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Editors

# Editorial

We are increasingly faced with premodern foundation myths coming from right-wing propaganda and grassroots movements alike. They tell us that some things don't change and they ask us to think about how original communities are constituted. And we start to wonder whether these original communities are new synthetic fabrications concocted by the limits of communication and exchange, by the failed promises of a liberal democracy or a thriving economy that does not reach people who thought they were entitled to it, and who thus start to look elsewhere. Or do these communities actually contain some real claim to a historical line that was violently interrupted by economic and geopolitical shifts that became most pronounced in the 1990s? Have we simply gotten so high on a period of information fever and lateral planetary spread that we simply forgot about entire swaths of the globe that have basically been on another wavelength the entire time?

In Beirut there is a nightclub called B 018 that architect Bernard Khouri designed in the late 1990s. In addition to being a great club, it is also well known for its macabre design: built a decade after the end of more than fifteen years of constant fighting in Lebanon, the building is set completely underground and is reminiscent of a crypt. The site of the club is also the site of a refugee camp that saw a massacre of its Palestinian, Kurdish, and Southern Lebanese inhabitants at the hands of local Christian militias in the late 1970s. Even if the club is a memorial to the dead and a chilling parody of amnesiac Lebanese frivolity, its most cruel joke is ultimately on the claims of public memorials to speak to collective memory in general, especially in a place where the civil war never reached any formal conclusion.

In place of a naive belief in the possibility of ever memorializing a collective loss, at B 018 there is a dress code, and on most nights you can hear the club responsibly pumping out the hits of the '80s, '90s, and 2000s. It doesn't claim to resolve all contradictions into a kind of hopeful utopia to be eventually used against you, but actually explodes them further, and hands them to you as they are. No one is trying to nationalize your desires into any kind of heroic totalitarian mythos. This is no small feat, considering that it is typical for people who fear for their safety and survival to seek out symbolic forms of belonging and togetherness that appear to stabilize their families and communities. People begin to ask for the nation, the race, the creed, the sectarian, the rooted, the indigenous. The old greatness must be restored. Sentimental resources are called in to keep the community together when material resources fall short.

What is clear in these new origin myths is that the nation as a functional structure is less and less of an actor, regressing either to a role as manager and regulator of a market economy, or as a fragmentary or backward fossil playing host to corruption and opportunism. Even today's most unapologetically authoritarian states are little more

than an umbrella for the whims of an inner circle of rulers. But when faced with the question of what a state should or could be, and what its responsibilities are, we simply don't care. And yet we have to admit that when the idea of a nation breaks off from the structural base of the state, things start to get extremely weird. The nation starts to morph into a floating signifier for all manner of original communities—and can be used by original and synthetic communities alike to recompose and assemble a myth of togetherness for whatever end they please.

Whatever is causing this to happen in so many places, it appears that fewer people are immune to its effects—in spite of education, class, and wealth—that it moves in many directions simultaneously. For artists and artworks this poses a problem of representation whereby a reinvigorated need to explore cultural origins will not assume any fixed or easily discernible form familiar to traditional authoritarian declarations. Rather, it will seize upon artists' own lives and priorities, infusing the content of their work with sentimental origin quests, and it will inflect the decisions made by collectors, acquisition departments, and curators. It will accent the way an artist situates his or her work in relation to the world, and to other places in the world where these works may circulate. Everything might look like business as usual when a massive gravitational shift builds itself firmly into already existing lines of thought in artistic discourse, with contextual specificity and cultural sensitivity ascending from artistic strategies or signs of curatorial good faith to become dominant criteria and battleground sites of proxy wars waged in museum auditoriums. A responsible artist might consider carrying small arms to the opening in case anyone has a problem with large-format C-prints of landscapes from a certain corner in that dark cavernous place where you should not go.

And yet some artists who might appear to be moving back to their mythical home to purify themselves might at the same time be permanently purging themselves of the lure of origin. In the cycles of decomposition and recomposition, others might push instead for the granting of statehood to synthetic subcultural milieux which for some reason attain a legitimate status alongside more historically situated tribes and peoples. A promised land of gamers and alcoholics, for instance. A continent for indebted MFAs, rich in coltan deposits and with its own stock market harvesting bitcoin. Finally, a place gay Bolsheviks can call their own.

—Anton Vidokle, Brian Kuan Wood, Julieta Aranda

**X**

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

**Brian Kuan Wood** is an editor of *e-flux journal.*

**Anton Vidokle** is an editor of e-flux journal and chief curator of the 14th Shanghai Biennale: Cosmos Cinema.

Oleksiy Radynski

# Maidan and Beyond, Part I

*1.*

On November 21, 2013, Ukrainian journalist Mustafa Nayem posted a call on Facebook to gather at Maidan square in Kyiv, a common site for civic dissent: "If you really want to do something, don't just 'like' this post. Let's meet at 10:30 p.m. near the monument of independence in the middle of the Maidan."[1] Nayem called for the protest after the Ukrainian government announced earlier that day that it would not sign a trade agreement with the European Union, and would halt further integration with Europe. This may seem like an unusual reason to rise up. But what started as an apparently minor attempt by the tiny Ukrainian creative class to carry out another "social media revolution" rapidly developed into a gigantic people's uprising centered on Maidan square in Kyiv.[2] It lasted for several months and resulted in hundreds of casualties, the violent overthrow of the regime, and the subsequent reshaping of the world map.

Scholars of social media may interpret the Maidan uprising as a brilliant example of how Facebook helped people start a revolution without resorting to a military coup or self-immolation. Yet it is all too easy to claim that everyone is Adbusters now. There is another, less enthusiastic view of the role of social media in world politics. For adherents of this view—such as Vladimir Putin and his ultra-nationalist supporters—the launching of the Maidan uprising was part of a covert Western plot to overthrow the reigning political regimes in the post-Soviet world. According to this view, just as the suicide of Mohamed Bouazizi was aimed directly at toppling not only Ben Ali of Tunisia but also Hosni Mubarak of Egypt and Bashar al-Assad of Syria, Mustafa Nayem's Facebook post aimed ultimately to overthrow not just Victor Yanukovych of Ukraine, but also Aleksandr Lukashenko of Belarus, Nursultan Nazarbayev of Kazakhstan, and of course Vladimir Putin himself.

Oleksiy Radynski, Integration, 2014. Video still, HD video.

Disturbingly, the proponents of this theory are the same

ones hosting Edward Snowden in exile and publishing Slavoj Zižek in Russian.[3] They also possess one of the world's largest nuclear arsenals. The theory is just one of the many components of Putin's propaganda machine, which has allowed him to plunge Russian society into an anti-Western, militaristic hysteria, while he simultaneously tries to persuade the Western public that the real fascist threat now comes from the decaying post-Maidan interim government in Kyiv—and not from Russia itself. Meanwhile, the Russian government has expropriated sovereign territory, endorsed pro-Russian irredentist terrorists in Ukraine, staged spoof referendums, racially segregated Crimean Tatars in occupied Crimea, and pursued an ethnicization of international politics based on Russia's alleged need to protect its apparently endangered *Volksgenosse* across the former USSR.

The scale of conspiratorial thinking in Russia is now comparable to that of the US after 9/11.[4] But the problem with conspiracy theories is not the fact that they are false products of a paranoiac imagination, but rather that some conspiracies *do* exist. To reject this means to turn a blind eye to one of the many important tools of world politics. It thus seems crucial to avoid a simplistic opposition between middlebrow paranoiac thinking, and apparently enlightened reason unaware of its own blind spots. Thus, the first step toward a proper understanding of the Maidan movement in Ukraine is to replace the dominant question *What is behind this?* with the question *What is beyond this?*

*2.*

On November 30, 2013, Ukraine's elite riot police, the Berkut, attacked the pro-EU encampment in Maidan square, violently dispersing the protesters and seriously injuring dozens of them. This attack turned out to be a powerful jolt for the Maidan movement, which by that time was already in decline and would have probably ceased to exist in a matter of days if the police had not intervened. After the attack, what had started as a peaceful, liberal, pro-globalization student movement transformed into an all-encompassing uprising that grew increasingly violent and at times nationalist, all the while invoking "Western values" and EU symbols.

The Maidan movement has brought into stark relief not only the issue of Ukrainian identity, but also the issue of European identity. The irony is that the Maidan protests, the "biggest pro-EU demonstrations in history," were comparable in size to the anti-austerity, anti-EU protests that have shaken Southern Europe. It turns out that the same political structures and institutions that are loathed by many Europeans inside the EU, are genuinely praised and desired by numerous Europeans on its outside—simply because their lives are incomparably more miserable than the lives of the most aggrieved victims of European unification. Although Ukraine's courtship of Europe has looked like a tiresome attempt by an underclass admirer to charm an upper-class beloved by constantly praising her values and accomplishments, the West can nonetheless recognize in the Ukraine conflict many of its own antagonisms in a condensed, crystallized form.

For instance, the violent methods of the infamous Berkut forces are not unknown to riot police in Europe and the US, where dissenters experience comparable violence. This is not to suggest that the scale of police violence carried out in Ukraine is in any way similar to that carried out in countries beyond its Western border; in recent years, police aggression has become an everyday reality for many Ukrainians. The police apparatus has increasingly merged with the criminal underworld. Blackmail and forced bribery are the day-to-day business of the police. The abduction and killing of detainees at police stations throughout the country is rarely investigated or even documented. But ironically, the Maidan protesters, who did not experience the joys of kettling or mass arrest, waved EU flags without knowing that in the EU itself, the response to their protest might have been only a shade less violent.

In his 2011 documentary *All Watched Over by the Machines of Loving Grace*, Adam Curtis gives an account of Ukraine's 2004 Orange Revolution—a popular protest against electoral fraud and an important precursor to the 2014 Maidan uprising.[5] According to Curtis, the Orange Revolution was part of the wave of newfangled uprisings—leaderless, self-regulating, largely organized via the internet—that puts them in the same context as the Occupy movement and the Indignados. For any viewer of the film who actually participated in the Orange Revolution, this account is very surprising. The Orange Revolution had strong, highly influential leaders. It was primarily organized by opposition parties and politicians. And it took place before social media started to have any significant impact on Ukrainian society. Curtis's reading of the Orange Revolution actually applies more to events in Kyiv in 2013–14, three years after his film was completed.

The Maidan uprising was largely spontaneous. It may have

even come as a surprise to the official opposition, which over and over again during the protests lost its grip on the dissenting masses. Although the uprising did have some leaders, their authority and credibility was constantly questioned and subverted by various grassroots groups and movements. Participants in the Maidan uprising displayed an outstanding skill for self-organization, sustaining the huge protest camp in Kyiv's main square for three months amidst increasing legal repression, constant abduction, and violence from police. At the same time, there were some fairly frightening aspects to the Maidan uprising turned. In addition to providing many thousands of supporters with food, relative safety, and accommodations on a daily basis for several months, many participants in the Maidan uprising occupied their spare time with paramilitary training, national and religious rituals, and a hunt for internal enemies. As if to illustrate Adam Curtis's critique of self-organized grassroots movements, the Maidan protesters reproduced many of the hierarchies that existed outside their temporary autonomous zone in the middle of Kyiv. Although Maidan never did pick a leader, the movement's self-defense units, which grew increasingly paramilitary in response to mounting violence from police, started to resemble miniature totalitarian entities. These units—called "hundreds," referring to the number of participants—play out a kind of postmodern identity politics, since most of them were formed on the basis of regional, occupational, or symbolic affiliation: Maidan had its "Jewish hundred," "female hundred," "cyber-hundred," "Crimean hundred," and so on.

However, not all identities were accepted by the Maidan crowd. From the very beginning of the Maidan uprising, its intolerance of certain groups that tried to join the movement (most notably leftists, unionists, and feminists) put it at odds with its proclaimed devotion to "European values"—and in line with Russian authoritarianism and anti-pluralism. When Western audiences saw reports about militarized protesters wrapped in EU flags professing nationalist views, they experienced a kind of a cognitive dissonance. The immediate Western response was hypocritically colonial, proclaiming that Ukrainian protesters were not European enough to claim allegiance to European values. In reality, the juxtaposition of neo-Nazi symbols with EU flags in the streets of Kyiv exemplified a pan-European malady.

For years, the EU project was presented in Ukraine as the ultimate anti-communist endeavor, which was not necessarily the case in Europe itself. Since communism has long been gone, it became a convenient culprit for all post-Soviet disasters. It was the communists, then, and not the rampant post-Soviet neocapitalists, who were blamed for more than twenty years of post-1991 impoverishment and stagnation in Ukraine. Equating all stripes of totalitarianisms was another bad and widely accepted idea. By condemning communism as an evil equal to Nazism, Europe did the Eastern European far right a great favor: if communism is as bad as Nazism and there are still plenty of communists around, by that logic the existence of Nazis is equally justified. If the Soviet red stars still decorate governmental buildings and Lenin statues are still there, why can't the Nazis still paint swastikas and praise Hitler? If members of the racist and xenophobic extreme Right sit in nearly every one of the European parliaments, why are we constantly told that racism, xenophobia, and fascism contradict European values? The ideological composition of Ukraine's Maidan square mirrored Europe. That's why so many in the West turned away from that mirror in horror.

*3.*

On December 8, 2013, an angry crowd of Maidan protesters toppled a Lenin monument in central Kyiv. This act was absurdly greeted by liberals in Ukraine and abroad as a final cutting-of-ties with communism—almost a quarter century after it had already fallen. At the same time, skeptical voices claimed that this outburst of mass frustration directed at a historical statue revealed the total impotency of the movement. Soon, monuments to Lenin fell in many other Ukrainian cities. Anti-communist iconoclasm became an important feature of the first movement in twenty-first century Europe whose outcome at least vaguely resembled a revolution.

The site of the Maidan movement in Kyiv is intimately linked to revolutionary ideas and practices, and not only by the old Soviet name for Maidan square—"the Square of the October Revolution." The urban structure of central Kyiv itself, as envisaged by the Stalin-era city planners, was meant both to commemorate the event of the revolution, and to prevent its repetition by rendering expressions of dissent on the part of Soviet Ukrainians impossible. Maidan square and nearby Khreschatyk Street were designed to accommodate mass communist rallies and demonstrations—as long as these celebrated state policies. The Haussmannian proportions of the central squares and avenues were designed to make it easy for police forces to contain any public unrest.[6]

The monument to the October Revolution, erected in the late 1970s at what later came to be known as Maidan square, was an astute commentary on the relationship between the revolutionary masses and their revolutionary leaders. In this monument, the figure of Vladimir Lenin was surrounded by the four pillars of the October Revolution—the male worker, the female worker, the peasant, and the sailor, all represented in bronze. The figure of Lenin stood apart from the masses not only in size—it effectively dominated the composition—but also in medium: his likeness was made of red granite, suggesting that he belonged to a different, transcendent mode of being. More than twenty years after the October Revolution monument was removed during the Soviet Union's collapse, this spatial relationship between masses and leaders was re-projected, or reenacted on a different level, during the Maidan uprising. Although the Maidan movement did not have clear leaders or did not accept those who claimed their role, the representatives of the movement were clearly visible and constantly appealed to the assembled public via the large, mounted screens that broadcast the revolution in real time from the square. In this way, the relationship between the screen and the televised demonstrations actually reenacted a familiar, monumental representation of the revolution

During the Soviet years, October Revolution Square was the site of so many pseudo- or counterrevolutionary rituals that it is hard to imagine it as a site for a genuine uprising. This cynical use of fake demonstrations led to the discrediting of the very idea of public assembly. In 1986, the square was the site of perhaps one of the most cynical uses of public assembly in history. Thousands of Kyivites marched through the square during the official Labor Day parade without knowing that five days earlier, a disaster had taken place in Chernobyl, about one hundred kilometers away. Soviet workers were made to march through the radiation-exposed streets for the sake of communist ritual. While the Labor Day ritual was not cancelled by atomic disaster, little could be done to prevent the Soviet society from its subsequent atomization.[7] Very soon, the Thatcherite formula "there is no such thing as society" was realized in Ukraine and other post-Soviet states in its most radical form.

The 1992 documentary *Levels of Democracy* (directed by Georgiy Shkliarevsky), which portrays various political assemblies that took place in and around Maidan square in the late 1980s and early 1990s, grasps the ultimate transformation of Ukrainian (and, more broadly, late-Soviet) society into a post-social assemblage of individuals overwhelmed by the need for personal survival. The film's opening scenes are filled with the joyous exultations of the masses, who for the first time had been granted the right to celebrate their national identity. In 1991, however, the situation changes drastically: the protesters stop caring about national identity, since they are suddenly faced with a collapsing economy and the urgency of physical survival. People still assemble—but instead of listening to performances of Ukrainian national anthem, they now listen to a teenager singing Yegor Letov's songs on a guitar, or to a speech by a paranoid anti-Semite preacher. When freedom of assembly finally becomes a real constitutional right, practicing it is very difficult due to a sudden lack of basic goods.[8]

In the early 2000s, when the effects of economic collapse and social degradation started to wane, the Ukrainian people started to reclaim Maidan as a place for assembly and dissent. In the winter of 2000–2001, protesters set up an encampment in the square and called for the resignation of Ukrainian president Leonid Kuchma, who was accused of ordering the murder of the opposition journalist Georgiy Gongadze. The encampment was dispersed, and in order to prevent any further use of Maidan square for public dissent, President Kuchma ordered that it be redeveloped as a consumer space—a shopping mall combined with a para-historical sculpture park. The new surface of Maidan, dotted with kitschy sculptures and glass domes linking it with the promising shopping mall underworld, was supposed to prevent large crowds of protesters from gathering there. Instead, the public was supposed to assemble in the shopping mall underneath for the sake of pure consumption. On the spot where the October Revolution monument previously stood, a notoriously ugly monument to the independence of Ukraine was erected in its place, its use of imperial Corinthian order absurdly reverting Ukraine's post-colonial imaginary. But Kuchma's plan for doing away with Maidan as a public space failed— probably because his corrupt tendencies led him to award the project to a group of wealthy businessmen who had no prior experience in the construction business. Kuchma's stated reason for redeveloping Maidan was the tenth anniversary of Ukrainian independence. Instead, the second decade of Ukraine's alleged "independence" saw a tremendous proliferation of protest activity at Maidan square.

*4.*

On February 20, 2014, I was standing on the fourteenth floor of the Ukraine Hotel overlooking Maidan square, watching the sniper massacre that was unfolding down in

Instytutska Street. The preceding days and weeks had seen a tremendous escalation in violence both by the government and protesters. After the Ukrainian parliament passed a number of laws that severely restricted civic freedoms—rendering the Maidan movement largely illegal and threatening its participants with long-term prison sentences—the protest entered a decidedly violent stage. An attempted blockade of the government quarter, which was supposed to force the authorities to repeal the new draconian laws, resulted in a monthlong street war with the police, centered on a piece of land adjacent to the National Museum of Ukraine. The Maidan movement had acquired a "radical" iteration in addition to its "moderate" one, which found its physical form in the tent camp and protester-occupied buildings.

Autonomous and self-sufficient, most of the different protest mini-camps in Maidan square and the surrounding area became grassroots laboratories for ideas and practices of all stripes. In the Ukrainian House, a neomodernist palace that had previously housed the Museum of Lenin, a leftist student assembly tried to implement consensus decision-making and horizontal democracy among the frustrated, increasingly violent crowd. At the same time, the occupied city hall of Kyiv, several hundred meters away, became a breeding ground for the most bizarre kinds of far right ideologies. Between the two, in the encampment of tents that hardly protected their dwellers from the freezing temperatures outside, a hodgepodge of various resistance and partisan groups was boiling over.

After the first protesters died in clashes with Berkut forces outside the National Museum, a peaceful resolution seemed highly unlikely. The National Museum itself was taken hostage by the street war: the building, strategically crucial for access to the government quarter, was blocked by riot police. Berkut fighters made themselves at home under the museum's neoclassical porticus, taking a rest between its columns or observing the raging crowd from its stairs. The National Museum was living through a state of emergency, with the artworks hastily removed from the walls in preparation for the worst-case scenario. This worst-case scenario did finally arrive elsewhere, in the form of a sniper assault that killed up to a hundred desperate protesters as they tried to make their way to the government quarter through neighboring Instytutska Street. Ultimately, however, the regime was unable to pit the army against the people—it collapsed the next day.

