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### Facing Forward: Art and Theory from a Future Perspective

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FACING FORWARD  
Art & Theory from a Future Perspective

Edited by  
Hendrik Folkerts / Christoph Lindner / Margriet Schavemaker

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# A CHANGE OF DIRECTION

## An Introduction to Facing Forward: Art & Theory From a Future Perspective

It is as if the invisible light that is the darkness of the present cast its shadow on the past so that the past, touched by this shadow, acquired the ability to respond to the darkness of the now.

Giorgio Agamben, *What is the Contemporary?*, 2009.

The future is there... looking back at us. Trying to make sense of the fiction we will have become.

William Gibson, *Pattern Recognition*, 2003.

## I

Expectations and anticipations of the future are part of our everyday lives. Contemporary visual culture is inundated with a kaleidoscope of futuristic utopias and dystopias in which the longing for a seamless interface between the virtual and the real, as well as the desire for release from the constrictions of time and space, are recurrent themes. Based on speculative predictions and creative scientific arguments, a pervasive visual rhetoric of acceleration and progression, as well as damnation and destruction, shapes our sense of the future.

The project Facing Forward started with a collaboration between five institutions: the Stedelijk Museum Amsterdam, the Amsterdam School for Cultural Analysis at the University of Amsterdam, the De Appel arts centre, W139, the Stedelijk Museum Bureau Amsterdam, and the art magazine *Metropolis M*. Having previously organized the lecture series and publications *Right About Now: Art & Theory in the 1990s* (2005/2006) and *Now is the Time: Art & Theory in the 21st Century* (2008/2009), the organizing committee decided to take the final step in this timeline and turn its attention to the far horizon. Informed by a shared interest in the role that history, speculation, and utopianism play in the field of contemporary art and design (as well as the larger context of global, socio-economic, and political developments), a selection of seven themes emerged from the conversations of the initial organizers. These eventually shaped the seven lecture and discussion events — collected in this volume of essays — publicized under the banner *Facing Forward: Art & Theory From a Future Perspective*. A great number of internationally renowned speakers were invited to reflect on the proposed themes during often sold-out events, which were presented at the Oude Lutherse

Kerk in Amsterdam in 2011/2012. Yet, however compelling our desire as organizers to go beyond the framework of contemporary events and the current interest — well-nigh obsession — with history, it is obviously an illusion to think that we can escape the past by means of a turn towards the future. As Walter Benjamin described it, progress is an angel positioned with its back to the future and blown forward by the wind of history. Nevertheless, our aim is to turn Benjamin's angel around to face forward. We do this not with the goal of ignoring the present and the past. On the contrary: the idea is to face forward in order to change the present and confront our relationship with the past.

Contemporary art in the beginning of the twenty-first century has remained largely aloof from this growing fascination with futurity. One could even claim that it has been excessively fixated on, and oriented towards, the past. Archiving, nostalgia, heritage, commemoration, memory, re-enactment, reconstruction, and documentation have been popular themes and methods in the contemporary art world. At the start of this new millennium, artists, curators, and theorists have frequently adopted a retrospective view in which they set out like archeologists to excavate, preserve, and interpret the past. Theorist and curator Dieter Roelstraete has described this trend as “the historiographic turn”.<sup>1</sup> However, taking refuge in history carries the risk of a certain blindness. Looking back — as opposed to a focused, sustained examination of the contemporary moment and its afterlife — can obscure the view of both the present and the future, making it more difficult to be open to the creative/critical potential of the unknown and the unexpected. And yet, such openness is precisely the orientation that is needed in these turbulent times of financial crisis, technological reinvention, political uprisings, and much more.

The book *Facing Forward: Art & Theory From a Future Perspective*, springing from the eponymous lecture series, counters the retrospective approach by shifting our attention towards art and theory on the horizon of the future. In particular, the book draws attention to a number of important social and artistic questions that are inextricably bound up in the hybrid “discourse of the future”. What will art and art theory bring us in the years and decades to come? How can they change the ways in which we experience and think about the future? What roles do technology, globalization, urban development, science, and politics play in our cultural engagements with futurity? What does it mean (and how does it work) to look forward, to speculate, to extrapolate? Is it possible to develop visions of the future outside and beyond the tired paradigms of utopia and dystopia?

