelection of the Fidesz Party, it became clear why this seemingly marginal museum was incorporated. Baán, besides overseeing the ambitious creation of a museum quarter in Városliget Park in Budapest—a plan called the "Liget Budapest Project"[8]—has also been assigned to develop an Asian art center crucial for opening diplomatic relations with the East.

The Műcsarnok (Kunsthalle Budapest) has operated without a professional leader for quite a while after his previous director, Gábor Gulyás—who had been appointed to that post without any competition from other candidates—resigned (only to be promoted afterwards to a higher position), under the umbrella of the Hungarian Art Academy (HAA), a kind of shadow ministry that grew out of a private organization. This ultraconservative institute is gaining full power over cultural issues, controlling the subsidies given to the arts while it favors "national culture within the culture of the nation." How this program will affect the Műcsarnok, the most important venue for contemporary art in Hungary, is still unclear.

Protest Movements Against the Vehement Flagging

Some cultural activists and other protesters, however, have been disrupting the image of Hungary as a "clean garden, proper house" by boycotting self-congratulation occasions organized by the new official culture. The internationally known philosopher Gáspár M. Tamás accurately stated that contemporary Hungarian culture is not against the ideology of the recent administration, but rather against its acts. Although some artists have merely reflected on the nationalist ideology, the cult of the leader, and the falsification of history, other artists have produced collaborative, critical, and socially engaged work—a kind of activism.[9]

The artists Szabolcs KissPál and Csaba Nemes, among others, initiated Free Artists in opposition to the empowerment of the HAA. Their first action was an interruption of HAA meetings to demand that art remain autonomous from party politics. When the Műcsarnok was taken over by the HAA, young curators, as well as the respected art critic József Mélyi, initiated regular actions and events outside the museum. These events were entitled "Outer Space" and protested the right-wing

Péter Donka, Untitled, 2013. This sketch, drawn from photojournalist István Huszti's photo, depicts a brawl during the first meeting of Hungarian Art Academy with Free Artists, when one of their representatives, was attacked with a folder by a poet member of HAA, December, 2013. Courtesy: Csaba Nemes.

invasion of an independent art institution.[10]

In response to the nontransparent process behind the appointment of a new director at the Ludwig Museum, a few dozen artists and art professionals established the group United for Contemporary Art. In May 2013, the group occupied the Ludwig Museum. The occupiers—artists, art historians, curators, and students—demanded complete transparency in the selection process, autonomy from political power for cultural institutions, as well as a dialogue between museum professionals and ministry officials. Many of the occupiers—including many members of the Free Artist group—slept and ate on the stairs in the museum, besides organizing forums and events there. When director Gábor Gulyás resigned and the HAA took over the Műcsarnok, contemporary art's fortress in Hungary, Free Artists responded by organizing a kind of group performance: a burial ceremony for the flagship institution.

At the time of the occupation, the new right-wing museum officials held an event at the Vigadó Concert hall on the banks of the Danube, one of the most beautiful art nouveau buildings in Budapest. Artists disrupted the celebration to raise awareness of the financial imbalances in the art scene and the absolute power of the ultraconservative museum regime. This protest was similar to the one that took place at New York's Guggenheim Museum, where activists sprinkled fake money and leaflets on museum visitors to protest against the inhuman labor conditions at the construction site of the new Guggenheim museum in Abu Dhabi. Although the

Obituary—Műcsarnok protest at Kunsthalle, Budapest. Oct. 8. 2013. Photo: Gabriella Csoszó / FreeDoc

Budapest protest was called "Raining Money," the key element here was not money, but rather the defenseless bodies of the protesters lying on the stairs and floor of the building's entrance.[11] All had their mouths stuffed with money, in accordance with the visual and verbal violence that is one of the side effects of the vigorously flagged nationalism that fills everyday life in the heart of Europe.

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1
Kriszta Nagy, *I Take on Painting Portraits* , exhibition at Godot Gallery, Budapest, May 15–June 14, 2014.