The protesters refused to remove their encampment and their barricades after the regime fell, claiming that its collapse was merely the start, and not the end, of a genuine revolution. The government buildings remained occupied, and some militias, claiming they needed more space for their activities, even took over numerous boutiques next to Maidan, which had previously been left untouched. Even the McDonalds at Maidan was shut down and turned into a clinic for protesters suffering from post-traumatic stress disorder. Only the luxurious shopping mall underneath Maidan remained completely intact during the uprising.

Days after the regime's collapse, masked gunmen from right-wing militias began arriving at the National Museum, still shut down and deserted. The gunmen brought artworks discovered at the private suburban residence of the toppled president, who was notorious for kleptocracy and bad taste. The artifacts were to be stored in the museum halls, still empty after a monthlong siege. Meanwhile, some of the protest tools invented by the Maidan demonstrators (like the famous catapult used in clashes with riot police) were claimed by museum workers as artworks and acquired for the collection. If classical revolutions turned royal palaces into museums, the Maidan uprising started to become a museum object before it was even over. Its second phase—the counterrevolution—was yet to come.

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All images from the video *Integration*, 2014. Copyright of the author.

**Oleksiy Radynski** is a filmmaker and writer based in Kyiv. He is a member of Visual Culture Research Center, an initiative for art, knowledge, and politics founded in Kyiv, 2008. Since 2011, he has been an editor of Ukrainian edition of *Political Critique* magazine. His texts had recently been published in *Soviet Modernism 1955-1991: Unknown Stories* (ed. by Katharina Ritter, Ekaterina Schapiro-Obermair, and Alexandra Wachter, 2012), *Post-Post-Soviet?: Art, Politics, and Society in Russia at the Turn of Decade* (ed. by Marta Dziewianska, Ilya Budraitskis, and Ekaterina Degot, 2013); *Sweet Sixties: Spirits and Specters of a Parallel Avant-Garde* (ed. by Ruben Arevshatyan and Georg Schöllhammer, 2014). His latest films include *Incident in the Museum* (2013), *Ukraine Goes To War* (with Tomas Rafa, 2014), and *Integration* (2014).

1
See the original Facebook post (in Russian) here https://www.facebook.com/Mefistoff/posts/10201177280260151 .

2
Maidan's official name is Independence Square ( *Maidan N ezalezhnosti* in Ukrainian). However, the word " *maidan*" (square) acquired a special political meaning of its own, as described by Timothy Snyder: "Interestingly, the word *maidan* exists in Ukrainian but not in Russian, but even people speaking Russian use it because of its special implications. In origin it is just the Arabic word for "square," a public place. But a *maidan* now means in Ukrainian what the Greek word *agora* means in English: not just a marketplace where people happen to meet, but a place where they deliberately meet, precisely in order to deliberate, to speak, and to create a political society." See http://www.nybooks.com/articles/archives/2014/mar/20/fascism-russia-and-ukraine/ .

3
In recent years, Europe Publishers, a publishing house with close ties to the Kremlin, has had a monopoly on translating Zižek's books into Russian.

4
The presence at Maidan of the likes of John McCain and Victoria Nuland certainly contributed to this line of thinking in Russia and beyond—which doesn't mean these guests were warmly greeted or even noticed by the majority of the protesters.

5
See https://vimeo.com/52901358 .

6
In the *Guardian*, Owen Hatherley had recently outlined the architectural implications of Kyiv's revolts http://www.theguardian.com/cities/2014/apr/08/architects-revolt-kiev-maidan-square-ukraine-insurrection .

7
On May 1, 2013, artist Volodymyr Kuznetsov decided to reenact the notorious Labor Day march of 1986 as a gesture of remembrance. This march took place amidst the politically charged atmosphere of pre-Maidan Kyiv, with numerous groups, from the far Left to the far Right, trying to claim the Labor Day tradition as their own.

8
In the autumn of 1990, a group of students organized a hunger strike and a tent occupation of Maidan square, demanding, among other things, the resignation of the Ukrainian cabinet and more autonomy from Moscow. The authorities didn't crack down on the protesters, and after two weeks, their demands were met. The successful Occupy-style protest, which emerged victorious against the Soviet authorities twenty years before the actual Occupy movement was conceived, became a symbol of the Ukrainian transition from Soviet socialism to post-Soviet neocapitalism. But the blind spot of this transition was also exemplified in the hunger strike: the students starved voluntarily, while for many of their compatriots, hunger soon became a stark everyday reality.

Chus Martínez

# The Octopus in Love

The octopus is the only animal that has a portion of its brain (three quarters, to be exact) located in its (eight) arms. Without a central nervous system, every arm "thinks" as well as "senses" the surrounding world with total autonomy, and yet, each arm is part of the animal. For us, art is what allows us to imagine this form of decentralized perception. It enables us to sense the world in ways beyond language. Art is the octopus in love. It transforms of our way of conceiving the social as well as its institutions, and also transforms the hope we all have for the possibility of perceptive inventiveness.

### *1. Parts Being Totals*

Let us now imagine an institution composed entirely of well-functioning parts of other institutions—a strange new form of urbanism that take the shape of a gigantic museum. Parts, as well as departments, would coalesce into a gigantic yet identifiable choreography, recognizable as an "institution"—defined as a behavioral pattern so powerful that the viewer could easily embody the sense of interiority such institutions create. The image I am trying to convey here is not that of an institutional "quilt"—of several well-functioning parts spread over a territory and dependent on a larger bureaucratic container centralizing all assorted activities. Rather, this is an image of a formation, a system that unravels multiple codes simultaneously. All these systematics would be invisible at first. We would not be able to name any of these parts as such; to us, they would appear and function as totalities. The simultaneity of these multiple meanings—forms of understanding art and practice—and the simultaneity of languages that present the heteroclite nature of art both today and in the past, would render the structure that holds them together innocent or even absent. And so, these different institutions—or better yet, organisms—in their natural way of inhabiting a coordination and even successfully broadcasting it, would render insignificant the prototypical academic prejudices of level, character, or style. None of these organisms—our former museums, art centers, art projects, art societies, kunsthalles, and so forth—would be arranged in a hierarchical formation. At the same time, it would be difficult to claim that the equality of these organisms is determined by any standardization of working codes. None of these parts or totalities would be embedded in a didactic form of organization.

### *2. The Rainforest*

To present a rainforest inside a white cube is impossible. A rainforest is the radical other of a white cube: the opposite of culture, the opposite of an exhibit, the contrary of scale, the opposite of legibility, the opposite of ideology, order without subject matter—or rather, without any subject matter other than life in itself.

Utagawa Kuniyoshi, Fashionable Octopus Games (Ryûkô tako no asobi), 1840-1842.

In a conversation we once had, the artist Raphael Montañez Ortiz, who founded El Museo del Barrio, said that when the Museo was conceived, he thought that all its exhibitions should start with a rainforest. Or rather, that the preamble of any form of art presentation should pass through a rainforest. He did, in fact, collaborate with the American Museum of Natural History to this end, by creating a rainforest room with their help. Unfortunately, no images of it have survived. After telling me about his idea of the rainforest, he stared at me and asked: "Do you understand?" I did not—or at least, I did not at that moment.

For a long time, I have been wondering what he meant—surely not that one should reproduce nature or a representation of nature inside the gallery. I remembered the title of his two-volume dissertation, *Towards an Authenticating Art*, published in 1982. The book is an exhaustive account of his growing interest, from the late sixties on, in psychic healing therapies and rebirthing. He coined the term "Physio-Psycho-Alchemy," a physical reversal that can be carried out by means of the mind and its alchemic power. A rainforest at the core of an institution is also a reversal—an alchemic reversal of the institution, turned first into an organism so that later, a "room" can host art, artworks, and artifacts.

Claude Lévi-Strauss was also fascinated by the potentiality of reversal. He often wrote about chiasmus, a rhetorical figure used masterfully by Shakespeare. A chiasmus is a reversal that produces a total confusion of identity that aims, later on, to reestablish that identity under a renewed contract, so to speak. The Museo del Barrio—invented, created, and developed by Ortiz under the special circumstances of diaspora and the civil rights struggle for equality—may have been disguised as a rainforest before it was able to emerge as an institution at all. How else could a museum for a still-forthcoming community be possible? Disguised as a rainforest, the new organism could convey both the monumental importance of the project and the futility of presenting itself as "alternative." The transformative language that is required in order to change the art historical canon demands a radical metamorphosis—like that of becoming-nature—and not only a modulation in the narrative, or new additions to that canon. This museum of a certain future, which still needs to flourish under a yet-unknown relation between modern aspirations and vernacular language, was forced to appear as a rainforest first, before becoming an institution. The rainforest is the beggar that will become the sovereign. What, then, is the question? How will this presentiment of radical transformation find its fulfillment, or, at the very least, its mode of performance?

I then recalled the distinction between game and ritual in Lévi-Strauss. As Boris Weisman explains, Lévi-Strauss defines a game as a structure that produces symmetry among the players through its rules:

> An essential principle of every game is that the rules are the same for everyone; the starting point of every game is symmetry. The end result of a game is intended to engender asymmetry by producing a winner. This asymmetry is the product of non-structural factors: individual skill or talent, chance, or accident—in other words, an "event."[1]

Another kind of event—namely, death—is what gives rise to rituals:

> Death … brings about an asymmetrical relationship between the living and the dead, the sacred and the profane … The purpose of the ritual is to perform a series of pre-ordained "actions" (which are different from the "actions" or events that make up a game;

> since they are pre-determined they constitute an integral part of its structure), and thereby ensure that all the participants to the ritual end up being "winners."[2]

In the historical horizon of the museum-as-artwork that Raphael Montañez Ortiz proposed, it makes sense to believe that the rainforest provokes the institution to take ritual as its structure. The logic of the ritual may remedy or otherwise compensate for the social imbalance—disruption—that gave rise to the ritual (the rainforest/Museo). If the modern institution is one whose structure is closer to the logic of the game, in 1968 the emerging Museo embraced the ritual.

This play of inversion between game and ritual—the chiasmic logic—is intended here as a means of reconciling the vernacular and the modern: both can be used as models-for-thinking to address social and aesthetic paradigms. The former should no longer be regarded as belonging to an earlier, pre-scientific stage in an evolutionary process that invariably leads to the latter. Rather, both models must find a way—through art—to reflect one another in such a way that the vernacular provides a kind of inverted mirror image of the modern way of structuring and interpreting the real. The Lévi-Straussian message—channeled here through Ortiz's rainforest/Museo—is that the force separating vernacular from modern worlds is not time, or history, but rather, as Weisman puts it, "a synchronic system of symmetrical relationships of correlation and opposition."[3]

There are many ways to interpret Ortiz's vision of the rainforest as the preface to every exhibition. To put it simply, I think his rainforest introduces a very novel element into the existing discussion around the politics of the white cube. The debate has been a notably hard one, either taking architectural perspectives (as related to modernity) or flowing freely and responding to active discursivity and project-oriented energy (as in the late-nineties and the first decade of this century). Amidst all this, what the white cube discussion has lacked is precisely a rainforest: a principle that, in its radical otherness, defies the container, since the life force represented by a rainforest cannot be contained.

I still do not know exactly what to do about this incredibly beautiful image of a rainforest installed at the core of an art institution. It embodies all the difference in the world, separated from human agency and ideology, yet it also encapsulates the source of all that. It differs from the conventions of neutrality, and through its scale and its very nature it escapes from any formal canons. It compels a form of intelligence without consciousness to erupt into the white cube. "The rainforest," as Ortiz has said, "is an element that really helps us to think about class and labor and autonomy and dependency, just introducing a radically different viewpoint, the viewpoint of the rhythm of moisture."

In short, it seems very fertile to picture art that is outside the notion of culture. Can you imagine a white cube adopting a rainforest?

### *3. The Invention*

The rainforest marks one of the multiple ends of the era of critical philosophy. Critical philosophy seeks necessary conditions or general foundations in order to determine possible relations. Instead of casting solid architecture, it casts doubt—an enormous parenthesis that allows us to avoid entering into the details of things. A museum emerging from a diasporic community that suffers from social and legal inequality could not possibly start by presenting itself as an "alternative" to modern institutions. There were no shared general conditions that could produce a "new modern Museo"—not enough social, political, or aesthetic consensus. Thus, in 1968, the Museo was not an alternative art space, but rather, through the rainforest, a true invention. This idea of invention is given the greatest importance by French philosopher Michel Serres. He defines philosophy as aspiring to give birth to a world of politics and professional ethics, rather than remaining crouched in an immovable position from which it either approves or condemns modernity or rationality—or the clarity of all discourse, for that matter.

In philosophy as in life, and in life as in the sciences, I personally prefer invention accompanied by the danger of error, rather than rigorous verification paralleled by the risk of immobility. As Serres has pointed out:

> All around us, language replaces experience. The sign, so soft, substitutes itself for the thing, which is hard. Yet, I cannot think of this substitution as an equivalence. It is more like an abuse—a violence … The sound of a coin is not worth the coin; the smell of cooking does not fill the hungry stomach; publicity is not the equivalent of quality; the tongue that talks annuls the tongue that tastes or the one that receives and gives a kiss.[4]

It is very complicated to give an exact meaning of the word "invention," or to apprehend the central role that the senses play in Serres's writing. He argues for a reinvention of the site of relations between law and science. To invent, according to Serres, means to abandon the notion that philosophy has the right to judge. In the process, philosophy regains its ability to create. To invent is to produce that which will foster production, to formulate and express a system of laws, to understand and apply scientific possibilities.

Dominique Gonzalez Foester, Chronotypes and Dioramas, 2010. Dia Art Foundation, New York.

This simple mention of the rainforest represents the opposite of the critical project: a rejection of the narcissism that defines the re-institutionalization of the forms of knowledge and culture that transform artworks into cultural products, and exhibitions into ideological demarcations of experience. It is also the opposite of the demand that art be significant, that it deliver what we could call a "situation of reading," of extending meaning and memory into a sterile void. The image of the rainforest embodies an ongoing, performative speculation about ways of affecting and being affected, about ways of naming—a language, a place, a time. The viewer must find a language, imagine a place, and conceive a time, while at the same time producing a position far away from it all.

This, I suppose, is what we call invention.

*4. Thinking Through The Skin*

"For Serres," Laura Salisbury writes, "before language, before even the word, there was noise, a 'background noise, which precedes all signals and is an obstacle to their perception.'" She goes on: "This noise, against which previous philosophies have blocked their ears, is both the very possibility of language and also its interference; it is the multiple sound of the universe that 'the intense sound of language prevents us from hearing.'" [5]

"What is mathematics," Serres asks, "if not a language that assures perfect communication free of noise?"[6] In other words, as Salisbury explains,

> in order for these diverse systems of coding to speak to one another, the philosopher's work must establish pathways of communication between this network of systems; it must also read communication itself as an

Stirrup jar with octopus, ca. 1200–1100 B.C.; Late Helladic IIIC.

enactment of the turbulent relationship between contingent pockets or figures of order and the swirling disorder that is its ground.[7]

Serres writes that "noise is the basic element of the software of all our logic, or it is to the logos what matter used to be to form."[8] In this vein, Salisbury notes that for Serres,

> communication only emerges from background noise, from signs differentiated from an infinite cacophony of

Simon Blanc, Untitled, 2008. CGI wallpaper image.

> other signs and from the static that will not admit to being read as a sign at all … The analysis of the flows and thrusts, the prepositions that link together these turbulent systems, become, perhaps unexpectedly, part of Serres's project to construct "a decent philosophy of the object."[9]

Salisbury goes on to explain that in his book *The Five Senses*, Serres "demonstrates that sensory embodiment renders it impossible to stand in front of or outside the world, to free oneself from its entangled networks and the multiple spaces and times traced by the circulation of objects."[10] This thought, however, is very difficult to convey. Serres rejects analytic philosophy, which he identifies with the critical school. But he also distances himself from writers like Foucault and Deleuze. His thought operates within an intriguing and fascinating refusal of language. Salisbury again:

> Part of this refusal of language is a turning away from the discourse of phenomenology, which has a lineage that links the poststructuralism of Derrida back through Heidegger's fundamental ontology to Husserl. Serres tells Latour that the 'return to things' always runs up against the barrier of logic within philosophy; phenomenology, in particular, always filters sensory experience through structures of language.[11]

Serres refuses this "agreement" on which language depends, an agreement that petrifies objects and suppresses the chaos caused by the senses. In place of this refusal, the embodied subject is shown to feel, think, and construct itself through the already multiple effects of information dispersed and condensed, as well as the centripetal and centrifugal forces that make both center and periphery impossible to locate. These forces and processes are the sensory body's work of self-making and self-transformation.

Federico Peralta Ramos, Nosotros afuera, 1965. Installation view of the work at the Instituto Torcuato Di Tella, Agentina. Courtesy Peralta Ramos family.

*5. The Egg*

Federico Manuel Peralta Ramos, an Argentinian artist, created a large egg as his contribution to the final Instituto Torcuato di Tella show in 1965. The egg was entitled *We Are Outside*. Very little documentation remains of this piece, although there are a few pictures. At first sight, the pictures show the large egg alone with its maker on a thin plinth on the gallery floor. The black-and-white photographs show some dark areas in the plaster; the piece was not entirely dry at the time of the show. The few surviving friends who saw the piece recall that the work was made in such a hurry that it broke immediately after the jury declared it the "winner" of that year's final show. A relative of Peralta Ramos similarly told me that the artist miscalculated the tension between the metal structure and the plaster skin—the piece imploded right after the prize ceremony. Yet there is also a picture that shows Peralta Ramos destroying the piece himself. Either way, the work, too large to be moved, was made inside the gallery space and was always fated for destruction.[12]

Over the years, and because it was his last art object, the egg formed part of the myth surrounding Peralta Ramos. Some say he abandoned art (he later became an important character on a late-night television show), but in actuality, he did not. The egg brings to an end the anxiety of becoming a conceptual artist, a part of an international movement—a figure able to comment and contribute to a certain tradition. Like the rainforest, the egg is also an end of critical thinking. And also like the rainforest, the egg is an invention. It is an invention of a different kind: a more classical one, still organized around appearance and what is hidden—around enigma and truth. Unlike the rainforest, the egg depends on language; it establishes a dialogic form that calls attention to the physicality of the object—its texture, shape, and even its sound as a form inhabited by a void amidst the space. The egg actually speaks. It is the egg that says we are outside. The piece traces a clear correspondence between rationality (sense) as "outside" and irrationality (non-sense) as "inside." The momentum of meaning is delayed as the egg starts to fall apart, turning all possible narratives into debris. During this process of announcement, presence, and

disappearance, a movement of another sort arises: not production but seduction.

[figure 2014_05_histo2_25c_grWEB.jpg Federico Peralta Ramos, *Nosotros afuera,* 1965. Installation view of the work at the Instituto Torcuato Di Tella, Agentina. Courtesy Peralta Ramos family.
]

In the years following the egg, Peralta Ramos devoted himself to life, giving parties with his grant from the Guggenheim Foundation, but also meeting friends in cafes during the day and at cabarets at night. He performed living as an artwork while writing maxims on bar napkins, paper, and canvas. It all indicates that the egg was part of an avant-garde gesture focused on a personalized surrealist take on total autonomy, the destruction of art, and the overlapping of rules that separate form from content. But, apart from the obvious, the interesting part of all this lies in how Peralta Ramos ended up on the other side, so to speak. If "we are outside," it is because he—the egg/the artist—is inside. He did not stop making art; he just started making it from the other side. In this sense, the egg marks more of a beginning than an end. The egg—Humpty Dumpty—is, like Serres, tired of language, but still ultimately dependent on it. Like Humpty Dumpty, he and he alone can decide on the meaning of words. The egg can rename the world and invent it anew. However, since only he knows this meaning, the whole process may end up becoming a radically solipsistic effort. The world was invented that day. The egg stood in front of us—all of us, people from the past as well as the future. Peralta Ramos transfigured the world, changed the rules, and altered the universe in Buenos Aires—an act similar to the Psycho-Physio-Alchemy of Rafael Montañez Ortiz. And then?