In this publication, renowned international art professionals such as Hans Belting, James Elkins, Amelia Jones, Rem Koolhaas, Manuel Delanda, Iwona Blazwick, and Hito Steyerl, together with a new generation of art historians, practitioners, and critics, engage with these questions while opening new routes to a world beyond the present. The seven themes that their speculations and analyses address cover a wide spectrum: from broad, socio-cultural themes to more art-related issues, as well as more philosophical and methodological inquiries. In the epilogue, the book’s project and topic as a whole are subjected to critical reflection.

## II

A future without elements of the past and/or the present is perhaps most accurately demonstrated in the theme *Future Tech*, the first section in this book. The theme’s point of departure is the view that, in modern society, two ideas vie

for priority: a strong belief in technological progress and an established suspicion about the consequences of technology for society and the condition of humanity. If science and technology continue to develop as rapidly as they have in the past fifty years, what will the relationship between people and machines be in the future? Will the post-human condition — described, among others, by Donna Haraway and Katherine Hayles — become reality, or will the cultural consequences of technological development stagnate in the next few decades? The future mainly appears to lie in the blurring between the artificial and the real. From genetics to augmented reality, the “natural” world is increasingly combined with a created world. How will the continued interrelationship of these combined realities influence our collective condition? And what role will they play in the development of art? In their respective essays, Amber Case and Manuel Delanda depart from such questions in two distinctive directions. Where Case takes the perspective of a ‘cyborg anthropologist’ to look at the way in which computers and mobile technology are profoundly intertwined with our lives, Delanda explores the artistic, or better, architectural value of genetic algorithms.

The city has always been an inspiring tableau for future projections. As a location for socio-political, cultural, and artistic production, the city is a disputed place, constantly being tested by local conditions and global and transnational circumstances. The second theme of this book, *Future City*, considers the influence that the steady acceleration of globalization will have on the shape and image of the future city as well as on rural space. Will the transnational flow of people, work, and images redefine the concept of “urban”? And can we imagine a metropolis beyond the global city? Renowned architect Rem Koolhaas and writer China Miéville try to imagine the city of the future — beyond



and within the urban landscape. Almost all scenarios of the future center on the omnipresence of the image. The fact that we will perhaps live — or are already living — in a culture overrun by images is an assumption that is portrayed in contemporary popular culture as an endless series of screen landscapes transmitting a flow of images that inundates defenseless viewers. In the section *Future Image*, art historian James Elkins and artist and writer Jalal Toufic question whether or not the image will indeed become so ubiquitous, or whether perhaps verbal culture based on experience will gain more ground. And how will art be influenced by these developments? The recent and contemporary practice of art has placed the image in perspective by both showing the strength of the image and embracing production methods of art that are based more on text and processes. A major question is posed: what is the future of the image in the visual arts?

Like *Future Image*, the fourth section on the theme of *Future Museum* considers questions closely related to the visual arts. The institutional critique of the 1960s and early 1970s (and its re-emergence in the 1980s) raised questions that made the future of the museum as institution increasingly uncertain. Where will art belong in the future? Will it still have a place in the museum? And where and to whom will the museum belong? In the first essay, art historian and curator Hans Belting questions this sense of “belonging”: is the future museum a place that is truly global and public, so that we can no longer talk in terms of belonging? Furthermore, the institutions themselves are dealing with their own questions. Can museums exist beyond their architecture and organization? If the four walls of the “white cube” are broken down and museums begin to function extra muros, what will the new theory of the art institution be? What institutional, futuristic concepts do we need to deal

with these sorts of changes? In her analysis of the operations of the modern and contemporary art museum at large, curator Iwona Blazwick imagines the museum of the future to be organized in an entirely differently way.