2
See http://web.archive.org/web/20141113135825/https://444.hu/assets/felcsut-01.jpg .

3
Michael Billig, *Banal Nationalism* (London: Sage Publications, 1995), 123.

4
See http://mariaszobor.hu/index.html . For an analysis of the history and recent revival of the Turul symbol in Hungary, see Szabolcs KissPál's essay "The Rise of the Fallen Feather: The Symbolism of the Turul Bird in Contemporary Hungary" in the June 2014 issue of - *e-flux journal* https://pdf.e-flux-systems.com/journal/the-rise-of-a-fallen-feather-the-symbolism-of-the-turul-bird-in-contemporary-hungary/ .

5
See Cara Eckholm, "Hungary's Identity Crisis Fought in Concrete and Bronze," FailedArchitecture.com, May 14, 2014 http://failedarchitecture.com/budapest-freedom-square/ .

6
For the group's blog "no MMA!," which provides news coverage and commentary about the monument controversy in multiple languages, see http://nemma.noblogs.org/category/english/ .

7
See (in Hungarian) http://web.archive.org/web/20140513055228/http://www.168ora.hu/itthon/renyi-andras-muveszettortenesz-szabadsag-ter-emlekmu-tortenelemhamisitas-126426.html .

8
See http://web.archive.org/web/20170527141322/http://www.szepmuveszeti.hu/museumpark_news .

9
See Maja and Reuben Fowkes, "Hungarian Art in the Eye of the Storm," no MMA!, July 23, 2013 http://nemma.noblogs.org/2013/07/23/hungarian-art-in-the-eye-of-the-storm-3/ .

10
For the website of Outer Space, see http://www.kivultagas.hu/.

11
For coverage of the action, see the no MMA! blog https://nemma.noblogs.org/2014/03/17/money-rain-opening-festivity-of-the-mma-hq-in-vigado/ .

Ilya Budraitskis

Hope in a Hopeless Situation

Why is there no antiwar movement in Russia? Why are so few people willing to take to the streets to publicly accuse the government of furthering the war in Eastern Ukraine? People who supported the March 15 peace march in downtown Moscow still pose these questions to each other. Their numbers are constantly shrinking, but the point is that even those people who still support the spirit of protest no longer have any confidence that protest can change anything.

If the new war (or prewar) footing into which Russian society is sinking deeper has a point of consensus that unites different social and cultural strata, it is the smothering, eerie awareness of society's total powerlessness in the face of interstate conflict. The flood of news has overwhelmed the already fragile system of coordinates used by individual citizens. Their psyches cannot withstand the strain, surrendering to the unknowable, opaque logic of events, a logic seemingly less and less amenable to anyone's specific will. "It is not the mind that controls the war, but the war that controls the mind," wrote Leon Trotsky about a war whose start one hundred years ago has been somewhat timidly commemorated this summer.

The unhappy residents of Luhansk and Donetsk are now at the forefront of the collision with war's destructive power. Their testimonies on social networks—meager exchanges of information about the people who have been killed, photographs of the damage done by shelling, requests for help and offers of aid—are the voices of victims, the voices of people who have already lost. They do not divide each other into supporters of Novorossiya and a united Ukraine, and they are not holding out for "their" side to win. All they want is peace: no matter what government offers it and on whatever terms. Along with houses, infrastructure, schools, and hospitals, society has almost been razed to the ground in Eastern Ukraine. This means that a victor capable of bringing stability even amid the smoking ruins will be rewarded with the kind of docility and obedience of which no government could dream during peacetime.

The shockwaves of this barbaric destruction have overwhelmed the population on both sides of the border. It is already a commonplace to argue that domestic politics in Russia seemingly disappeared in March of this year. What is more, invoking philosopher Jacques Rancière's definition, we could argue that politics as a form of human activity based on dissent has rapidly disappeared, while state policy as the art of managing communities has attained perfection. Anything that deviates even a millimeter to the right or left of President Putin's line is immediately devalued and deprived of any independent significance. People who try to applaud the government more loudly than everyone else are rendered as politically invisible and helpless as those who oppose it. As they support their government, patriots are instantly turned into its obedient tools. Liberals who criticize their government

Ukrainian military jet aircraft Su-25 fires decoy flares to protect itself in a counter attack operation after the seize of a terminal in Donetsk airport by pro-Russian militias. Photo: Mashable/Evegny Feldman.

serve wittingly or unwittingly as advocates of the other side.