Like La Rochefoucauld, Federico Manuel Peralta Ramos took refuge in maxims. This is not mere coincidence. Similar to the French thinker, Peralta Ramos had intuited how to transform negativity—nobody but him saw or felt the world change—into a voluntary force toward the good, toward living life as a second passion.

While living, he coined thousands of maxims. Sentences full of a "terse" wisdom: "Believe in an invisible world, beyond the fars and the nears"; "I am a start, since I only go out at night"; "I am a piece of atmosphere." People came to see him, at a cafe he used to go to every day, looking for a saying: a sentence he would often write to them on a piece of paper. They called him a street philosopher at times, a pacifist scholar at others. The sentences are quite stupid, in the best sense of the word. He was stupid because he needed to embody the expression of refusal without defensiveness. This form of refusal is much more difficult to locate, since it seems to appear as something not there or not understood or not contained.

[figure partialpage 2014_04_humpty-dumptyWEB.jpg Cover illustration by W.W. Denslow from the 1903 book *Denslow's Humpty Dumpty*.]

Another way of interpreting this production is to read all these sentences as maxims—sentences expressing the profound structure of a wisdom yet to come. This gigantic production of sentences written here and there, handed to all those who came to see him, express the vertigo of knowing that we can never give an ultimate definition of man. Their flow traces an endless trail of demystification. Without knowing Peralta Ramos, Roland Barthes wrote: "The infinite demystification which the Maxims stage for us could not fail to involve (to expose) the maxim-maker himself."[13] It may be useful to recall here that wisdom is different from knowledge, in that wisdom is impossible to describe as being "produced"—a distinction that is very present in the thought of Michel Serres. In a chapter entitled "Boxes" in *The Five Senses*, Serres states that the body "should not become a statue or tomb," because it "radiates wisdom." It is our duty not to "receive sense data as a gift, without reciprocating."[14] One could say, with Lauren A. Benjamin, that the sentences of Peralta Ramos conceived of "a philosophy rooted in the experience of the world (with a deep responsibility for giving back to that world—in whatever form—in return)."[15]

*Whatever form*, because the way the artist relates to the world is not as a participant, or a citizen, but as a visitor. Remember? He went inside the egg. The egg is a shell, like a spaceship, and spaceships often change direction while heading toward their destination. Like "Ulysses and Colombus, Bougainville or Cook," Peralta Ramos had, "together with all sea populations, the rare chance of inhabiting and travelling simultaneously."[16]

### *6. Of All Inhabitants of the Sea: The Octopus*

The octopus is a very friendly monster. It was not easy to convince a bunch of teenagers from a village on the Atlantic coast of Spain that an octopus could become a friend. They used to meet at breakwaters on the weekends, late in the afternoon. It was not dark, but dark enough to be unable to distinguish who exactly was sitting there and what they were doing. One of the village boys had an almost academic look, a remarkable trait in a group of school dropouts. They were all at the end of their teenage years. Their conversation oscillated between sex, death metal, family life, joblessness, and that octopus thing. In addition to being a huge part of the gastronomic tradition of the region, octopi represent a kind of bridge between the inhabitants of the sea and the inhabitants of the coast. Not that they were treated in a particularly friendly way. It was not uncommon to see a group of woman hitting octopi against the rocks. Their body fibers need to be broken, they say, otherwise they are inedible. Years later, it was said that freezing them was enough to guarantee a great texture once cooked. Two images were

iconic in that remote coastal spot in northwest Spanish: three or four octopi cooling on the windowsill, with their heads on a glass; and a large freezer full of octopi. I remember no less than thirty of forty in my own family's larder.

After a while, everyone was talking about that academic-looking boy becoming friends with an octopus. They said that the animal came to look for him at the same time every day. They said that the octopus came onto the shore every day to visit him. The boy took some photographs to prove to the others that the octopus "stared" at him. He claimed that they sat together on a cliff every day for hours, watching the sun go down. I remember him talking about it nonstop at bars, discos, and all the other gathering places one finds in a boring village. I loved the story, but I lost touch with him, since I only visited my family from time to time.

I recently came across new research on octopi in an article in *Wired*, published less than a year ago:

> The octopus is weird; it has an eerily malleable body, sucker-studded arms, skin that can transform into a convincing facsimile of seaweed—or sand—in a flash. It can solve mazes, open jars, and use tools. It even has what seems to be a sophisticated inner life. What's confusing about all of this is that the octopus has a brain unlike that of almost any creature we might think of as intelligent. In fact, the octopus brain is so different from ours—from most of the animals we're accustomed to studying—that it holds a rare promise. If we can figure out how the octopus manages its complex feats of cognition, we might be closer to discovering some of the fundamental elements of thought and to developing new ideas about how mental capacity evolved. "Part of the problem in working out what's essential to intelligence in the brain is working out which are the features that, if you took them away, you would no longer have an intelligent system," says Peter Godfrey-Smith, a philosopher at CUNY who studies animal minds. "What's essential as opposed to an accident of history?" Think about it: chimpanzees are, like us humans, primates. Dolphins are mammals. Even clever crows and ravens are at least vertebrates. But our last common ancestor with the octopus was probably some kind of wormlike creature with eye spots that lived as many as 750 million years ago; the octopus has a sophisticated intelligence that emerged from an almost entirely different genetic foundation. If you want to study an alien intelligence, Godfrey-Smith says, "octopuses are the closest thing we have."[17]

I quoted this research somewhere and, in a recent visit to my village, somebody left a name and a number for me to call as soon as I arrived. I did. "It's me," a male voice said, "the octopus friend." I recognized his voice. "You left your number?" I did not know quite what to say. "It is because of the octopus thing, you know. I saw you mentioned something, on Twitter. You know," he was talking slowly, "it changed my life. The octopus, I mean." Silence. "I was about to quit school, you know. But I decided to go on and do something after that summer. I was there sitting for hours and feeding that animal and I felt that I also should do something intelligent." "Did you take him home?" I asked. I felt stupid, even girlish, asking such a question. "Home? An octopus? No. Never thought of it actually. I just went to see him one day and he was not there anymore. I was shocked, but I guess it's normal. But I think of it every day, you know, even today. And I decided to become an electric engineer." I thought this was weird, but also the most logical conclusion in the world.

A large part of the neuronal mass of the octopus is spread throughout its eight arms. Unlike humans, the octopus brain does not have a centralized encephalization, which shows that a centralized brain is not the only evolutionarily advantageous form of intelligence. The octopus's unusual neuronal distribution allows for its eight arms to be "autonomous." They can carry out activities on their own, or coordinate among themselves, without needing the head to be involved.

It is very difficult to imagine this. It is like imagining a finger that is a self-sufficient totality, but also part of a body. It is like a small institution that is individually operated, but also an essential part of the cultural organism. This image shatters our notions of how information flows and how the senses think. It cannot yet be expressed efficiently in metaphoric language.

### *7. The Embrace*

> [Aesthetic autonomy is] the idea that art has its own sphere demarcated from other human activities and determines its own principles or rules. Art cannot be replaced by other activities without loss. Aesthetic experience should be explained by aesthetic terms or attributes, and art should be valued by itself alone. The idea is intended to protect art from being assimilated to scientific, religious, or moral functions and to insist that art has a different domain from science and morality.[18]

This definition exposes a cognitive demand, a demand that serves as the basis for judgment. And so, the question is how to judge without judgment, how to think without the critical method, how to speak without creating an order that excludes the disorder created by the senses.

Giuseppe Recco, Still Life with a Cat Stealing Squid , c. 17th century.

Judgment and its exercise are so deeply embedded in our way of understanding art, culture, and the outside-inside relationship between thought and body, object and thought, body and touch, that it seems almost counterintuitive to take seriously the demand to leave it behind. The Era of Judgment is the home of our complex institutional urbanism of aesthetics; it believes in order, not chaos, as the principle that secures the preservation of objects and values. It also perpetuates a cognitive attitude that prevents invention. The Era of Judgment, to borrow an idea from the historian Henry Focillon, is marked by the flow of time, by consecutive-ness. But it is also an era organized around the logic of transcendence, the game of oppositions between death and life, creation and noncreation—a logic that philosophy has tried many times to contest, especially since 1968. But Michel Foucault, in his critique of institutions and power, is more digestible and comforting than the later Giles Deleuze or Michel Serres on the matter of politics and invention. And art and artists have resisted the logic of transcendence, emphasizing, for example, the importance of not being creative—in other words, of *being* life without *generating* life, of being life without seeing an artwork as a "production."

Multiform and monotonous, repetitive of various forms of disorder, art since the mid-sixties—if not before—has sought ways to surpass the Era of Judgment, to find a path that preserves life and is able to transmute our sense of politics. Art, like quantum physics, looks towards photosynthesis to help in imagining new forms of time and perception. In other words, art tries to imagine the way it all connects, in order to preserve the values that we learn from our political past, but that are unable to define our

future. It is a future that we cannot even call a future because is not ahead of us, but inside.

And this is how I came to think about this new demand to travel beyond judgment, like the rainforest and the egg. It is one among millions of other demands that ask us to *become life*.

**X**

**Chus Martínez** is a Spanish curator with a background in philosophy and art history, and is currently Head of the Institute of Art at the FHNW Academy of Art and Design in Basel. Recently she was director of El Museo del Barrio in New York and dOCUMENTA (13) Head of Department and Member of Core Agent Group. Previously she was Chief Curator at MACBA, Barcelona (2008–10), Director of the Frankfurter Kunstverein (2005–08) and Artistic Director of Sala Rekalde, Bilbao (2002–05). For the 50th Biennale di Venezia (2005), Martínez curated the National Pavilion of Cyprus, and in 2010 served as a Curatorial Advisor for the 29th Bienal de São Paulo. She lectures regularly and has written numerous catalogue texts and critical essays.

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10
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11
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12
Another, very unclear image shows the piece as part of an ensemble that also includes a mural painting and an obelisk. Although there are no pictures of the obelisk, there is one of the painting, situated just behind the egg. The paint has the texture of molten rock forming a trail moving down the wall. The black-and-white image allows us to perceive the painting's dark colors, combined with brighter ones, but we are unable to imagine either its real tones or its effect next to the egg.

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Gleb Napreenko

# Back in the USSR?

Ever since Russia annexed Crimea and a quick clampdown started at home, the mass media, social media, and blogs have all been saying one thing: it's back to the USSR. The Olympics at Sochi are like Moscow in 1980, the trials of the May 6 protesters or of Pussy Riot like the show trials of 1937, and Russia's invasion of Crimea is the 1968 Soviet occupation of Czechoslovakia all over again. Like all metaphors, such analogies are political judgements, usually informed by liberal images of the USSR as a realm of necessity and violence, in contrast to the "normal," "Western" path of development. The regime, in turn, enlists fragments of the Soviet past (for example, the myth of the Second World War) and uses them for its own purposes, as tools for its great-power conservatism, skillfully manipulating the older generation's nostalgia, including that of Crimeans. If one looks more closely, it is easy to see that both liberal and Putinist-conservative understandings of the analogy between contemporary Russia and the USSR are mirror images of each other. I would like to problematize this analogy without rejecting it entirely, while leaving behind the binary oppositions between the USSR and the West—between us and them.

There are a few obvious things. Liberals like Irina Prokhorova like to imply that there is currently a general economic and political return to the Soviet Union, but this is simply not the case. True, capital and state are interwoven more than ever, and there are problems with doing business independently of the state. At the same time, Russia has joined the WTO, is cutting social spending, and is destroying free medical care and education. There is also something deceptive in the similarities between Putin's "vertical of power" and the nomenclature of the Soviet-era Communist Party, many former members of which are now part of the new system: a massive change in the base has prompted a mutation in the superstructure. The Soviet "vertical of power" was integrated into society and the economy in completely different ways, and despite all its superficial displays of power, it still set up a very different system of values for its members than United Russia, today's ruling party. It was, let's say, more responsible and less oriented toward personal luxury. More often than not, references to the return of the Soviet Union do not concern the economy or the political system, but culture, ideology, and the politics of identity. The Russian state really is using Soviet expertise to repress freedom of speech and manipulate facts. But there is a considerable difference in how state propaganda was constructed in the USSR and how it is constructed in the Russian Federation today.

Soviet mass media and other cultural institutions, including museums, may have silenced dissent and lied, but they retained Enlightenment ideals—maybe using them only as a fig leaf, but still: these were ideals of universal and universally accessible knowledge. Huge editions of fat periodicals and unread scholarly books full of diagrams and charts still burden the shelves of any provincial library, where they now stand next to Darya

Performers create a Russian flag during the opening ceremony in Sochi.

Dontsova's latest detective pulp. In terms of form, Soviet propaganda continued to believe, if only by inertia, in the possibility of universal human knowledge and universally applicable human truth. The real point of its content, though, was quite different, addressed as it was to a narrow circle of interested individuals. Statistical summaries in provincial papers would be full of hints about which *kolkhoz* head would receive an award, and which collective would receive a bonus—often a function of some corrupt scheme. One can see this flip side of Soviet bureaucracy exposed in the screenplays of Alexander Gelman, but exposed from the standpoint of late Soviet ideals, in the hope of recouping their meaning.

[figure 2014_05_KMSoulsWEB.jpg Komar and Melamid, *Souls Project,* 1979–81. Auction of American Souls in Moscow, May 19, 1979.
]

Today's propaganda lacks that dimension of generally human, universal truth—a dimension that allows Alain Badiou to talk about the truth of the October Revolution as an event addressed to the world at large, as opposed to the National Socialist coup d'état, which was addressed to only one nation. Contemporary Russia propaganda manipulates its audience with jingoistic language, appropriating rhetoric from the time of the Cold War as a weapon of nationalism. Of course, there was more than enough nationalism in Soviet propaganda under Stalin and afterward, but it was always linked to the specters of universal, global thinking: the specters of Marx. The new Russian propaganda does not follow Soviet principles of "propaganda and enlightenment," but instead the capitalist logic of "propaganda and entertainment." Like any commodity, this brand of propaganda is highly differentiated and oriented toward different target groups of consumers. It does not cater to producers, as was the case with those half-invented statistics in provincial newspapers.

I should clarify, to avoid misunderstandings: the question is not whether there was more or less freedom in the USSR than there is today; obviously, there are many more possibilities to express ourselves freely today, and we use them enthusiastically, although they are not available to all layers of society. The issue in question is the ideology of the state: compared to the flatness of the more and more openly nationalist ideology of Putin's Russia, Soviet ideology had an extra surplus dimension. Due to this dimension, Soviet artists related differently to the dominant ideology than Russian artists do today.


Collective Actions, The Slogan, Moscow region, 26 January, 1977.


Komar and Melamid, Slogans, date unknown.

In so-called Sots Art from the seventies and eighties, artists would appropriate Soviet ideology in such a manner as to reveal the paradoxical significance of its emptiness. They revealed this not only by appropriating the repressive symbols of power, but also by conveying a sense of the lost meaning of these symbols. The specter of this lost universal meaning is especially palpable in absurd privatizations of supposedly "universal" sayings, as in Komar and Melamid's *Slogans*, where the artists sign their names below familiar slogans like "All Hail Labor" or "Our Goal is Communism," thus actualizing the problematic of the universal and the particular. In Collective Actions Group's famous banner *I'm Not Complaining about Anything, and I Like It All, Even Though I've Never Been Here and Know Nothing of This Place,* there is a similar shifting of registers, from a slogan addressed to everyone to a purely personal confession. By deploying this rhetoric in such a paradoxical fashion, these artists revealed that the universal form of address, directed at the universal human being at the base of the Soviet project, had become empty. At the same time, these artists were fascinated by this emptiness; although the rhetoric of utopia had been hollowed out, it still retained its capacity to point toward some other, transcendental dimension.

Soviet artists (as well as filmmakers, writers, and composers) were forced by censorship to make these ambivalent, ambiguous gestures. There is nothing comparable in contemporary Russian art. Artists today engage in a buffoonish direct dialogue with power, as in Voina's *Priestocop* (Mentopop) or *C*CK Held Hostage by the FSB*, which emulate the logic of domination. Voina's pranks are constructed as mirror-images reflecting the brute, Gulag-style force with which the state thinks and acts today. In Maria Godovana's video about the Russian Duma's passage of legislation against "the propaganda of homosexuality amongst minors" and Putin's speech on the annexation of Crimea, there is no hidden dimension to Russian ideology; its otherness is that of a dumb and dangerous monster which inspires both mockery and fear. In Godavana's video, the speeches of Putin and the Duma representatives are inhuman productions of noise: anti-LGBT campaigner Mizulina speaks with a monstrously distorted baritone, while provocateur and political clown Vladimir Zhirinovsky patters and squeaks. Further examples of art that imitates power include Tanya Efrussi's *Sardinia Referendum*, which calls for the island of Sardinia to join Russia like Crimea did, and an action in which the anonymous Administration Group pasted up wanted posters in apartment-building stairwells targeting "individuals practicing non-traditional sexual relations." All of these contemporary gestures of subversive affirmation point toward the horror of identifying with the logic of power. But they do not open any of the lost territories within power that are forgotten by power itself, nor do they reveal any hidden layers of the unconscious, as the subversive affirmations of artists from socialist countries often did. The difference between the approach of Sots Art

or Collective Actions to all things Soviet, and the approach of contemporary artists to Putinism, reads as the difference between the study of a rhetoric hollowed out and robbed of truth, and a rhetoric that consists of lies to begin with.

This comparison between the Soviet Union and Putin's Russia may be a primitive construct, based on the principle of searching for similarities and differences between two objective and independent essences. Walter Benjamin rejected such an approach in his *Theses on the Concept of History*, and he was not alone. The past is not given to us as something separate from the present, and separating it is always an operation of sorting out traces: the simultaneous present traces of the distant past, the recent past, and that which is happening right now. These traces are grist for ideology—in both positive and negative senses of the word. Many contemporary photographers, including nonprofessionals, are concerned with discovering the rudimentary remnants of all things Soviet in the present. One recent example is a series by Rodchenko School student Dmitry Lukyanov, dedicated to the life of the provincial Soviet Houses of Culture. The series depicts typical community life under Soviet-enforced ideology, but also grassroots impulses of amateur creativity. Today, these impulses cannot find any new outlet. Instead, artists reproduce fragments of the past and try unsuccessfully to summon the departed specter of universality.

There are also more complex political statements about traces of the Soviet past in the present, examining not only the continuities but also the losses. Such was Dina Karaman's exhibition *Cinema to a Romantic*, which was recently shown at the Manege in Moscow. (The exhibition was overshadowed by a censorship scandal connected not so much to the show itself but to its curatorial text by Roman Minaev.) In each of the exhibition's three parts (a format determined by the architecture at the Manege), Romanticism appears in two inseparable forms: as a living impulse to reach the Other and truth, and as a repressive tool of the state, which appropriates that same truth to reinforce state ideology. For example, against the backdrop of an old slide—showing a modernist library in Ul'yanovsk, with pioneers marching across the foreground and the Trans-Volga region stretching to the horizon—the ecstatic voice of a contemporary tour guide tells children about the importance of family values. The entanglement of Romanticism as an impulse and Romanticism as an obligation refers to the Soviet cultural paradigm, where the pathos of speaking in the name of the people, speaking from below, ossified into the bureaucracy of the state apparatus. However, as contradictory as the exhibition's Romantic quality might have been, it revealed a core of genuine lyricism, one that only exists when it is called into doubt and disproven by itself. According to the artist, the exhibition's starting point was a video she made in the mountains: the moon over dimly lit branches, with clouds passing over the ridge. She made this video for herself and didn't think she would ever show it in public, where it would immediately look like shameless kitsch, losing any meaning whatsoever. But in the exhibition, that Romantic impulse receives a pardon; it is included in a system of doubts and ironies, thanks to which the impulse carries on. This dialectics at the heart of Romanticism defies the flat ideology of the Russian state, which tries to direct society's impulses toward the reproduction of the Soviet paradigm. Dina Karaman's work shows that universal truth and personal truth (the latter hidden from direct representation) need one another. Their encounter—the encounter of the universal and the intimate—unleashes an unresolvable conflict, which is a sign of the immanence of truth.