The theme *Future Freedom* was initially informed by the seemingly drastic changes that marked the years 2011 and 2012. The revolutions in the Arab world were claimed to be a struggle for future democracy, rhetorically inflected as a typical Western ideal. However, the question has now arisen whether a struggle for freedom actually embraces democracy as the ultimate aim. Like all political ideologies, democracy is charged with specific power structures. And more importantly, revolution does not necessarily lead to a different kind of society. Furthermore, with the emergence of right-wing political parties in Europe and the concomitant crisis in the Eurozone, concepts such as freedom, power, and democracy have been re-appropriated and become the subject of intense discussion in many Western democracies. To imagine the future of freedom necessarily requires looking at the present situation. What place does the concept of freedom have in our contemporary world? Is freedom and its supposed counterpart — democracy — possible for everyone or achievable by only a select few? Or does the power of democracy or democratic power stand in the way of freedom? And what does this mean for the free or liberal arts, which are under such enormous pressure in the current political climate? Artists Paul Chan and Hito Steyerl address these questions by exploring specific examples in the arts.

The paradox in the theme *Future History* points towards the complex relationships between past, present, and future, and is specifically related to the still-prevailing trend in contemporary art of the artist as archeologist, as Roelstraete

calls it. Does this recurring interest in history indicate an inability to look to the future? Should we — and can we — jettison the concept of “history”? Another question that presents itself is whether this sort of attempt to sideline history does not essentially imply a return to the postmodern thinking of Francis Fukuyama and Arthur C. Danto. At the end of the 20th century, they claimed that we were living in a post-historic age. This was allegedly a time in which only contemporary matters and the future were important. In a way, it was the end of the line in which history no longer existed. Is this conceptual model still relevant to our time, even now that Fukuyama has retracted his claim that history is ‘over’ in a recent essay?<sup>2</sup> Or can we focus on the future in a different way? Art historians Amelia Jones and David Summers take these questions as a point of departure to reflect on different notions and instances of temporality in the arts.

As many of the evenings in the lecture series made evident, the practice of speculation is by no means an easy one. How are we able to look at the future when the present is so uncertain and unstable? And if we do fix our gaze on the horizon, what and how do we see — is it utopia or dystopia, a purely speculative view or a mere extrapolation of current conditions? Ultimately, can the future be a productive model for visualizing contemporary power structures, global shifts, and changing relations? For the epilogue section *Future Future*, the editors invited a larger number of authors to write short reflections on this topic. In this way the theme is given a broad treatment, and the section will serve as a think tank for the pressing question of this book: how should we look forward?

## III

In the model of both the lecture series and this book, there is a comparison to be made with Italo Calvino's novel *Invisible Cities*, in which explorer Marco Polo always longs for what is in front of him precisely because this causes the present and the past to change shape: "Arriving at each new city, the traveler finds again a past of his that he did not know he had. The foreignness of what you no longer are or no longer possess lies in wait for you in foreign unpossessed places." Calvino links the present, the future, and the past. He looks forward to find answers to the past and present. In these interwoven periods of time, we are like time travelers, going back to the future to get a grasp of our own present and the history that informs it.

In this book, such admixtures of time serve as a testament to the impact of "the historiographic turn" and the legacy of its seminal predecessors, yet they also add a crucial element to the equation that has too often been missing: art and theory from a future perspective that will alter and diversify the here and now.

It is therefore important to outline in more detail what we mean here by a "future perspective" and to explain the ways in which that conceptualization/formulation informs both the title and the project of this book. First, we must stress that neither the editors nor the authors share a fixed, singular understanding of what constitutes a "future perspective". Such a narrow or stable understanding is not only impossible but also undesirable. Given the rich diversity of the authors' backgrounds and the variety of themes they address, it is both necessary and welcome that each of the book's contributors develops his or her own way of approaching art and theory from a future perspective and

that each approach is developed in relation to a particular set of intellectual, disciplinary, and aesthetic concerns.