The logic of war inevitably leads to identification between the government and the people, to their complete fusion with each other and the ruthless destruction of all hints of dissent. Contrary to popular belief, this identity is based not only on a chauvinism that quickly impregnates collective consciousness. The wartime "national unity" we are now headed toward derives its strength from the fear of instability, the expectation of protection from above, and the sense that subjects and rulers are ultimately in the same boat. It is hard to imagine the incredible freedom of action the state acquires with respect to citizens in this case. This victory of the ruling elite over their own society outweighs, at least in the short term, the losses from sanctions and the shame of international isolation.

Today it is impossible to predict how long this state of affairs will last. At any rate, previous successful episodes of "wartime unity" were often able to keep the majority in absolute subjection for years.

So why do we need an antiwar movement today? We should honestly point out that grassroots antiwar movements, no matter how massive, have hardly ever succeeded in preventing or stopping wars. After the outbreak of World War I, it took three more years of enormous death and destruction until supporters of "peace without annexations and indemnities" were able to turn from a marginal minority in their own countries into a force capable of changing the course of events. The textbook antiwar movement—against US involvement in Vietnam—tried for nearly a decade to influence Western public opinion before forcing a new president, faced with serious military losses, to begin withdrawing troops. Finally, the largest antiwar demonstration in London's history—the protest against the invasion of Iraq on February 15, 2003, attended by over a million people—was simply ignored by the Blair government.

But even when they are obviously going against the tide, antiwar movements have one incredibly important function—telling the truth. State propaganda, which in recent months has demonstrated its colossal capabilities, lies not merely for the sake of lying. In a state of "wartime unity," the lie is a direct continuation of hostilities and a key tool for shoring up the home front. Faith in the lie and complicity in spreading it are made civic virtues, a matter of "public interest" for which every citizen feels responsible. In recent months, many of us have discovered that we can get at the truth only by comparing the wartime lies coming from both sides in the conflict. Though largely uncontested nowadays, this method is fraught with great danger. At some point, one of the parties comes to seem more convincing.

The March of Peace, March 15, Moscow, Russia.

If it really wants to bring dissent back to society, an antiwar movement should always adhere to a third position. The victims, the losers, and the frightened, everyone who has been deprived of their own voice by "wartime unity," must find this voice in the antiwar movement. A movement like this must not decide which of the parties is more culpable or less culpable; it must not put itself in the shoes of those who would never put themselves in our own shoes. That is why, in the current circumstances, an antiwar movement in Russia that opposes its government can be completely honest and effective if it works in concert with a counterpart movement in Ukraine. In both Moscow and Kyiv, we must again call into question the state's monopoly on representing the "nation."

Protester and pro-Russia milita in Crimea converse a day after the March 6th referendum in Ukraine.

Barely audible and almost invisible, this third position can easily get lost amidst the humanitarian sentiment displayed by both voluntary and involuntary advocates of the lie of "public interest." If, in the first case, Russia's direct involvement disappears from analyses of the situation in the Donbas and what is happening is described solely as a civil war in which an oligarchical Kyiv government is fighting against its own people, while in the second case, on the contrary, everything boils down to a clandestine Russian intervention and all elements of the internal conflict are consistently ignored, we are dealing with yet another "ruse of war."

Telling the truth means not only exposing propaganda but also pointing out the reasons behind the military conflict: the struggle over defense budgets, the redistribution of markets and property, the desire to establish total control over the rank and file in the interests of the elites. Exactly one hundred years ago, this message, which seemed radical, utopian, and naive, was eventually able to change the world. This fact seems capable of inspiring hope in our hopeless situation.

X

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