In this context, we might return to Komar and Melamid's *Slogans* or to the Collective Actions banner. At first glance, their intimization of the fragments of collective ideology seems absurd, but it points toward a fundamental shortcoming in the construct of total knowledge and universal truth that underlies the Soviet utopia: this utopia—Badiou's truth that addresses everyone universally—cannot work if it is detached from the most intimate of relations, if it isn't linked to the truth of each individual subject. In their works, Komar and Melamid and Collective Actions restore that lost link between subjective truth and universal truth. For ideology, such a restoration is a provocative act that refers back to the repressed.

Today's Russian authoritarianism does not appeal to any of the dimensions of truth, neither its universality nor its subjective intimacy. Instead, it operates in the horizonless register of illusions. We should hardly bemoan the loss of the state's monopoly over truth. But it presents a challenge to society, which must now reinvent a system of social relations—a place where the truth might live. As long as there is a void where the impulse toward the Other should be, this emptiness will be haunted by Soviet ghosts, and the state will try to enlist them in its service. But to uncritically repeat the myths of Russian totalitarianism's eternal return does nothing but distort the situation, blocking all ways out of our common predicament.

Voina, C*CK Held Hostage by the FSB, 2010. This 65-meter phallus was painted on the Liteyny drawbridge leading to the Bolshoy Dom, headquarters of the Federal Security Service in Saint Petersburg, on the night of June 14, 2010.

**X**

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**Gleb Napreenko** is a Russian art critic and art historian, born in Moscow, 1989. He has studied in the Art History Department of the Moscow State University and has published his writings on websites such as **openspace.ru** , **colta.ru**, and periodicals such as *Art magazine, Artchronika, and Dialog of arts* among others.

Liu Ding and Carol Yinghua Lu

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

*Socialist Realism was introduced into China in the first half of the twentieth century, and gradually became the main, overarching creative method of the revolutionary era, leading art, literature, theater, and other creative fields for decades. It is often seen as a highly politicized creative model that is the product of socialist, and particularly communist, political views. Over the past three decades, contemporary artists and art discussions often attempted to cast it off as an external form, positioning themselves in opposition to it in order to declare their independent, rebellious, free, and contemporary stance in their artistic practice. Many artists and critics have also engaged in a conscious rethinking of their socialist heritage within their artistic practice, either distancing themselves or avoiding it altogether, unwilling to admit Socialism's direct connection to contemporary times as an artistic tradition or ideology. Such an independent, rebellious, and free stance appears to be the foundation of the contemporary legitimacy of art. At the same time, we have not engaged in adequate observation and discussion of its internal logic. The current ambiguity of articulation concerning contemporary issues in art criticism in China is largely due to the delay in carrying out deep research and analysis of this historical process. In this paper, we propose to address the subject of socialist realism as a fundamental issue, exploring the historic practice and complexity of its formation.*

## *The Origins of Social Realism*

Engels predicted in 1859 that socialist literature would possess profound conceptual and predictive abilities, as well as a perfected artistic form. He believed that realism "implies, besides truth of detail, the truthful reproduction of typical characters under typical circumstances." That is to say, art reflects generalized reality rather than solely and simply a mimetic reproduction of a particular reality. It is a depiction that presupposes historical development and class struggle so as to "lay claim to a place in the realm of realism." Socialist Realism is socialist first, not realist. The intellectuals, writers, and artists who were entrusted with the duty of changing and educating the working class had to accept communist utopia as the ultimate truth as well as the inevitability of the revolution. Once both were accepted, then romanticization, with its embellishment and exaggeration of heroes and various beautiful imaginings, would not be fabrication but an actual reflection of a reality to come.

As a creative method, Socialist Realism was not just a Soviet invention promoted by the Communist Party. Early in the twentieth century, progressive intellectuals introduced realism into the field of literature, its sense of

Wu Yinxian, Hainan Province, 1976. Image courtesy of Wu Wei.

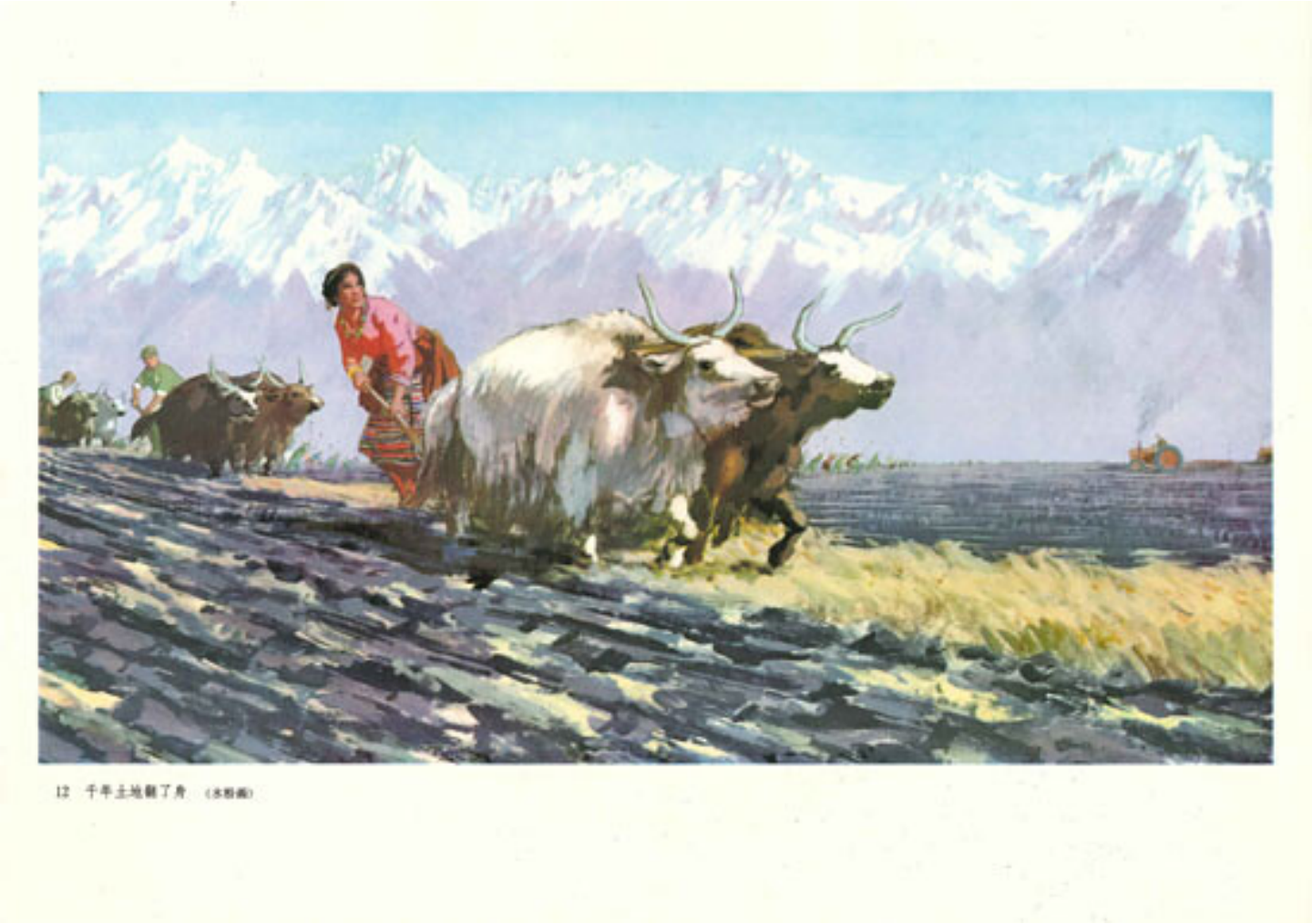
intimacy attracting many authors engaged in the fields of literature, drama, and art. For some, realism in China allowed for an escape from Western invasion and appealed to Chinese national values, including its culture. Others saw Western modern art as reflecting the modernization of the nation and a way to help overcome its feudalist structure. These complex, intertwined sentiments of admiration and hatred for Western nations—as both industrialized states and colonialists—filled the Chinese intellectual realm. Socialist Realism appeared within this context and appealed to Chinese artists' aspirations for the modernization of art. For intellectuals, it had a sense of presence in reality, and this in itself already proved quite alluring. Meanwhile, it fit with their deep desire to integrate their own ideals with their pursuit of change in reality and progress for the nation. An early definition of Socialist Realism accounted for this precedence, stating that Socialist Realism emerged

> between 1932 and 1934 in the discussion of creative methods among artists and writers in the Soviet Union, proposed by writers and theorists and agreed upon by Stalin. Though the Socialist Realist creative method was established in the 1930s, its basic traits had already taken shape in the creative practices of some writers before it was theoretically defined.[1]

In Russia, the First Congress of Soviet Writers in 1934 established Socialist Realism as the main creative style for Soviet literature, noting that the artist must not just understand life as an "objective reality" but also a reality within the developments of the revolution. On this occasion, Maxim Gorky stated that Socialist Realist literature was directly connected to the proletariat, and its ascension in world history as an independent political force. Hence, British Chartist poetry, German proletarian poetry, and the French literature of the Paris Commune were to be located as the beginnings of this new literary

form, which had to wait until the first Russian revolution to be able to affirm itself as the mature phase of this proletarian revolution.

control of the Soviet Union. The Communist Party of China was transformed from a subsidiary organization of the Communist International into a tight-knit, autonomous party with a solidified role for art and literature in its



Dong Xiwen, Thousand-year Old Earth has Turned Over, date unknown. Watercolor. This plate is extracted from the book Views on the Route of Long March (长征路线写生集), 1958.

*The Yan'an Conference on Literature and Art*

The Communist Party of China was established in 1921 as a branch of the Communist International founded by Lenin in 1919, with initial funding and guidance from the latter. A fracture arose when the Central Committee, controlled by personnel sent over by the Communist International, demanded that the Chinese Communist Party's struggles use Soviet tactics and directly serve the Soviet Union. When war broke out between Germany and the Soviet Union in 1941, the Soviet Union was too preoccupied to manage the affairs of the Chinese Communist Party and its Red Army, controlled by Mao Zedong and other local cadres. Mao Zedong took this opportunity to attack the internationalists within the party, led by Wang Ming, and coin a local Marxism—a "proletarian party" free from the political policies.

After these developments, the Chinese Communist Party carried out party-wide Marxism-Leninism pedagogic movements in 1942, 1950, and 1957 to solidify Mao's absolute leadership. As an important component of the Yan'an Rectification Movement, Mao personally hosted the Yan'an Conference on Literature and Art from May 2 to 23, 1942. Over a hundred art and literary workers as well as officials from various departments of the party attended. The objective was to resolve the theoretical and practical issues that Chinese proletarian art and literature had encountered in its development, including the relation of the artwork to the overall work of the party, its public and its dissemination, as well as the unification of content

and form, of praise and exposure. Mao Zedong's opening and closing remarks that May were combined and officially published on October 19, 1943 in the Yan'an newspaper *Liberation Daily*, marking the beginning of the new era of integration between new Chinese literature and the worker-peasant-soldier masses.

In the *Talks at the Yan'an Conference on Literature and Art*, Mao proposed:

> The life of the people is always a mine of the raw materials for literature and art, materials in their natural form, materials that are crude, but most vital, rich and fundamental; they make all literature and art seem pallid by comparison; they provide literature and art with an inexhaustible source, their only source. They are the only source, for there can be no other.[2]

This exposition has determined our later narrowness as we view contemporary art. Like Mao's absoluteness in the orthodoxy of the Communist Party's ruling and ideology in China, there is a tendency to exclude any different perspective and to recognize only one legitimate form, approach, and value, giving no space at all to diversions and differences. In the case of defining what is realist art for the Chinese art world, we often fall into the same logic of singularity, taking the biased view that content is the only testament to the continuation of the creative traditions of realism, while overlooking creations that engage in experiments with other aspects of a broader sense of realism.

Meanwhile, we narrowly define reality as that reality which exists before the eyes and in the lives of the masses. Despite the fact that the reality depicted by Socialist Realism actually includes subjective ideas and faces the so-called reality of communist ideals, Socialist Realism as a creative approach is far less definite than we have estimated and previously understood. Bureaucracy and censorship, as well as the resulting artistic views that arose in the 1940s around the principle that art should serve politics, have proven much more stable. After several decades of security, the various operations—from policies on art to art patronage projects, the Artist's Association, the National Fine Arts Exhibitions, sponsorship, the censorship regime, and the art museum system—formed an unshakeable inertia. The art and discussions of art cultivated within this system have come to occupy more widely disseminated fields such as textbooks, mass media, and museums.

The *Talks at the Yan'an Conference on Literature and Art* stressed:

> All our literature and art is for the masses of the people, and in the first place for the workers, peasants and soldiers; it is created for the workers, peasants and soldiers … Once we have solved the problems of fundamental policy, of serving the workers, peasants and soldiers and of how to serve them, such other problems as whether to write about the bright or the dark side of life and the problem of unity will also be solved. If everyone agrees on the fundamental policy, it should be adhered to by all our workers, all our schools, publications and organizations in the field of literature and art and in all our literary and artistic activities. It is wrong to depart from this policy and anything at variance with it must be duly corrected.[3]

This talk was established as the sole source for artistic and literary creation. It resulted in top-down orders that colluded to limit artistic creation to a narrow framework at the service of ideology, and determined that the ensuing artworks should, in content and form, be easy to disseminate. In the *Talks*, Mao particularly emphasized the "question of who art and literature is for," pointing out that literature "consists fundamentally of the problems of working for the masses and how to work for the masses." The reading public was endowed with intangible political rights and critical authority. Consequently, publications established sections for "letters from readers," turning readers into important writers of art criticism, making for a unique critical method in magazines such as *Fine Arts* ( *Meishu*).

### *Dong Xiwen and Wu Yinxian and the Beginning of Realism in China*

Let us look back again on the early days of realism's introduction into China. Its artistic properties held a strong appeal for the intellectuals, writers, and artists of the day. As the revolution progressed and the Communist Party further defined Socialist Realism, it gradually evolved from an artistic style into an ideology with clear viewpoints. It was the clothing of ideology, as well as ideology itself. This transformation of its role was total, because it began expressing powerful exclusivity and producing confusion. In order to fit with the political mode it represented, it not only expressed the ideology it represented, but also became that ideology itself, consolidating the mechanisms of that ideology. It put on its poker face, equating itself with correctness and singularity, through which it gained absolute authority. This is why the question of right and wrong began to emerge in these creations, with political views, goals, and functions coming to occupy the leading position in these creations. Creation itself began to follow political guidance. Its boundaries grew increasingly visible, and like a talisman, they came to regulate and define the range of artists' thoughts and

Wu Yinxian, Hainan Province, 1976. Image courtesy of Wu Wei.

creations.

Today, most accounts of people like Wu Yinxian and Dong Xiwen go only as far as the political foundations of their creations, treating their work the same as that which purely served ideological ends. Few of Wu Yinxian's contemporaries or successors had such a rich early education in Eastern and Western art, nor did they establish their later work on an artistic foundation—instead treating photography as a political task, an operation for the expression of political intentions. Even today, most photography services are run by photojournalists or even sports photographers. To summarily relegate the work of such artists as Wu Yinxian and Dong Xiwen to the category of ideological tools is to fall into the same absolutist and simplified approach to understanding as is applied in Socialist Realism.

After the establishment of the People's Republic of China, the literary and art workers streaming into Beijing from the liberated zones brought revolutionary artistic ideas to the capital. In the spirit of the times, Socialist Realist painting came to carry the idea of the "nationalization of oil painting" advocated by many artists in the early days of the People's Republic, allowing this European art form to constitute the most convincing medium for its entry into the realm of Chinese art at the service of political ends. The artists steeped in early Western modernism found political momentum for turning what they learned abroad into something Chinese. Placed on important platforms, they were, on the one hand, considered within the ideological framework. On the other, they were also able to refine and ponder artistic practice itself.

Dong Xiwen, for instance, became a household name in China in the 1950s and '60s for his oil painting *The Founding of a Nation*. Although he did not study abroad in Europe, Dong spent time in French-ruled Vietnam, where he studied at a French art academy. Between 1943 and '45, Dong researched and copied the art of Dunhuang, whose depictions of the human form he "highly praised, ... seeing the artists' great ability to render smooth flesh and elastic color tones with simple lines and colors as worthy of admiration."[4] From the murals at Dunhuang he absorbed the aesthetics of traditional painting, and learned the traditional modeling techniques that were to constitute his aesthetics:

> Through his research of the murals, Dong Xiwen deepened his understanding of the traditional art of his people, laying the foundation for his reverence for ethnic culture. It was this reverence that led him, when studying foreign oil painting, to consciously infuse oil painting with the forms and spirit of Chinese art, giving oil painting a Chinese style and artistic spirit.[5]

Though there was overlap between Dong Xiwen's pursuit of the "nationalization of oil painting" and the Communist Party's demands that literary and artistic creation fall into the service of politics, the artist's individual practice was not always entirely in accord with the nation's political standards. In "Self-Examination," published in *Fine Art Research*, Dong Xiwen confronted the influence of Western art forms and problematized his previous emphasis on style, individuality, and emotion. He wrote,

> Though I criticize recent European painting schools such as Impressionism and Post-Impressionism, when I saw the original works, I was full of uncontrollable excitement. When the "double-anti" campaign began ... I suddenly saw the capitalist artistic path I had taken over a decade ago, and that I still continued to follow. In the relationship between conceptuality and form, and on the question of political standards and artistic standards, I used the emphasis on formal appeal to dilute the primacy of the former. These capitalist views on art, still strong today, are clearly at odds with Chairman Mao's path for literature and the arts, and Socialist Realism's creative path.[6]

The late historian Gao Hua wrote that China's real proletarian cultural narrative was spread to China from Moscow and Japan. The narrative of class struggle emphasizes imperialism's suppression of and encroachment into China and the Chinese people's painful memories of it, while also providing an idealist vision for changing society. In theory, it is called communism, but in practice, it is actually "Soviet," and that was basically the case for the left wing for ten years (1927–1937). Into the 1930s, the left wing added another appealing banner: "resisting Japan for national survival," infusing the leftist revolutionary narrative with nationalist elements. From that perspective, the left occupied moral high ground in two places: anti-imperialist patriotism and egalitarianism.

Before 1949, leftist culture occupied a large space in Chinese intellectual consciousness precisely for these two reasons.[7] China also had its own background, the tradition of "writing as the carrier of the truth," a tradition of changing society through literature. In the early twentieth century, there was just such a movement for literature and art's intervention and participation in social reform. The years 1927 to 1937 were China's "red thirties," a decade of literature and art intervening in society and social reform, when many writers and artists entered more directly into the social revolution. Born to a scholarly family in Shuyang County, Jiangsu Province, Wu Yinxian enjoyed a rich artistic upbringing. In 1919, he was accepted into the Shanghai Professional Academy for Fine Arts, a school founded by Liu Haisu, where he received standard training in the fundamentals of painting. During his studies, he bought an old American Brownie camera at a secondhand

Dong Xiwen, Jia Ling River in Chong Qing, date unknown. Oil on canvas. This plate is extracted from the book Views on the Route of Long March (长征路线写生集), 1958.

market, and began to use photography and film to document the suppression of the poor by the rich, the warlords, and the Japanese invaders.

In March 1933, the Chinese Communist Party Cultural Council established an underground film group run by Xia Yan, Qian Xingcun, Wang Chenwu, Shi Linghe, and Situ Huimin. They began contacting progressives in hopes of producing an anti-imperialist and anti-feudalist film for the masses and making use of realist expressive methods. In an atmosphere of unprecedented anti-Japanese sentiments and a surging patriotic movement, they firmly established the Communist Party's status as the spokesman for the growing dissatisfaction.