Thus, with the phrase “future perspective”, the book as a whole refers to a full, creative range of approaches to writing about art and theory in/and/of the future. These approaches include both critical and imaginative attempts to look ahead to the future, to reflect back from the future, to think through the future, to reside in the future, and even to confront the condition of being after the future. Further, exactly what constitutes “the future” itself remains in flux too, and necessarily so. Is the future a moment in time or a place in history? Is it an attitude, an orientation, or an affect? Or is it a construction of form and style? As the following essays reveal, the future is all these and more. As a result, *Facing Forward* hovers between sci-fi depictions of brave new worlds and heterogeneous stories in which histories collide and are re-arranged in their encounters with the future.

Hendrik Folkerts, Christoph Lindner,  
and Margriet Schavemaker

1  
Roelstraete, Dieter, “After the Historiographic Turn: Current Findings,”  
in: *e-flux journal*, journal 6, 05/2009.

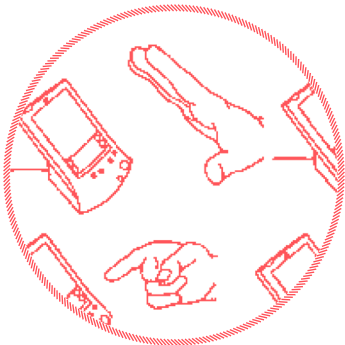
2  
Fukuyama, Francis, “The Future of History,” in: *Foreign Affairs* 91 (1),  
Jan-Feb 2012.





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Amber Case  
Manuel Delanda



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# An Anthropology of Cyborgs, for Cyborgs

Amber Case<sup>1</sup>

Cyborg Anthropology is a subspecialty of Anthropology that was introduced at the 1993 annual meeting of the American Anthropological Association (AAA). As Gary Downey, Joseph Dumit, and Sarah Williams stated in their 1995 article on the discipline, “[t]he term ‘cyborg anthropology’ is an oxymoron that draws attention to the human-centered presuppositions of anthropological discourse by posing the challenge of alternative formulations.”<sup>2</sup> The creators of Cyborg Anthropology wanted to provide a framework for study that would take into account the relations, power, politics, and sites of interaction of both tools and people, as part of a network of non-human and human actors and actants, following the work of Bruno Latour. They promoted the study of the symbiosis between human life and technology, which was no longer considered a mere extension of the physical self but a new field site at the fluctuating boundary of human and non-human, designating a ‘technorganic’ border zone.

When we were asked to contribute to this volume, we were somewhat at a loss as to what to write. Given that art is already a commentary on itself, art history a commentary on artistic trajectories, and art theory yet another meta-commentary, there seemed to be little room for unique ideas in a cursory article from two scholars who do not study art. Yet we do know about technology and the future, and we can offer some hints as to how technology is going to disrupt some of the classic categories by which art is understood. This is what we seek to accomplish in this contribution.

There is a general human tendency to create futuristic visions. We see more evidence of this as the world goes through significant transitions into different industrial periods. The onset of the Industrial Revolution inspired so many images by artists, designers, scientists, and laypeople in their vision of what the future might be like that it inspired a compendium entitled *The History of the Future*,<sup>3</sup> which explored what people in the 1880s to 1920s thought a day in the life of someone in the year 2000 might look like. Today we are experiencing another revolution, this time in the information space. Again we are seeing many people prove possibility futures through the medium of tweets, blogs, and their imagination, and many are

1  
This text was co-authored with Andrew Warner.

2  
Gary Lee Downey, Joseph Dumit, and Sarah Williams, “Cyborg Anthropology,” in: *Cultural Anthropology* 10, no. 2 (1995): 266.

3  
Christophe Canto, Rizzoli, Odile Faliu. *The History of the Future* (Paris: Flammarion, 2001).

busy at work promoting their own personal image of the future. While most of this is relatively innocuous, at some point these extravagant visions start to obscure some basic trends that are worth pondering in every discipline.

Artists have methods of exploring the intersection of technology and humanity in a more thoughtful way by creating experiences one might have in the future. These projects call to focus certain important aspects of technology's influence on culture.