In 1935, after Wu Yinxian and Xu Xingzhi's work was displayed at the *Photography and Painting Exhibition*, Xia Yan approached Xu Xingzhi, suggesting that both photographers move from Unique Film Productions to the Diantong Film Company to film the movie *Sons and Daughters in a Time of Storm,* with a script by Tian Han. Wu Yinxian accepted, and worked as the film's cinematographer. Set against the backdrop of the Mukden Incident of 1931, it tells the story of an intellectual's progression from hesitation to awakened struggle and revolution through the story of wandering poet Xin Baihua, reflecting the popular will to resist the Japanese invasion. *Sons and Daughters in a Time of Storm* was Wu Yinxian's first work as a filmmaker, and was also:

> An important part of Wu Yinxian's transformation. He began the shift from being a patriotic youth with a sense of justice and national awareness to gradually realizing that only by throwing himself into the torrents of the people's movement could he carry out his responsibilities to his people and society.[8]

In the filming process, Wu Yinxian "pondered Xia Yan's words, and came to feel the weight of his responsibility."[9]

After this, Wu Yinxian filmed *Street Angel* and the documentary *Long Live China*, which criticized China's social inequality and praised the Chinese Revolutionary Forces in their efforts to resist the Japanese and save China. Nationalist Party censors derided *Long Live China* as "communist propaganda," and destroyed all the negatives and copies—no footage of this film survives today. In the summer of 1938, Deputy Communist Party Military Commissioner Zhou Enlai invited Yuan Mu to travel to Yan'an, the Shaanxi-Gansu-Ningxia border area, and the Northern China Rear Guard Zone to film a documentary on the Eighth Route Army under the command of the Communist Party. Yuan invited Wu Yinxian, who arrived in Yan'an in the fall of 1938, planning to return to Shanghai after filming on *Yan'an and the Eighth Route Army* was complete. But he was touched by the life of battle in the revolutionary stronghold, and decided to stay, joining the Communist Party in 1942 and continuing to work in party-related films, reflecting the political, economic, and cultural life in Yan'an. During these eight years, Wu Yinxian merged with his subjects, facing the tests of battle alongside those he photographed. Deeply influenced by Marxism, Leninism, and Maoist thought, he transformed from a progressive leftist youth into a "proletarian warrior who struggled for the photographic endeavors of the party with staunch resolution." He founded the Northeastern Film Studio, and in the subsequent decades worked in the field and wrote a nearly one-million-word theoretical treatise on photography that became an important manual for the theory and practice of photography.

In 1955, Wu Yinxian travelled to Beijing to take part in the creation of China's first higher education institution for film, the Beijing film Academy, where he served as deputy director and directed the photography department. When the Cultural Revolution began, Wu Yinxian and his fellow cultural workers were no longer able to openly engage in education and photography. He was required to take part in labor activities and write reports on his thinking. In 1969, Wu Yinxian wrote a letter to Jiang Qing, hoping to gain the right to continue working:

> Comrade Jiang Qing: I would also like to report a personal matter. Though I am old, and unable to carry heavy cameras myself, I am free of disease, have good blood pressure and an overall healthy body. I very much hope to contribute my personal abilities to your filming of the revolutionary model operas, for instance helping the photography comrades, and exploring such aspects as composition, camera movement and lighting. I also hope that through my participation in the filming of the model operas, I can raise my own political awareness, becoming someone who can do more beneficial work for the party in the future.[10]

In the later years of the Cultural Revolution, Wu Yinxian became one of the first academy administrative cadre members to be released from manual labor and suspension from work. At Jiang Qing's request, the Beijing Film Academy and other art academies were dismantled, and the 57 Art Academy was built, with Wu Yinxian serving as deputy director. Because of this experience, Wu Yinxian was not immediately rehabilitated at the end of the Cultural Revolution, unlike many of his peers who had been mistreated during that period, and his position was not restored until he wrote a letter to Hu Yaobang explaining his situation.

In *Unstoppable Concern: Intellectual Life and Politics Before and After 1949*, Yang Kuisong writes,

> In the recent era, Chinese political change has always begun in a violent fashion. Into the twentieth century, it became even more of a violent seizure of political power. Thus, gun barrels, rather than pens, became the main determining political means.

Within this brutal political reality and political logic, Wu Yinxian and other intellectuals and artists had to choose their areas, and to carry out their work in ways that politically benefitted those fields. Their work and values were often covered over by their political standpoints—examined and observed through the logic of revolutionary thinking. Even today, their creative achievements are overlooked and they are shunned according to the revolutionary values that still course through the blood of the majority of people.

Still, Wu Yinxian, who was present at the Yan'an Conference and filmed the proceedings, never forgot in his later practice Mao Zedong's exhortation to serve the people with art. After Yan'an, he always played a principle role in the party's film and photography endeavors. His artistic insight, his research on the theory and practice of photography, never became dogmatic, mechanical, or devoid of his own viewpoints. To the contrary, the artist's early education in Shanghai and his own independent studies retained their relevance.

A look at Dong Xiwen and Wu Yinxian reminds us that in approaching the creations of this period, we should not overlook the complexity of the creators while looking at the goals and viewpoints of these creations. Even when engaging in creations to carry out political tasks, there was still a dynamism to the art and thinking, and artists were able to exercise a certain amount of subjectivity. Even if the artist as an individual was working to express the political authority he served, his artistic experiences and aspirations still played a role in his work. In their creative processes, their pursuit of diversity in artistic forms and

Wu Yinxian, Untitled, from the series Sailing Boat, 1949–1950. Image courtesy of Wu Wei.

artistic tastes often clashed and contradicted with the powerful constraints placed on art by the political structure of the times, and these real experiences, the struggles and reflections of the artists within this process, and the results that emerged from these competing forces, came to form our experience of the artistic creations of the era. Within the internal party mechanisms for controlling speech and ideas, self-examination and self-criticism are highly effective methods. For instance, in "Self-Examination," Dong Xiwen wrote,

> The political and artistic aspects of art should be unified, nevertheless, political standards should come first, but in the question of conceptual and artistic, political standards and artistic standards, I still place great emphasis on the latter, while merely paying lip service to the former. Though I say that I believe the direction of Socialist Realism to be the correct one, I have always felt that our average artworks are monotonous in style and lacking in form, rarely possessing the personality and emotions of the artist.

Dong Xiwen used writing, teaching in the academy, and presenting artworks to continue progressing and practicing artistic experimentation in this political atmosphere and sense of self-contradiction, and thus added to the formation of artistic discourse. Around the time of the nation's founding, the goals and directions of artists' work were the same as those of the ruling party, full of duty and hope for the rise of the nation, and the pursuit of the modernization of art. In later years, even as individual artistic pursuits fell under government suspicion and became the target of criticism, the relationship between these individual artists and the government was an internal one. They never became opposing camps pursuing different political ends. Throughout this time, the government hoped to limit the boundaries of art and ideas, while the artists, in their work, always hoped to gain more, and because of this, they often collided with the limits of

Dong Xiwen, Spring Arrives in Tibet, date unknown. Oil on canvas. This plate is extracted from the book Views on the Route of Long March (长征路线写生集), 1958.

government tolerance. This collision was always the result of artistic demands, not political ones. This internal, parallel, but sometimes abrasive relationship can also be used to describe the later relationship between art and government, which was sometimes peaceful and sometimes not so peaceful.

*The Superstructure for Art and Its Discourse*

There are several characteristics and issues in our understanding and description of the creative trends that have taken place in Chinese contemporary art over the past thirty years. First, discussion of art has been profoundly shaped by two narrative types that have occupied a definitive position in modern Chinese history. These two narrative types are the "revolutionary narrative" and the "modernization narrative," as described by art historian Gao Hua. Gao has made a profound yet simple analysis of the roots and lasting impact of these narratives:

> The so-called "revolutionary narrative" arose from the 1920s to 1940s, and is the revolutionary history of the left. Various "organic" or "organized" new intellectuals such as Qu Qiubai, Zhang Wentian and He Ganzhi imported a series of concepts and categories from new leftist theories in the Soviet Union and Japan, constructing a system for leftist forces to apply to understanding the reality, past and future of China, with the core theme being the legitimacy and inevitability of revolution in China.[11]

Socialist Realism represents the expressive methods of this system of understanding and interpretation. Gao believes that the "revolutionary narrative," owing to its roots in an era of revolutionary struggle, is marked by strong tones of political mobilization. Beginning in the mid-1950s, the "revolutionary narrative" began a slide towards ossification and dogmatism. The "revolutionary narrative" engaged in an excessive pursuit of a "grand

Wu Yinxian, Island Militias, 1976. Image courtesy of Wu Wei.

narrative," establishing a standpoint before engaging in research and discussion:

> Guided by authoritative descriptions or authoritative documents, it selectively cut and pasted historical material in order to affirm a certain authoritative description, simplifying the complex processes of history into an explanation of "inevitability" while covering over many rich and fresh historical layers.

The other main narrative model in modern history, the "modernization narrative," was introduced into China in the early 1980s. The end of the Cultural Revolution is often viewed as the starting point for contemporary art, and the continued use of this chronology has led to the oversimplification of its complexity. By placing the beginning of Chinese contemporary art in 1976, and by placing contemporary art together with the universally described loosening of the social atmosphere, liberation of ideas, and the people's strong desire to escape the past after the end of the Cultural Revolution, contemporary art and the contemporary art field have gradually been turned into symbols, and to a certain extent, this practice has come to hinder creative practitioners and art critics themselves.

This narrative uses the global and universal historical process that is modernization to describe the modernization process that China carried out under strong a influence from other countries, using it to expound upon China's experiences and lessons from over a century of modernization. This narrative model views China's recent history through the lens of close connections to the world, and has been applied to Chinese modern and contemporary art, particularly in the description of creative forms and artistic movements from the mid-1980s to the present.

The weakness of this method is that it magnifies the universal applicability of the European and American modernization process, and fails to place the logic of China's own modernization process in the proper light. The limitations of this narrative model led to many anxieties in Chinese culture and art circles in the 1990s regarding China and the West, how to construct a self-oriented history, and how to engage in a suitable self-narrative.

We believe that the trajectory of Chinese contemporary art, from creation to discussion, did not take place entirely removed from Socialist Realism, but that it has continued to follow Socialist Realism and the pursuit of modernity as its evolution was shaped by China's political environment. Describing contemporary art as a "rebellious and progressive" set of ideas and actions is actually in keeping with Socialist Realism's historical demand to present reality in creative work. In existing accounts, contemporary art's birth after 1976 was to become the best "witness" to the openness of communist society, where "dissidents and rebels" had become integrated into the reality of society itself.

Dong Xiwen, Kazak Shepherdess, date unknown. Oil on canvas. This plate is extracted from the book Views on the Route of Long March (长征路线写生集), 1958.

**X**

*To be continued in "From the Issue of Art to the Issue of Position: The Echoes of Socialist Realism, Part II." This text was translated from the Chinese by Jeff Crosby.*

**Liu Ding** is an artist and curator based in Beijing. His artistic and curatorial practice treats objects, events, and discourses of art history and the foundation of historicization both as materials and as the basis for critical reflection. He initiated the research and exhibition project titled *Little Movements: Self-practice in Contemporary Art I, II,* in collaboration with Carol Yinghua Lu. He co-curated the 7th Shenzhen Sculpture Biennial, titled *Accidental Message: Art is Not a System, Not a World.* Publications written and edited by him include *Little Movements: Self-practice in Contemporary ArtI, II, Accidental Message: Art is Not a System, Not a World,* and *Individual Experience: Conversations and Narratives of Contemporary Art Practice in China from 1989 to 2000.*

**Carol Yinghua Lu** lives and works in Beijing. She is the contributing editor for Frieze and is on the advisory board for the *Exhibitionist.* Lu was on the jury for the Golden Lion Award in 2011 Venice Biennale and the co-artistic director of 2012 Gwangju Biennale and co-curator of the 7th Shenzhen Sculpture Biennale in 2012. Since 2012, she is the artistic director and chief curator of OCAT Shenzhen. Lu was the first visiting fellow of Asia-Pacific at Tate Research Centre in 2013.

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Jalal Toufic

# A Hitherto Unrecognized Apocalyptic Photographer: The Universe

"[Paul Gsell:] 'Well, then, when in the interpretation of movement he [the artist] completely contradicts photography, which is an unimpeachable mechanical testimony, he evidently alters truth.' 'No,' replied Rodin, 'it is the artist who is truthful and it is photography which lies, for in reality time does not stop, and if the artist succeeds in producing the impression of a movement which takes several moments for accomplishment, his work is certainly much less conventional than the scientific image, where time is abruptly suspended.'"[1] While I tend to concur with this Rodin view generally, I do not agree with his assertion that "in reality time does not stop." To disagree with this assertion, I do not have to invoke the freezing in dance and undeath, under silence-over; I can invoke relativity. The Schwarzschild membrane of a black hole is an event horizon not only because once an entity crosses it that entity can no longer communicate back with us this side of it, but also because from our reference frame the entities at the horizon do not undergo any events, being frozen due to the infinite dilation of time produced by the overwhelming gravity in the vicinity of the black hole. Was photography invented not so much to assuage some urge to arrest the moment, but partly owing to an intuition that it already existed in the universe, in the form of the immobilization and flattening at the event horizon? "Windbag, watching Goulash from a spaceship safely outside the horizon, sees Goulash acting in a bizarre way. Windbag has lowered to the horizon a cable equipped with a camcorder and other probes, to better keep an eye on Goulash. As Goulash falls toward the black hole, his speed increases until it approaches that of light. Einstein found that if two persons are moving fast relative to each other, each sees the other's clock slow down; in addition, a clock that is near a massive object will run slowly compared with one in empty space. Windbag sees a strangely lethargic Goulash. As he falls, the latter shakes his fist at Windbag. But he appears to be moving ever more slowly; at the horizon, Windbag sees Goulash's motions slow to a halt.... In fact, not only does Goulash seem to slow down, but his body looks as if it is being squashed into a thin layer. Einstein also showed that if two persons move fast with respect to each other, each will see the other as being flattened in the direction of motion. More strangely, Windbag should also see all the material that ever fell into the black hole, including the original matter that made it up—and Goulash's computer—similarly flattened and frozen at the horizon."[2] By superimposing the reference frame of the outside observer and that of the astronaut approaching the black hole, one has at the event horizon a flattening and a suspension of motion—a photograph—of the still moving three-dimensional person who crossed into the black hole. The universe automatically takes the astronaut's photograph as he crosses its border, the event horizon, in a sort of paradigmatic farewell. Do photographs induce nostalgia because they show a moment that has vanished? Both relativity, with its spacetime,[3]: 41–42).] and Zen master Dōgen, with his time-being ( *uji*),[4], in *Moon in a Dewdrop: Writings of Zen Master Dōgen* [New York: Macmillan, 1985]], 76–77).] tell us that that moment

has not vanished. I rather think that this gloomy nostalgia is linked to an intuition of the resonance of the man-made photographs with the aforementioned naturally occurring photographs, which signal the irretrievable loss to the universe of the one who has been thus photographed. From a local reference frame, an artistic rendering in the Rodin manner of the astronaut at the event horizon might very well be less conventional, more truthful, than a photograph of him; but from the reference frame of an outside observer, a photograph of the astronaut at the event horizon is less conventional than an artistic rendering of him in the Rodin manner, for at the event horizon not only is the person flattened, but also time is so slowed it comes to a standstill.

If the radical-closure work presents only one, exclusive frame of reference, then the crossing into such a closure happens in a lapse of consciousness, in other words, is missed, one finding "oneself" to the other side without having been introduced there; but if two reference frames are provided, then the crossing both does not happen and is continuous! From the reference frame of an outside observer, those at the black hole's event horizon are flattened and frozen, turning into quasi photographs; but from their local reference frame they have gradually crossed that boundary as three-dimensional persons. In Robbe-Grillet's universe, from one perspective, exterior to the radical closure, the protagonists and the objects are frozen and flat; but from another perspective, interior to the radical closure, they are three-dimensional and undergo events ("I am closing the door behind me, a heavy wooden door with a tiny narrow oblong window near the top, its pane protected by a cast-iron grille.... The wood around the window is coated with a brownish varnish in which ... I have discerned human figures for a long time: a young woman lying on her left side and facing me, apparently naked.... From the left part of the frame spreads a cone of harsh light ... : the shaft of light has been carefully directed, as though for an interrogation.... Yet it cannot be an interrogation; the mouth, which has been wide open too long, must be distended by some kind of gag.... Besides, a scream, if the girl were screaming, would be audible through the thick pane of the oblong window with its cast-iron grille. But now a silver-haired man in a white doctor's coat appears in the foreground from the right.... He walks toward the bound girl"[5]). If, in the narrative, there is a subsequent freezing that is again accompanied by a flattening, the reader would be once again looking from outside the radical closure. This would indicate that the fiction writer has not relinquished the ubiquity and omniscience of the traditional novelist, but truly accomplished it: what could be a clearer sign of an omniscience of the narrator than to be able to report on what is happening to either side of the event horizon?

There is a sort of photograph that is specific to a radical closure: the photograph that irrupts in it without being shot by anyone within it[6,7] Were one to want to list David Lynch's photographs, one should include not only those that were shown in exhibitions and/or published,[8] but also *Lost Highway*'s photograph of the two look-alike women, and *Twin Peaks: Fire Walk with Me*'s photograph handed by the old woman and the child, who suddenly appear on the sidewalk, to Laura Palmer, and in which she later appears. Similarly, in order to complement one's view of Robbe-Grillet the writer and filmmaker by Robbe-Grillet the painter and photographer, one has to include as part of his oeuvre the paintings, ostensibly by others (Magritte ...), that irrupted in his novels ( *La Belle Captive* ...),[9] and the photographs that resulted from the freezing and flattening of various characters at the gateless gates of radical closures in his novels as well as those that irrupted in his films, for example, the photograph that the woman's suitor hands her to convince her they met the previous year at Marienbad and that was taken by no one, not even "the third who walks always beside you" (T. S. Eliot)—her husband?[10] While made possible by the radical closure presented by the film, these photographs do not fit fully in the film in which they irrupted, making the latter a mixed media work. The absence of any mention of, let alone a separate section on the photographs in Robbe-Grillet's *Last Year at Marienbad*, *L'Immortelle*, and *The Man Who Lies*; the photographs in Lynch's *Twin Peaks: Fire Walk with Me* and *Lost Highway*; and the photograph of Jack Torrance among the other guests at the July 4th ball that took place in 1921 at the Overlook Hotel, where he apparently first arrived as a middle-aged man sometime in the 1970s, in Kubrick's *The Shining* is a significant omission in historical surveys of photography. Francis Bacon frequently painted not directly from models but from photographs of them taken by other, camera-wielding humans ("I've had photographs taken for portraits because I very much prefer working from the photographs than from models"), in the process allowing, from a reference frame external to the radical closure, the fashioning of the figure into a photograph at that radical closure's border, as in *Study for Self Portrait 1982*, 1984, *Study from the Human Body after Muybridge*, 1988, and *Triptych*, 1991, where the figure is three-dimensional in the left panel, but two-dimensional in the right one (what is presented consecutively in Robbe-Grillet's novelistic radical closures is presented simultaneously in Bacon's artistic radical closures);[11] or the irruption in the radical closure of a photograph not taken by anyone,[12] often in the form of a portrait hung on the wall ( *Three Portraits: Posthumous Portrait of George Dyer, Self-Portrait, Portrait of Lucian Freud*, 1973, and *Three Studies of Isabel Rawsthorne*, 1967).

The scientists at the space program had asked the astronaut to take a fitting pose once he was almost at the event horizon, as he would appear, from an outside reference frame, as a photograph (that would look increasingly dimmer and redder as he got ever closer to the event horizon from their reference frame), and had programmed the main computer on the spaceship to provide him when he had gone beyond the Schwarzschild radius with a convincing simulation of a photograph

showing him at the event horizon. Some perverse engineer had even arranged for the click of a camera to be suddenly audible as the spaceship crossed the event horizon. Supposedly, by looking at this photograph, he would still feel himself to be virtually outside the event horizon. A few psychiatrists and a thinker cautioned him that it would be unsettling to look at a photograph that uncannily reproduced one that could exist only in a frame of reference from which he was excluded, warning him that he would have the impression of being at two places or even three places at the same time: in the spaceship inside the black hole, where he would actually be; back at the event horizon; and in the reference frame, at a distance from the event horizon, from which his freezing and flattening would be observable.[13] They cautioned him that by seeing this photograph in his spaceship beyond the event horizon, indeed by merely knowing of its existence in his spaceship, he would feel dissociated. But was such a warning really necessary in this peculiar case? If, as Bergson avers, memory is not localized and preserved in the brain, but presupposes the subsistence of the past, and if "whenever we are trying to recover a recollection, to call up some period of our history, we ... replace ourselves, first, in the past in general, then, in a certain region of the past" where "little by little it comes into view like a condensing cloud ... [and] from the virtual state passes into the actual,"[14] how can the person who crosses the event horizon continue to have his memory if by crossing it he becomes disconnected from the spacetime to the other side? According to Kip S. Thorne, Paul Davies, and other physicists, setting aside the intensifying gravitational tidal forces, hypothetically the astronaut would not feel anything special at the Schwarzschild membrane or just after he crosses it. But, since the spacetime outside the event horizon is no longer available to the astronaut who crossed that boundary, my contention is that starting at the event horizon the astronaut suffers an automatic, instantaneous loss of memory. There is thus a weighty difference between the traditional photograph taken by a human using a camera, and this other photograph into which he or she would turn at the edge of the universe, the event horizon: while we still have our memories when photographed by humans, the person whose photograph is taken at the event horizon, as it were by the universe, loses memory (as a result of being separated from the spacetime to the other side of the event horizon he has just crossed). To the other side of the event horizon of a black hole, a photograph showing the astronaut would not elicit any nostalgia from him or her because he or she would have become amnesiac—and because such a photograph might be an unworldly, ahistorical entity that irrupted in the black hole as a radical closure. (Similarly, to the other side of the gateless gate of the radical closure in Resnais and Robbe-Grillet's *Last Year at Marienbad*, the photograph her suitor presents to the woman and that shows her in the hotel in Marienbad does not elicit any nostalgia from her not only because she has become amnesiac but also because it is an unworldly, ahistorical entity that irrupted in the radical closure.) Many physicists resort to robots in their description of what may happen to the entity that crosses the event horizon (Kip S. Thorne: "The spin of the [black] hole intrigues you. Never before could you observe a spinning hole up close. So with pangs of conscience you ask for and get a volunteer robot, to explore the neighborhood of the horizon and transmit back his experiences"[15]); is this merely to allay the empathetic reader's concern by sparing the human astronaut, his *semblable*, death by gravitational shredding? Or is it possibly because they intuit that only one of the two forms of memory that Bergson differentiates ("The past appears indeed to be stored up ... under two extreme forms: on the one hand, motor mechanisms which make use of it; on the other, personal memory-images which picture all past events with their outline, their colour and their place in time"[16]), "the bodily memory, made up of the sum of the sensori-motor systems organized by habit,[17] [and which] is ... a quasi-instantaneous memory"[18]—the only one available to the robot, indeed the one that the robot embodies[19]—continues to be available to the entity that crosses the event horizon? Convinced by Bergson's views, the astronaut was less apprehensive of being shredded by the gravitational tidal effects or the singularity to the other side of the event horizon of a gargantuan black hole than of suddenly becoming amnesiac just as he crossed the event horizon. To appease him, some scientists "explained" to him that since the brain is the locus where the traces of the past are preserved through a series of modifications to the circuits of that complex biological organ, the entity that passes to the other side of the event horizon maintains its memory up to its death by enormous tidal forces; and a philosopher told him that there was a conflict between the largely spatialized time of relativity, especially in its Minkowski rendition, and the unextended time of Bergson, and that he had to choose between the two: "If time is unextended, then you cannot be separated from it by a border in space." He was not convinced, exclaiming: "Can one cross beyond the end of the universe and conserve one's memory intact?" Deleuze on Bergson: "The present changes or passes. We can always say that it becomes past when it no longer is, when a new present replaces it. But this is meaningless. It is clearly necessary for it to pass on for the new present to arrive, and it is clearly necessary for it to pass at the same time as it is present, at the moment that it is the present. Thus the image has to be present and past, still present and already past, at once and at the same time. If it was not already past at the same time as present, the present would never pass on."[20] The two different frames of reference with regard to a black hole manifest the two consequences of a present divested from the past, which "is preserved by itself, automatically,"[21]], is not a faculty of putting away recollections in a drawer, or of inscribing them in a register. There is no register, no drawer; there is not even, properly speaking, a faculty, for a faculty works intermittently, when it will or when it can, whilst the piling up of the past upon the past goes on without relaxation. In reality, the past is preserved by itself, automatically. In its

entirety, probably, it follows us at every instant.... The cerebral mechanism is arranged just so as to drive back into the unconscious almost the whole of this past, and to admit beyond the threshold only that which can cast light on the present situation or further the action now being prepared—in short, only that which can give *useful* work" ( *Creative Evolution*, authorized translation by Arthur Mitchell [New York: H. Holt and Company, 1911]], 4–5).] and which allows the present to pass: at the event horizon of the black hole, and from the reference frame of an outside observer, the present that does not pass, in the form of the freezing of the astronaut as well as any object whatever; inside the black hole, from the reference frame of the astronaut who crossed the horizon, the present that is not preserved, thus an astronaut that not only is amnesiac but also irrupted fully formed ahistorically, so that if he or she does not at some point suddenly perceptibly disappear, this would be only because he or she is being recurrently created. While of the view that modern physics is not Leibnizian, since it contains many absolute borders, for example, relativity's light cone,[22] which makes "the connexion of all matter in the plenum" ( *Monadology* #62) impossible; and since, as is made clear by quantum physics's Bose-Einstein condensate, it contradicts Leibniz's principle of the identity of indiscernibles, the astronaut nonetheless wondered what would happen to him at the border of the black hole in case he were a monad. One could consider the world delimited by the event horizons of all the black holes as the expression of monads. What is outside the incorporeal monads is not the world, which is enfolded in the monads, but what is external to the world, what borders it: invisible black holes. This side of the event horizon, there is no world out there, but only its expression by the incorporeal monads; beyond the event horizon, there is an external world, but, given that black holes do not allow what renders visible, light, to escape, one that can be detected this side of the event horizon only indirectly, through the effects, enfolded in the monads, of the mass, electric charge, and angular momentum of what ostensibly imploded or fell into the black holes. At the event horizon, there is an abrupt switch from one extreme closure to another: from the monad, which has "no windows, by which anything could come in or go out" ( *Monadology* #7), to the black hole, a spacetime region that is radically closed.[23] What we have around the event horizon is the ever-increasing unfoldings of the monad, which contains all the information in the universe past, present, and future ("each created monad represents the whole universe" [ *Monadology* #62], in other words, "every substance ... expresses, although confusedly, all that happens in the universe, past, present and future" [ *Discourse on Metaphysics*, IX]). A monadic entity's camera-less photographic portrait in the vicinity of the event horizon is also that of the photographer, the universe:[24] in the vicinity of the event horizon, we have, from an external reference frame, a photograph of the astronaut, or, to be more accurate, the astronaut turned, through flattening and freezing, into a photograph; but also, through the infinite unfolding of what he, as a monad, enfolds, the baroque photograph of the universe. While in the last moments before one's death, one's whole life reportedly flashes before one, at the universe's end, at the event horizon, all the universe's events unfold. From this perspective, any monadic entity that ostensibly crosses the event horizon, but certainly a human being, is an apocalyptic event. Jorge Luis Borges wrote in the "Afterword" to *The Maker* (1960), "A man sets out to draw the world. As the years go by, he peoples a space with images of provinces, kingdoms, mountains, bays, ships, islands, fishes, rooms, instruments, stars, horses, and individuals. A short time before he dies, he discovers that that patient labyrinth of lines traces the lineaments of his own face";[25] one can paraphrase his words thus regarding a monadic astronaut in the vicinity of the event horizon. "A man sets out to draw the world. Years go by as he travels to the nearest black hole. Then some extremely long-lived patient futuristic outside observer discovers, as the years go by from his or her reference frame, that the labyrinth of lines into which the face of the monadic astronaut a short time before the latter crossed into the black hole and died in his local reference frame indefinitely unfolds traces the lineaments of provinces, kingdoms, mountains, bays, ships, islands, fishes, rooms, instruments, stars, horses, and individuals; that 'there is a world of created things, of living beings, of animals, of entelechies, of souls, in the minutest particle of matter'; that 'every portion of matter may be conceived as like a garden full of plants and like a pond full of fish'; that 'every branch of a plant, every member of an animal, and every drop of the fluids within it, is also such a garden or such a pond'; and that 'although the ground and air which lies between the plants of the garden, and the water which is between the fish in the pond, are not themselves plants or fish, yet they nevertheless contain these.'[26]" To be precise, the portrait of the universe that unfolds, from an outside reference frame, as the monadic astronaut approaches ever closer the event horizon would take an infinite time to do so fully since the wavelengths of the electromagnetic signal, which undergo gravitational redshift, keep rapidly increasing, with the consequence that some of them "take forever long to climb out of the hole's gravitational grip"[27]—by which time the world, according to numerous scientists, would have imploded in a Big Crunch or endured a Heat Death.

He had first seen her in a cafe at the space program. She turned when someone called: "Shanna!" A couple of days later, he wrote the following letter: "In Duras's *India Song*, is the French vice-consul of Lahore Leibnizian or enunciating a Leibnizian truth during his conversation, in voice-over, with Anne-Marie Stretter: 'I didn't need to dance with you to know you. You know that.' 'Yes.' 'There's no need for us to go any further, you and I. We haven't anything to say to each other. We are the same.' 'I believe you'? Sitting at nearby tables at the cafe, he felt they were two monads, windowless, and that not only all that had happened or would ever happen to her is plicated in him, albeit as quite confused perceptions, but also that all that

would ever happen to him was folded in her who might refuse his advances. Which did he prefer: to meet her in a world where one learns about others through observation, writing that receives through creation the *aparté*, French kisses, slips of the tongue, in short, intercourse? Or, rather, to express a Leibnizian world in which he never meets her, a world where each monad, himself included, expresses the universe, Shanna included, past, present, and future? Which did he prefer: to meet her in the former kind of world and know that whole zones of her life will remain totally unknown to him? Or never to meet her but for both to be monads, with the consequence that he expressed her past, present, and future, though in a confused, unconscious manner?" He did not end up mailing or giving in person the letter to her. They were soon after chosen for the first mission to a black hole. Along the training process, they became lovers. They quickly came to view that coming trip into the black hole as a double suicide. She began avidly reading any biographies and letters she could find of Heinrich von Kleist, who shot himself in 1811 in a suicide pact with Henriette Vogel. He surrounded himself with reproductions of Francis Bacon paintings, since for him that painter's work made gravity visible. He was particularly attracted to Bacon's triptych *Three Studies for a Crucifixion* (1962). Like Bacon, he was not interested in crucifixion from a religious point of view. It rather captured his interest as the fate awaiting him as a consequence of the quick increase in the excruciating difference of the gravitational pull on various parts of his body that he would suffer as his spaceship approached the black hole. He told her: "We will be together until the end of the world." And indeed at the event horizon, they were, from the reference frame of an outside observer, together until the end of the world; notwithstanding his aversion to being photographed, he could not refuse her a photograph with him at the event horizon since they both became, from the reference frame of some outside observer, a photograph. But immediately beyond the event horizon they were, in their own reference frame, separated from each other as no two sane living humans were ever separated. The only kind of separation that might be equivalent would be that between oneself and one's double, who is oneself divested from all the others with whom one is, insofar as one is alive, intermingled.[28] He was preparing himself to possibly encounter alien beings and exotic kinds of matter to the other side of the event horizon, but the first things that he encountered as alien were the other astronauts in his spaceship. The one who crosses the event horizon is divested of the world, not only because he can no longer cross to the other side, but also because he or she is then no longer a monad, no longer enfolds the world. By crossing the event horizon one exits this universe, but also the universe exits one, in the sense that it is no longer enfolded in one, that one is no longer a monad. In which case, no information is lost to the black hole, because the astronaut *as a monad* never crosses the event horizon, and because anyway all the information is enfolded in each of the other monads "outside" the black hole. The separation he had to accept inside the supermassive black hole was not only with the universe to the other side of the event horizon, but also with the other travelers on the spaceship, no longer feeling any affinity with them: they presently gave the impression of being, indeed were possibly, ahistorical, unworldly entities that irrupted fully formed. Moreover, to the other side of the event horizon, the astronaut, now no longer a monad, could notice all the unworldly entities that were irrupting in the black hole.[29] That we do not perceive the irruption of unworldly entities in a world that physics tells us has absolute ends (in the form of the singularities of the Big Bang and black holes) could be either because such entities are localized in black holes or because we are what Leibniz considered us, monads, and the entities that irrupt do not belong to the world all monads express. As monads, enfolding the same world, at the most basic level *we are always only in our own company*.[30] As they, monads, ever so closely approached the event horizon, unfolding ever more, they appeared from outside reference frames to be less and less distinguishable, since they both expressed the universe; but to the other side of the event horizon, and from their local frame of reference, they, no longer monads, immediately became alien to each other. Looking at his beloved as they crossed to the other side of the event horizon, he felt that she is as alien as a sphinx. I envision the sphinx of Bacon's *Oedipus and the Sphinx after Ingres*, 1983, asking a twenty-first-century Oedipus, now an astronaut, a different riddle at a black hole's event horizon: "What is it that conjointly crosses a gateless gate and doesn't, is two dimensional and three dimensional, and although ostensibly the same totally alien?" Some time after they had crossed into the massive black hole, he was again gradually getting acquainted with her, but the intimacy was gone since it was no longer the case that whatever happened to her was folded in him (albeit in such a manner that for the most part he could perceive it only in a confused way). He realized now which of the two alternatives he had listed in his Leibnizian letter to her he preferred—by far.

**X**

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**Jalal Toufic** is a thinker and a mortal to death. He was born in 1962 in Beirut or Baghdad and died before dying in 1989 in Evanston, Illinois. Many of his books, most of which were published by Forthcoming Books, are available for download as PDF files on his website: **www.jalaltoufic.com.** He was most recently a participant in the Sharjah Biennial 11, the 9th Shanghai Biennale,

Documenta 13, “Art in the Auditorium III” (Whitechapel Gallery …) and “Six Lines of Flight” (San Francisco Museum of Modern Art). In 2011, he was a guest of the Artists-in-Berlin Program of the DAAD.

1
Auguste Rodin, *Rodin on Art*, translated from the French of Paul Gsell by Romilly Fedden (New York: Horizon, 1971), 75–76.

2
Leonard Susskind, "Black Holes and the Information Paradox," *Scientific American* 276, no. 4 (April 1997): 55. On gravitational time dilation, see also Kip S. Thorne, *Black Holes and Time Warps: Einstein's Outrageous Legacy* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1994): "Near a black hole gravitational time dilation is enormous: If the hole weighs 10 times as much as the Sun, then time will flow 6 million times more slowly at 1 centimeter height above the hole's horizon than far from its horizon; and right at the horizon, the flow of time will be completely stopped" (100).

3
"Albert Einstein ... wrote to a friend, 'The past, present, and future are only illusions, even if stubborn ones.' Einstein's startling conclusion stems directly from his special theory of relativity, which denies any absolute, universal significance to the present moment. According to the theory, simultaneity is relative. Two events that occur at the same moment if observed from one reference frame may occur at different moments if viewed from another. Such mismatches make a mockery of any attempt to confer special status on the present moment, for whose 'now' does that moment refer to? If you and I were in relative motion, an event that I might judge to be in the as yet undecided future might for you already exist in the fixed past. The most straightforward conclusion is that both past and future are fixed. For this reason, physicists prefer to think of time as laid out in its entirety—a timescape, analogous to a landscape—with all past and future events located there together. It is a notion sometimes referred to as block time. Completely absent from this description of nature is anything that singles out a privileged special moment as the present or any process that would systematically turn future events into present, then past, events. In short, the time of the physicist does not pass or flow" (Paul Davies, "That Mysterious Flow," *Scientific American* 287, no. 3 [September 2002

4
Dōgen: "An ancient Buddha said: 'For the time being stand on top of the highest peak.... / For the time being three heads and eight arms. / For the time being an eight- or sixteen-foot body....' 'For the time being' here means time itself is being, and all being is time. A golden sixteen-foot body is time.... 'Three heads and eight arms' is time.... Yet an ordinary person who does not understand buddha-dharma may hear the words the time-being this way: 'For a while I was three heads and eight arms.... Even though the mountains and rivers still exist, I have already passed them.... Those mountains and rivers are as distant from me as heaven is from earth.' It is not that simple. At the time the mountains were climbed and the rivers crossed, you were present. Time is not separate from you, and as you are present, time does not go away" ("The Time-Being" [Uji

5
Alain Robbe-Grillet, *Project for a Revolution in New York: A Novel* (New York: Grove Press, 1972), 1–3.

6
If one considers a black hole as a radical closure, then there are two sorts of possible photographs that are specific to it: the freezing and flattening at its *gateless gate*, the event horizon; and the photographs, shot by no one and no camera, that irrupt in it (by *objective chance* the unworldly photograph, taken by no camera, that irrupts inside the black hole may show the same image as the "photograph," also taken by no camera, of the astronaut frozen and flattened at the black hole's event horizon).

7
And there is a sort of video that is specific to a radical closure: the video that irrupts in it without being shot by anyone within it. In David Lynch's *Lost Highway*, the circumstance that Fred Madison and his wife twice omitted setting the alarm system on the day preceding their reception of the anonymous videotape showing shots of the interior of their house leaves open the possibility that they are dealing with an unlawful entry through the door or window by someone who then took these shots with a camera. The two detectives who come to investigate the case ask Fred to thenceforth activate his alarm system. Therefore we can assume that (unlike in the script, where he again fails to activate the alarm) he did so, and, moreover, since he does not hear the alarm sound, that no unlawful entry took place through any of the entrances of the house, and, consequently, that no camera served to take the new video shots of the inside of the house—the videotape, unworldly, shot by no one, irrupted in the radical closure. Similarly, it is quite possible that the tracking shot of the highway at night, with the yellow broken lines illuminated by the headlights of a moving car, which is first seen in *Blue Velvet* , 1986, and which accompanies the opening credits sequence and the ending of *Lost Highway* , 1997, was not filmed for the latter film but irrupted in it from the earlier one. Since the highway of *Lost Highway* is a cine matic shot from an earlier film rather than a road, it cannot be used to flee somewhere else—unless the person flees his pursuers not farther along the highway but through (his double's?) irruption into the shot of the highway (that is why, while being unsettled, I am not surprised that when the Mystery Man, standing next to Fred Madison, hands the wounded man on the desert sand a portable pocket television, its monitor shows the Mystery Man handing a portable pocket television while standing next to Madison, that is, as an image).

8
For example, David Lynch, "Paintings and Drawings," Touko Museum of Contemporary Art, Tokyo, January 12–27, 1991; and *David Lynch: Sala Parpallo – Palau dels Scala, Mayo –Junio 1992, Diputacion Provincial de Valencia* (Valencia; Sala Parpalló: Edicions Alfons el Magnànim, Institució Valenciana d'Estudis i Investigació).

9
Here are two examples of the artist as producer: Warhol, who simply turned on the camera and let it shoot what was in front of it until the end of the film roll, or else assigned others to make the films or the silkscreens; and Robbe-Grillet, who produced radical closures in which images that are ostensibly those of others (Magritte, Rauschenberg, etc.) irrupted (in the process introducing singularly unfamiliar elements amid his recurrent imagery).

10
One did not have to wait for digital technology (with the absence of generation loss it makes possible) to question the veracity and historicity of photographs, their indexical function.

11
In Francis Bacon's work, painting foregrounds or at least addresses its being a two-dimensional medium not so much in a self-reflexive manner but through dealing with the flattening of the figure (from the reference frame of an outside observer) at the border of the radical closures he establishes.

12
Paintings such as *Triptych March 1974* , where the figure is shown holding a camera next to its face, presumably in the act of taking a photograph, are exceptional in Francis Bacon's work.

13
While the figure that is seemingly divided into two at the juncture of the panel in Francis Bacon's *Study from the Human Body* , 1981, is not actually dislocated but just represented and viewed from two reference frames, when painting it the painter had to mentally place himself and when looking at it the spectator finds himself paradoxically in two reference frames simultaneously: outside the radical closure, from which he would see the two-dimensional figure, but also inside the radical closure, where he would see the three-dimensional figure.

14
Henri Bergson, *Matter and Memory* (New York: Zone Books, 1990), 134.

15
Kip S. Thorne, *Black Holes and Time Warps: Einstein's Outrageous Legacy* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1994), 52.

16
Henri Bergson, *Matter and Memory* , page 88, and, more generally, "The Two Forms of Memory." Cf.: "There are, we have said, two memories which are profoundly distinct: the one, fixed in the organism, is nothing else but the complete set of intelligently constructed mechanisms which ensure the appropriate reply to the various possible demands. This memory enables us to adapt ourselves to the present situation; through it the actions to which we are subject prolong themselves into reactions that are sometimes accomplished, sometimes merely nascent, but always more or less

appropriate. Habit rather than memory, it acts our past experience but does not call up its image. The other is the true memory.... It retains and ranges alongside of each other all our states in the order in which they occur, leaving to each fact its place and, consequently, marking its date, truly moving in the past and not, like the first, in an ever renewed present" (ibid., 150–151).

17
Ibid., 152.

18
Ibid.

19
Henri Bergson: "A human being who should dream his life instead of living it would no doubt thus keep before his eyes at each moment the infinite multitude of the details of his past history. And, conversely, the man who should repudiate this memory with all that it begets would be continually acting his life instead of truly representing it to himself: a conscious *automaton*, he would follow the lead of useful habits which prolong into an appropriate reaction the stimulation received" (ibid., 155; my italics).

20
Gilles Deleuze, *Cinema 2: The Time-Image* , trans. Hugh Tomlinson and Robert Galeta (London: Continuum, 2005), 76.

21
Henri Bergson: "Our duration is not merely one instant replacing another; if it were, there would never be anything but the present.... Duration is the continuous progress of the past which gnaws into the future and which swells as it advances. And as the past grows without ceasing, so also there is no limit to its preservation. Memory, as we have tried to prove [ *Matter and Memory* , chapters 2 and 3

22
Since "signals and other causal influences cannot travel faster than light, ... for a given event E, the set of events that lie on or inside the past light cone of E would also be the set of all events that could send a signal that would have time to reach E and influence it in some way.... Likewise, the set of events that lie on or inside the *future* light cone of E would also be the set of events that could receive a signal sent out from the position and time of E, so the future light cone contains all the events that could potentially be causally influenced by E. Events which lie neither in the past or future light cone of E cannot influence or be influenced by E in relativity" ( *Wikipedia*'s "Light Cone" entry).

23
"When British physicist Stephen Hawking ... studied the quantum theory of electromagnetism near black holes, he found that black holes actually emit radiation.... How can black holes emit radiation? ... The answer lies in quantum uncertainty. All over spacetime the quantum electromagnetic field is undergoing ... little negative-energy quantum fluctuations. Normally ... the negative-energy photons disappear as quickly as they form. But near the horizon of a black hole, it is possible for such a photon to form outside the hole and cross into it. Once inside, it is actually viable: it is possible to find trajectories for photons inside the horizon that have negative total energy. So such a photon can just stay inside, and that leaves its positive-energy partner outside on its own. It ... becomes one of the photons of the Hawking radiation. In this picture, *nothing actually crosses the horizon from inside to out* . Instead, the negative-energy photon falls in, freeing the positive-energy photon. The net result of this is that the hole loses mass: the negative-energy photon makes a negative contribution to the mass of the hole when it goes in." Bernard F. Schutz, *Gravity from the Ground Up* (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 304 (my italics).

24
This is the case if we consider the black hole part of the universe.

25
Jorge Luis Borges, *Collected Fictions* , trans. Andrew Hurley (New York: Viking, 1998), 327.

26
Leibniz, *Monadology* § 66–68.

27
Kip S. Thorne, *Black Holes and Time Warps: Einstein's Outrageous Legacy* , 33.

28
Cf. "Composites" in the revised and expanded edition of my book *(Vampires): An Uneasy Essay on the Undead in Film* (Sausalito, CA: Post-Apollo Press, 2003; available for download as a PDF file at: http://www.jalaltoufic.com/downloads.htm ): "The living person is a composite that dissociates in death-as-undeath or during some states of altered consciousness first into separate subunits that are themselves composites, most of them uglier than the original one, then into elements, becoming alien. Each of us is common, not alien, both because each of us is a composite of all the others, even of those who lived erstwhile and who are long dead, and because each of us is part of the composite that constitutes the others. That is why we do not find others or for that matter ourselves alien, and that is why they too do not find us alien. In certain states of altered consciousness, though, we see the dead, people who have become not merely uglier, but alien, and that is because they are no longer composites (the withdrawal of the cathexis of the world).... The double is not the other, but I divested of all others. That is why whenever I encounter him, even in a crowded public place, I feel I am alone with him, *alone with the alone* ; he embodies the divestment from the world. That is why encountering the double is such a desolate experience, and is a premonition of death with its bereavement from others and the rest of the world" (173–174).

29
In Bacon's triptych *Two Figures Lying on a Bed with Attendants* , 1968, the gazes of the left panel's seated human figure looking right, of the center panel's recumbent couple, and of the right panel's seated human figure looking left, although sharply separated by the panels' frames, are aligned, suggesting that the figures perceive each other or at least are aware of each other. Triptychs or diptychs with figures (other than dancers) whose gazes or gestures are aligned across the various panels suggest a monadic ontology (triptychs and diptychs have in monadic ontology a raison d'être). In the aforementioned Bacon triptych, the left panel's human figure does not at all perceive the bird-like creature visible to us in the same panel, for the latter is an unworldly entity, thus incompossible with the world expressed by the monad, though allowed by that expressed world's radical closure. There is intra-action among the monadic figures that enfold the same world; there is no relation between the monadic figure and the unworldly entity that irrupts in a radical closure; and there is interaction between the unworldly entities that irrupt in a radical closure.

30
Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Gay Science: With a Prelude in German Rhymes and an Appendix of Songs* , ed. Bernard Williams; trans. Josefine Nauckhoff; poems trans. Adrian Del Caro (Cambridge, UK; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2001), no. 166, 135.

Luis Camnitzer

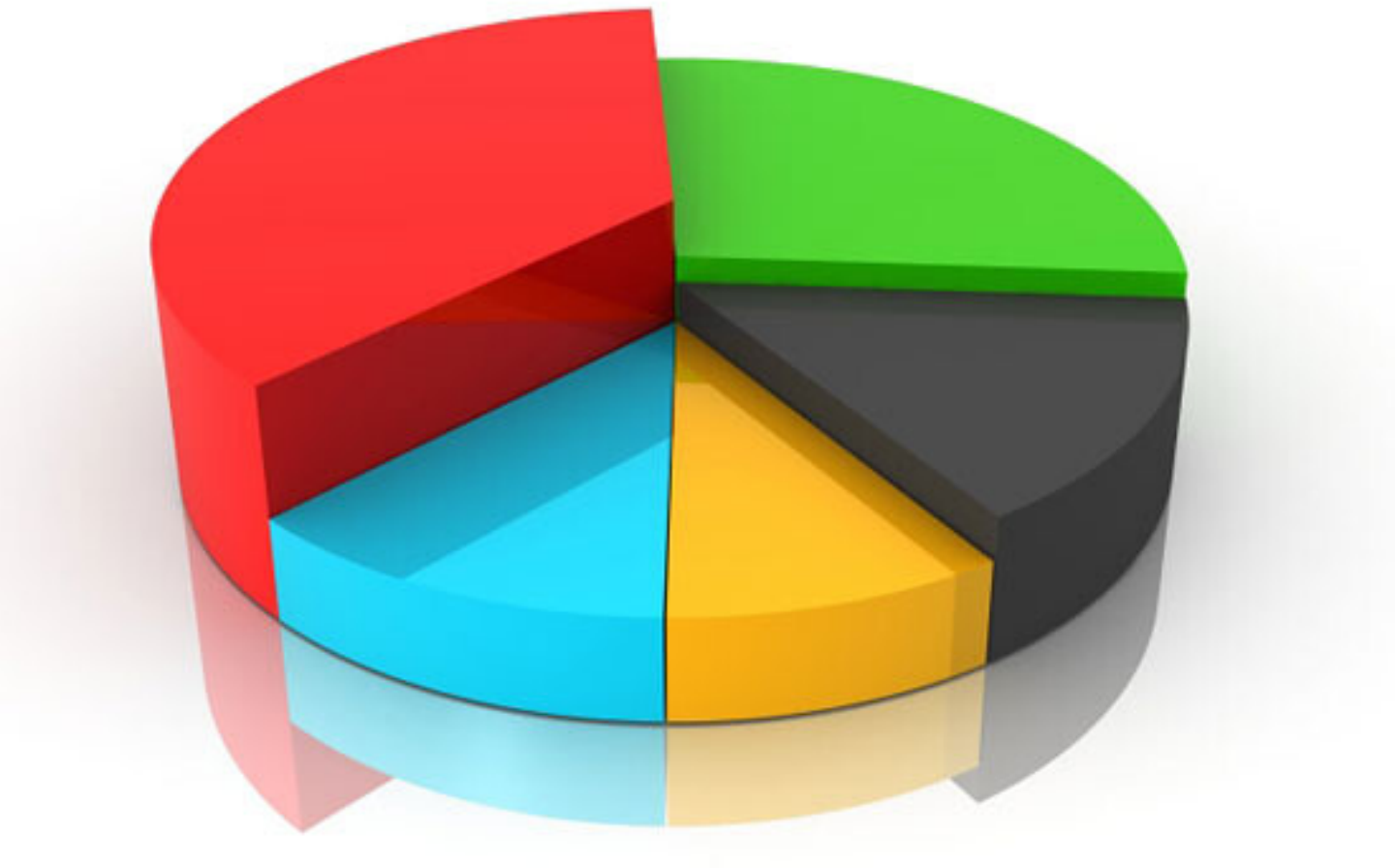
# An Artist, a Leader, and a Dean Were on a Boat...

As of next September, Emory College is closing its Visual Arts Department. Dean Robin Forman wrote a letter dated September 14, 2012 communicating this to the faculty. The news recently hit Facebook via an Art and Education announcement of March 2014. I don't know what exactly happened in the intervening two years, but the consequences of the retrenchment are far reaching.

The dean's letter is more interesting in what it implies than helpful in what it says. Forman is happy to underline the importance of the study of human health, quantitative theory, race, contemporary China, and the impact of digital media. He also mentions that the school currently has too many programs, with many of them stretched to the limit financially. (In 2011, Emory's endowment was $5.4 billion, which was the sixteenth largest endowment among American universities that year.[1] So it's not clear what financially stretched means, exactly.) Later, the letter insists that the decisions are academic, not financial. The planned cuts go beyond visual arts; they also include the departments of educational studies, journalism, and physical education. In addition, admissions to graduate programs in Spanish, economics, and the Institute of Liberal Arts will be suspended.[2] According to Forman, these decisions are necessary for Emory to "maintain its place as one of the top liberal universities in the nation." Probably more important, the cuts and reallocations will also help "train the leaders of the century to come."

I'm not a strong believer in art departments or art schools. Maybe Emory's example is a good moment to examine their relevance. It's not clear yet if Emory's decision foreshadows the future of academia in the US, or if it's just a passing fad. Either way, these developments at Emory raise crucial questions: What function do art schools fulfill? Do we really need them? In a lecture back in 2007, I referred to the institutional teaching of art as a fraud.[3] I made the point that during my thirty-five years of teaching, I probably taught about five thousand students. These students financed my salary. Maybe about five hundred of them hoped to "make it" in the gallery circuit. Possibly twenty among these succeeded. That means that the other 480 hoped to make a living from teaching. Each one of them would in turn require another five thousand students to ensure their salaries. In only one generation, then, the needed student base went up to 2,400,000—and that was only considering my students, nobody else's. No wonder this system is collapsing. In *e-flux journal*, Anton Vidokle used the term "pyramid scheme" to describe the system of art education, based on the fact that an MFA degree doesn't even ensure employment to begin with.[4]

Looking at the issue from the point of view of fraud, Emory's move to retrench visual arts could be interpreted as a step towards honesty and a perceptive reading of the market situation. The big flaw in the dean's letter is that this point isn't touched upon. We may therefore assume that guilt for past deception and false advertising did not play a role in the school's decision. I'm not particularly



interested in Emory, but since it's rated number twenty in the *U.S. News and World Report*'s college ranking and charges $44,008 in tuition and fees ($8?), we should give its behavior some weight. It may be the canary in the coalmine.

Is there any reason that the arts should mingle among other disciplines? Emory's decision treats art as a slice that doesn't fit into the educational pie anymore. But perhaps it never should have. Does it make any sense to offer a degree that in some cases costs a quarter of a million dollars, but whose financial return is doubtful? When students used to come to me to register as visual arts majors, my first question was always: What on earth would make you want to do that? The ensuing conversation would often make me realize that I shouldn't have become an artist. I should've become a shrink.

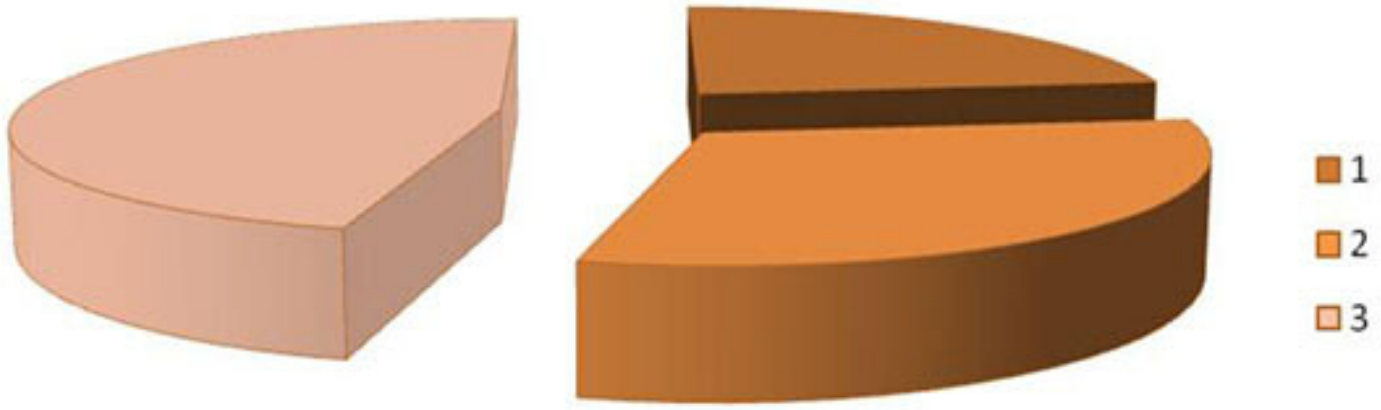
There are many professions where corporations prefer to ignore what a student learned in school. Instead, they train their own personnel as if starting from zero. Corporations have a better knowledge of the market. They have up-to-date information and the latest equipment. Schools, meanwhile, lag behind. They overpay presidents and have top-heavy, self-serving administrations. They hire star performers to improve public relations and fundraising, instead of hiring star teachers. To save money, they shift from full-time faculty to adjunct faculty. They use outmoded professional standards because the faculty ages but stays on. Depending on the discipline, they are often stuck with obsolete equipment.

Why don't mega-galleries organize their own little art schools? This way, they could make sure that their stable of talent was regularly replenished with exactly the kind of artists they like to represent. I've always thought of the Whitney Independent Study Program as a forerunner to this; a museum shaping good producers of collectible artworks seems to bring everything full circle. Mega-galleries wouldn't even need to conduct faculty searches. They could just hire from among their stable of artists. Teaching salaries could be covered with a modest 5 percent increase in the artists' share of the revenue from the galleries' sale of their artworks.

Most schools see themselves as feeding the gallery stables, but it's not clear that they are the best place to do that. They filter students by trying to identify, like horses in a race, the best bets. That is, they identify those who need education the least, not the most. This handicap makes teaching less labor-intensive and cheaper. When they are conservative, schools focus on developing students' skills (Painting 1, 2, and 3) and act as misnamed crafts schools. When they are progressive, schools teach students how to behave as an artist rather than be one, and how to fit smoothly into the system. Neither conservative nor progressive art schools that focus on artists as producers can claim that they are forming society's leaders. That Bush, Putin, and Fujimori paint today, and that Eisenhower, Churchill, and Hitler did so in the past, helps much to support this claim.

The obsession with creating the leaders of the future seems consistent with the old trickle-down theory in economics. The problem is that leadership doesn't trickle down. Concentrating on the formation of leaders and ignoring those that are supposed to be led actually destroys society. So, on less elitist platforms, we have to push to better all educational levels. But this time, we shouldn't leave anybody behind just to make the US more competitive in the "global market." To achieve the latter, Bush Sr., in his America 2000 program, asked for national testing in order to build a nationally unified education system. Clinton, with his Goals 2000 program, wanted US students to be first in the world in both science and math achievement, and also wanted every adult American to be literate and to possess the knowledge and skills necessary to compete in a global economy. Bush Jr. instituted No Child Left Behind with the same purpose, again giving priority to testing over education. Obama's Race to the Top and his promotion of STEM (science, technology, engineering, and mathematics) continue this tradition, helping bury the humanities a little deeper. In spite of this two-decade effort, things haven't worked out so well: the US is ranked 37th (averaging different indexes) on the international scale.[5]

"STEM" and "PISA" are the new favorite acronyms in education. The latter stands for "Program for International Student Assessment" and is sponsored by the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD). PISA is a system for evaluating international educational achievements.[6] It ranks the effectiveness of the school system in about seventy countries, in the hopes that international competition will spur improvements in education. PISA is not really concerned with defining education. Their statistics are




based on the performance of fifteen-year-olds in reading, math, and science. The PISA webpage speaks of "economies" rather than countries, a refreshing turn that challenges the geographically bound nation-state, but that also clarifies the purpose of the operation. The webpage states: "Aside from providing global rankings, analysts were [also] able to find out which educational systems are offering students the best training for entering the workforce of tomorrow, and why." PISA has an overt economic, not a humanist, function. This explains the strangely limited material on which the statistics are based. By only studying fifteen-year-olds, PISA neglects to factor in students who repeat grades. More generally, this method doesn't take into account societies concerned with extending educational access to hitherto neglected segments of the population lack the cultural context to be "good students."[7] Though PISA, to its credit, also emphasizes comprehension, the main strengths of art (speculation, imagination, and asking questions like *what if?*) have not been explored or used in conjunction with literacy or with the meaning of being educated. In 2012, PISA used "problem solving" as an added component for the first time. Only one-third of the usual countries were assessed, and the questions concerned everyday tasks in affluent situations: "identify the cheapest line of furniture in a catalogue," or figure out "why a particular electronic device is not working properly."[8]

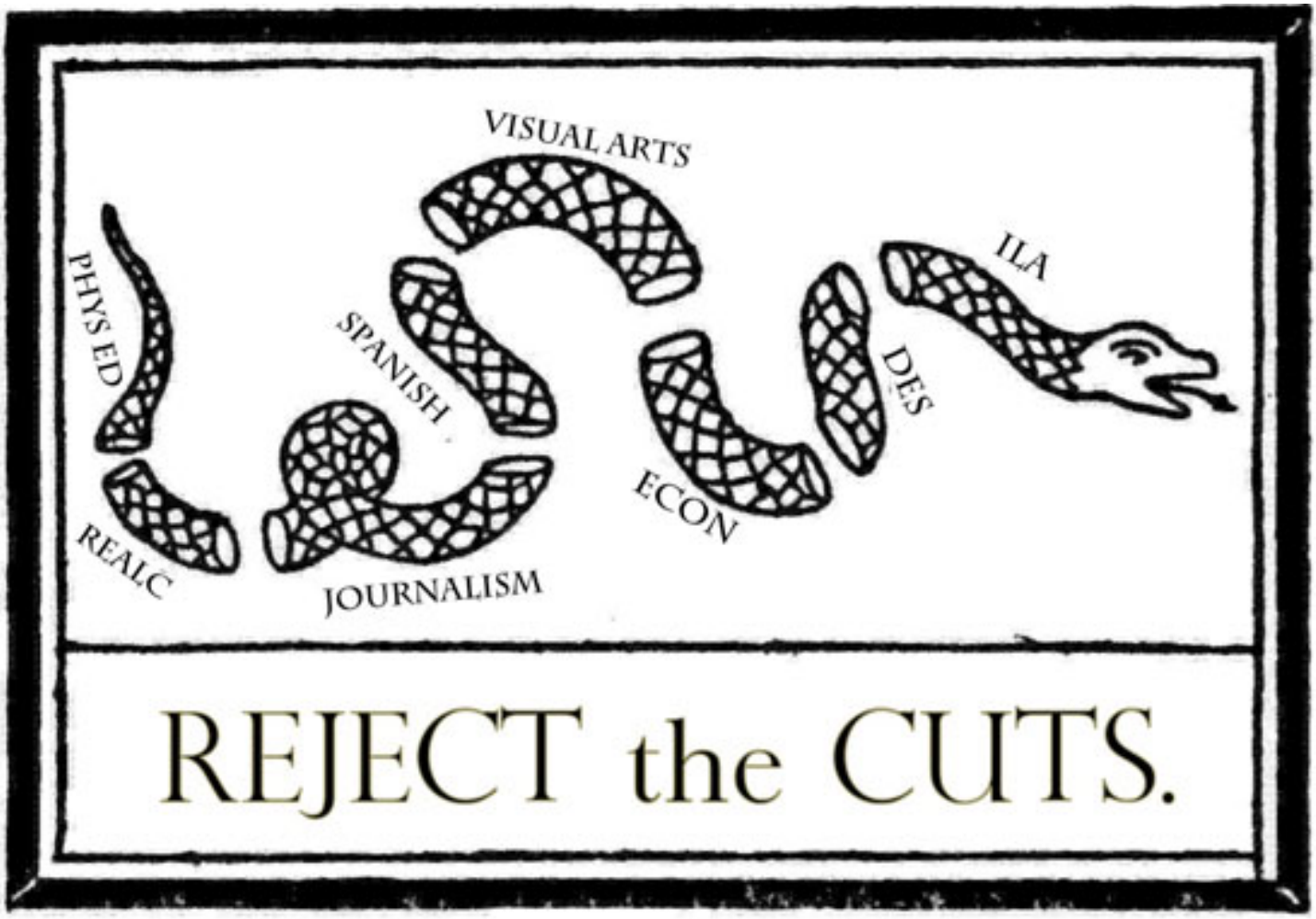
Studies have shown that countries that receive a high PISA rating in mathematics are doing proportionally worse in creative entrepreneurship. The US, for example, has high entrepreneurship ratings, but its creativity has been steadily declining thanks to standardized tests and policies like No Child Left Behind. According to education scholar Yong Zhao, creative strength in the US decreased by 3.16 percent from 1990 to 1998, and by 5.75 percent from 1990 to 2008. "The ability to develop and elaborate upon ideas, detailed reflective thinking, and motivation decreased by 36.8 percent from 1984 to 2008."[9] America's comparatively higher ratings in entrepreneurship are perhaps a consequence of its deficient educational system. Entrepreneurship is obviously not a synonym for artistic creativity, but it is the business world's close equivalent, and there are more statistics available about entrepreneurship in the business world than about creativity in the arts. The art producer, meanwhile, is both an entrepreneur and a self-administered slave worker—hoping to become the former, but usually earning like the latter.

Maybe it is this hybridity that exempts artists from the situation described in graphs correlating productivity and employment that one can find on Google. They all show that starting in the mid-nineties, productivity increased as employment and wages declined. The typical artist suffers from this because of whatever second job he or she must have to survive, not because of being an artist. However, this reality is something that education officials around the

world should take very seriously. It should in turn generate a discussion about the role of the arts in the educational process. A US government study conducted in 2008 determined that Americans born between 1957 and 1964 changed jobs more than ten times between the ages of eighteen and forty-two.[10] This information alone should be enough to put the emphasis of education not on training, but on flexibility and the capacity to retrain (that is, on unlearning and learning as a combined action). It should bring to the fore the ability to think creatively and "out of the box." Professional concentrations are not valuable anymore. While this doesn't mean that we have to give up on them entirely, we do have to begin underscoring interdisciplinary connecting points that facilitate transitions. From this perspective, the present system, in which students must select a single area of focus, makes their choice into a career crap shoot. So, what combination of disciplines should students study? Medicine and auto mechanics? Architecture, dental hygiene, and watchmaking? Students should be prepared to constantly evaluate contexts and connections instead of being locked into a professional tunnel.

Meanwhile, in all of this, art is treated as a leisure activity. Although one may study it in school, it is during leisure time that art is normally produced and appreciated. Within capitalist ideology, leisure time is considered a time for consumption. It props up employment, since much of our leisure time is devoted to shopping and spending money. Even vacation time, which is merely a concession on the part of bosses to limit our exploitation, helps the economy: whatever our bosses lose on the production end with our absence from work, we pick up on the consumption end with our shopping. But just as art should be an area of free imagination unhindered by production, leisure time should be free from the requirement to consume. Thus, education should equip people as much for nonworking hours as it does for working hours. They are equally important, and only once this is understood will it make sense to link art and leisure.

Just as we should view art not as an accumulation of so-called art objects, but as a way of approaching knowledge, we should also view knowledge not as an accumulation of data, but as a flexible mechanism for



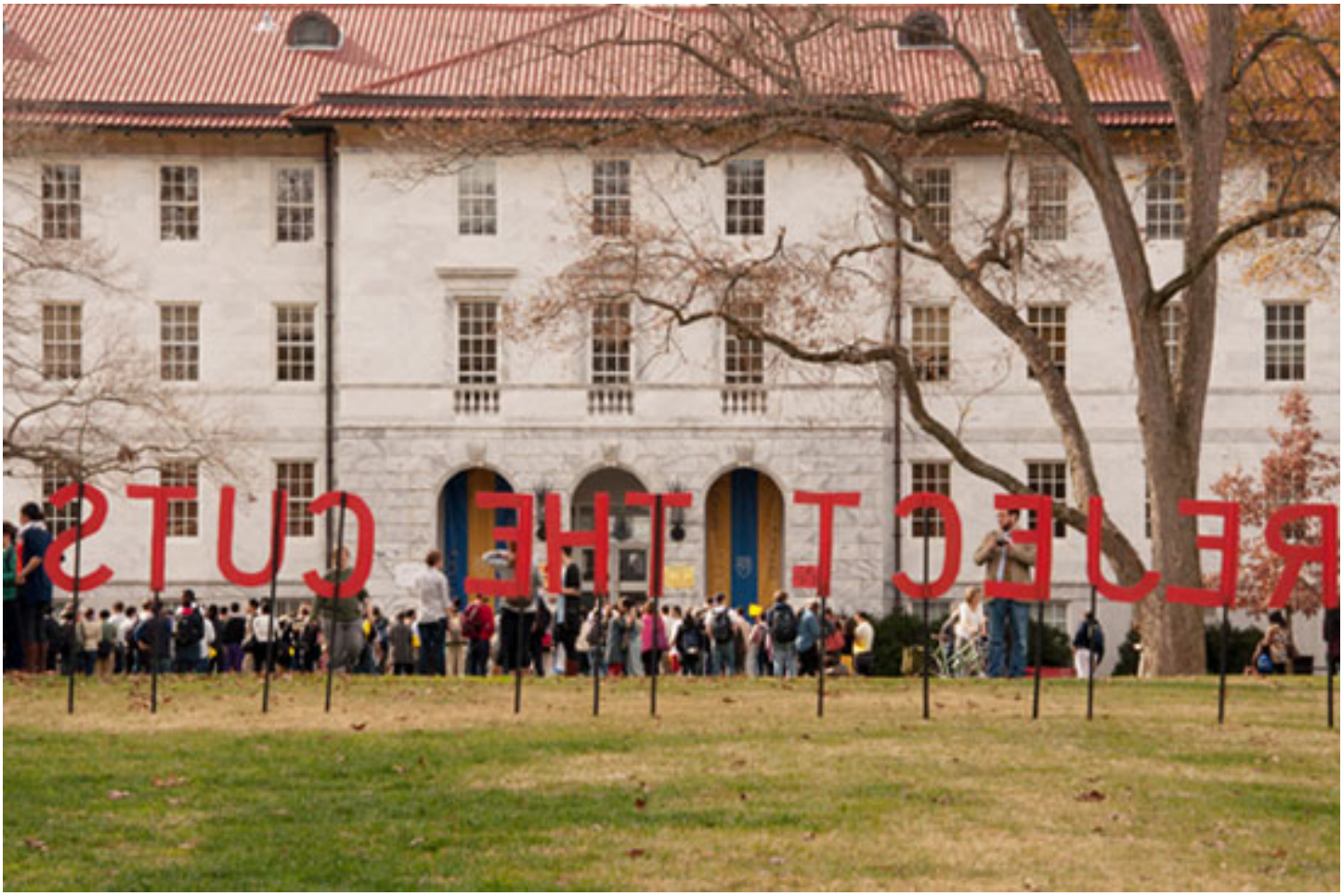

A “Reject the Cuts” flier plays on the colonial "Join or Die" woodcut. This flier was intended to make a point about the slashing of departments at Emory College, but was accused of evoking Tea Party imagery.

reorganizing reality. Under present conditions, education should not focus on training, but on developing the ability to be constantly retrained. This means that learning should be combined with the skill of unlearning. Like computer software, we should know how to uninstall programs that we previously installed.

This approach to learning would democratize the relationship between teachers and students, since it would put teachers in the same position as students, or maybe even in a weaker one. Students would still be a tabula rasa, but teachers generally have ingrained habits which make uninstalling more urgent and more difficult. The main lesson, though, may be that we are seriously misusing art by forcing it to stay confined to a single academic department. Educationally speaking, producing artworks should be seen as a byproduct of a much more important process: learning to face the world with imagination rather than with submission.

We should treat art as a way of thinking, of acquiring and ordering knowledge, as a tool for subverting conventions in order to refresh and reshape culture. Art is the gluten in the dough, helping to hold the knowledge pie together. Our current educational system, however, seems to be gluten intolerant, with the corresponding symptoms of bloating, abdominal pain, and diarrhea. Art-thinking is speculation based on wonder. It has the advantage of being non-dogmatic, of not discarding anything except for the obvious and the trivial. Even chaos is part of this totality: nonlogical connections are as important as logical ones, and everything is available as we seek to construct new systems of order. From this point of view, art includes both science and magic: it doesn’t leave anything out.

Art is not situated in between; it is the umbrella that hovers over everything and includes everything. This inclusiveness makes art a meta-discipline, with science as one of its many subcategories. The obvious question then is, why can’t art-thinking be integrated into other ways of thinking? If we achieve this, we don’t need to fight to keep art schools going. We only need to change curricula, as well as some minds. With this we would achieve true liberal arts education. Meanwhile, I can only hope that our




Students protest at Emory College as department cuts are proposed, December, 2012. Photo: James Kelly Crissman. Courtesy of the artist.

leaders in the century to come do not graduate from Emory.

**X**

**Luis Camnitzer** is a Uruguayan artist who has lived in the USA since 1964, and an emeritus professor of art at the State University of New York, College at Old Westbury. He was the Viewing Program Curator for The Drawing Center, New York, from 1999 to 2006. In 2007, he was the pedagogical curator for the 6th Bienal del Mercosur. He was pedagogical curator for the Iberê Camargo Foundation in Porto Alegre, and was a pedagogical advisor for the Cisneros Foundation. He is the author of *New Art of Cuba* (1994/2004) and *Conceptualism in Latin American Art: Didactics of Liberation* (2007), both from University of Texas Press.

1
Nick DeSantis, "Emory U. Will Close 3 Departments as Part of Broad Academic Restructuring," *The Chronicle of Higher Education* , Sept. 14, 2012 http://chronicle.com/blogs/ticker/emory-u-will-close-3-departments-as-part-of-broad-academic-restructuring/48872 .

2
Lilly Lampe and Amanda Parmer, "Emory University Eradicates its Visual Arts Department, Portending an Ominous Trend in University Education," Art and Education *,* March 2014 http://web.archive.org/web/20140326231127/http://www.artandeducation.net/paper/emory-university-eradicates-its-visual-arts-department-portending-an-ominous-trend-in-university-education/ .

3
Universidad de los Andes, Bogotá, Feb. 8, 2007. Published in *Cuadernos Grises* 4 (2009).

4
Anton Vidokle, "Art Without Market, Art Without Education: Political Economy of Art," *e-flux journal* 43 (March 2013) http://pdf.e-flux-systems.com/journal/art-without-market-art-without-education-political-economy-of-art/ .

5
16th in livability; 70th in health; 69th in ecosystems sustainability; 34th in access to water and sanitation; 31st in personal safety; 39th in basic education. See Nicholas Kristof, "We're Not No. 1! We're Not No. 1!," *New York Times,* April 2, 2014 http://www.nytimes.com/2014/04/03/opinion/were-not-no-1-were-not-no-1.html?_r=0 . The last line of the article continues with competitiveness as an aim: "The Social Progress Index offers a reminder that what is at stake is also the health of our society—and our competitiveness around the globe."

6
PISA was created in 1997 by the OECD, which in turn was created in 1948 to help administer the Marshall Plan in Europe after the Second World War.

7
Gonzalo Terra, interview with Guillermo Montt, *El País* (Uruguay), August 18, 2013 http://web.archive.org/web/20131219043824/https://www.elpais.com.uy/informacion/filtros-ingreso-docencia-eleva-nivel.html .

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9
Zhao, World Class Learners: Educating Creative and Entrepreneurial Students (Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin, 2012), 12.

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See https://web.archive.org/web/20150906112720/http://www.clearmgmt.com/careers.htm .

Grant Kester

# Response to E.C. Feiss

I want to thank Ellen Feiss for her thoughtful and honest response, and I'm glad my essay was able to solicit some further reflection on her part.[1]

I would also note, again, that I myself have been guilty of most of the problems I identify in this essay (the off-loading of critique to a theoretical authority figure, failure to engage with the work in its specificity, and so forth). Many of the questions Feiss raises about the role of the critic and the complexities of research into participation have been central to my own work for many years, and play an important role in the research we're developing at UCSD. They have also been addressed, of course, in the field of anthropology itself, among other places (hence my interest in a cross-disciplinary dialogue). I welcome her own efforts to explore and articulate these questions. A thorough response to her understanding of "rights" critiques would occupy more space than is appropriate in this context, but I do want to address a few of the other points she raises.[2]

First, we have an unfortunate tendency in our field to think the worst of other disciplines (outside of a narrow spectrum of theory and philosophy, which we tend to consume in a fairly unreflective manner). While the history of imperialism may well be "inseparable from the discipline of anthropology," as Feiss writes, one could easily enough say the same thing about the discipline of art history (it was founded, after all, with the goal of translating "heathen" artifacts into a language that could be understood by "Christian" viewers, in Karl Schnaase's words). It should go without saying that efforts to work across the boundaries between art history and anthropology, for example, will involve a mutual interrogation of both disciplines. I would encourage Feiss to have a look at some of the newer forms of experimental, collaborative, and activist ethnography that are currently being developed in the field, and which represent a productive evolution from the earlier work of figures such as Latour, Taussig, and more proximately, Jean Rouch, among many others. She may be surprised to discover that many anthropologists these days are quite capable of being critically self-reflective about their discipline and methods. This is a quality we would do well to emulate more widely in our own field. I would also note here that anthropology is only one possible disciplinary interlocutor for art historians and critics to consider when exploring new research methods. A thorough account of all the potential opportunities for cross-disciplinary dialogue, along with the proper framing of the internal politics of each of those disciplines, far exceeds the capacity of a short essay in *e-flux journal*.

Ultimately, the critic or historian's obligation is to the work itself, in all its registers of meaning. My point in the essay I wrote is not that the online statements published in conjunction with *Immigrant Movement International* (*IMI*) are irrelevant or less "real" (I state clearly that they are part of the project as whole). However, I would encourage

critics who wish to write about this area of practice to abandon, just for a moment, the Google search and the JSTOR download, and to remain open to the new forms of criticality that can emerge when one is present with the work at its physical site of production (or at least makes an effort to understand what has occurred there). This can be considerably more challenging than critiquing written statements or branding strategies, but in a way this is precisely the problem. We are quite good in our field at analyzing what Feiss terms the "discursive," but not very good at being aware of, and intellectually responsive to, the kind of social, somatic, and political encounters that occur in a process-based work. As I noted in my essay, more conventional gallery or biennial-based artworks tend to be propositional in nature, and thus lend themselves to this kind of critical approach. They can be easily enough grasped through documentation, artist's statements and interviews, and so on. In the case of Feiss's original essay, however, I found it symptomatic that she could critique a project that has unfolded over a period of five years and has involved hundreds of interlocutors and participants solely on the basis of two written statements, without at least acknowledging that there might be some possible tension between the "embodied" project and its discursive adjuncts. I remain agnostic about the relative quality of *IMI* as an art project, having never seen it, but I'm unlikely to be persuaded by a critique that remains so materially unbalanced.

Second, at no point do I attribute to the critic an "all encompassing power" to "see shifts in power." In fact, my own experience in witnessing engaged art practices over the years is precisely the opposite—a sense of disorientation as I try to come to terms with an extremely complex configuration of subjectivities, differences in space and temporality, and modes of power. This experience quite often challenges my own *a priori* assumptions about what a given work is supposed to "mean." For myself, I find this disorientation to be generative. I certainly don't imagine that I could somehow reconstruct a given project in its totality, but I do think that the forms of insight that are produced at the site of practice are epistemologically valid and essential in understanding the nature of this work. Nor do they preclude acts of critical judgment or rest on the assumption that the participants in a given project somehow transcend "power relations." This is a view that can be sustained only by deliberately ignoring existing scholarship in this area. I appreciate that this kind of research is not easy, and that it carries its own liabilities. It's my hope that intellectual curiosity, as well as the slowly evolving norms of the discipline, will lead more critics and historians to accept the challenge that this work poses to their assumptions about both theory and practice, and to begin developing critical methodologies that are more effective in coming to terms with the rapidly growing field of socially engaged art practice.

**X**

**Grant Kester** is Professor of Art History in the Visual Arts department at the University of California, San Diego. His publications include *Art, Activism and Oppositionality: Essays from Afterimage* (Duke University Press, 1997, editor), *Conversation Pieces: Community and Communication in Modern Art* (University of California Press, 2004) and *The One and the Many: Contemporary Collaborative Art in a Global Context* (Duke University Press, 2011). He's currently finishing work on *Collective Situations: Dialogues in Contemporary Latin American Art 1995–2010*, edited with Bill Kelley.

1
See E.C.Feiss, "Response to Grant Kester's 'The Device Laid Bare,' *e-flux journal* 54 (April 2014) https://www.e-flux.com/journal/50/59990/the-device-laid-bare-on-some-limitations-in-current-art-criticism/ .

2
Regarding the relative novelty of Wendy Brown's critique of rights discourse, I would refer Feiss to Deleuze's impassioned attack on the concept of human rights in Pierre-André Boutang's *L'Abécédaire de Gilles Deleuze* (1996). His stance led to a falling out with Michel Foucault during the 1970s over the violence of the Red Army Faction in Germany, which Didier Eribon discusses in Michel Foucault (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1991), 258—262. Brown offers an updated version of long-standing critiques of the key ideologies of liberalism ("rights," "tolerance," and so forth). There is much to be said on behalf of this critique, but the idea that it's somehow "highly contentious" in the context of an art world that happily devours Zižek's far more incendiary assaults on the evils of "liberal consensus" is puzzling to me. I suspect Feiss and I simply have different perceptions about what constitutes conventional vs. transgressive theoretical insight in contemporary art critical discourse.