Nick Rodriguez's work is one of many artists visualizing the growing relationship between humans and technology. In the performance piece *Portable Cell Phone Booth*,<sup>4</sup> Rodriguez offers a possible solution to the glut of audio created by noisy cell phone users on the streets of a busy city, in the ordering line of a café, and in other situations where cell phones are considered inappropriate, though not yet fully contained. In *Email Garden*, Rodriguez offers a synthetic landscape of grass-like fibers emerging through a plastic container. The installation is synchronized with the artist's email account, causing the grass-like fibers to grow at the rate of email. Over time the desk transforms from a useful work surface into an overflowing vessel of synthetic communication and endless obligations.<sup>5</sup>

If you consider the anthropologist's traditional field site, it has always been a geographical location. It has always been some place that you go to — if you want to go to the field to study the “other”, you might for instance study heroin abuse, which you will find in many metropolitan city centers. Traditionally, you go to another country. But the main issue is that traditional anthropologists have always had an “other”. They always had a field site. It was always something outside of themselves. But with Cyborg Anthropology, the field site can be anywhere — it can even be you.

Add to that the fact that discourses on the future have historically been highly influenced by fictional projections (science fiction) and religious yearnings (messianic religion), and we have a perfect recipe for general confusion and unproductive dialogue. A significant subset of commentators seem set on the idea that technology is either going to be our salvation (immortality, enough resources for everyone, space exploration, transubstantiation, etc.) or our definite doom (ecological disaster, powerful weapons, dystopian techno-fascism, etc.). Our remedy for this is Cyborg Anthropology.

While we do not enthusiastically endorse the master narratives of technological transcendence or damnation (the two extreme conclusions of technological determinism), it is hard not to notice the increasing role that technology is playing in our lives. Our hope is that, when people hear the word “technology” or “cyborg”, they will not just think of the Terminator concept from science fiction or the

4

Rodrigues, Nick,  
*Portable Cellular  
Phone Booth*,  
Stainless Steel,  
Aluminum,  
Polycarbonate 16”  
X 24” X 36”. 2002.  
<http://www.nickrodrigues.com/paintings-1/portable-cellular-phone-booth>

5

Rodrigues, Nick.  
*Email Garden*.  
Unknown. <http://www.nickrodrigues.com/paintings-1/email-garden>

latest smartphone or software, but think instead about networks of people and machines, organisms and feedback loops, interfaces and cognitive health. But what exactly is Cyborg Anthropology? Why are we using this discipline as a framework rather than any of the other, more established disciplines? To answer these questions, we will first look at the nescient discipline of Cyborg Anthropology itself, and continue by looking at the concept of the cyborg and the informatic disciplines it has spawned. After getting a sense of the different elements that make up Cyborg Anthropology, we will try and tease out how Cyborg Anthropology can uniquely contribute to the collective discourse on our technological and artistic future.

Cyborg Anthropology, in brief, studies the culture surrounding new technologies and how they redefine our traditional notions of what it means to be human. The formal history of Cyborg Anthropology is rather short. It was introduced as a field of study in a short lecture by Joseph Dumit and Robbie Davis-Floyd in 1993 at the annual meeting of the American Anthropology Association.<sup>6</sup> In this presentation, Cyborg Anthropology was inaugurated “as an activity of theorizing and as a vehicle for enhancing the participation of cultural anthropologists in contemporary sciences.”<sup>7</sup> The presentation laid the groundwork for a conference on the discipline in Santa Fe, New Mexico in 1993, which led to the collaborative book *Cyborgs & Citadels*. In 2001, *The Cyborg Handbook* was published as a reference book with primary and secondary sources on the history of cyborgs, including several essays on the idea of Cyborg Anthropology. A few scholars kept the idea alive (such as Amber’s professor, Deborah Heath) until Amber founded the Cyborg Anthropology<sup>8</sup> wiki and started giving lectures about the discipline. With only a few previous scholarly references to Cyborg Anthropology, we find ourselves in a strange position of simultaneously giving a description of what this discipline has been and writing a manifesto of what the discipline should be. Put another way, we are simultaneously participating in and creating Cyborg Anthropology, a dynamic that befits a future-oriented discipline.

## THE CYBORG

The object of study of Cyborg Anthropology is the cyborg. The term was originally a shortening of the phrase “cybernetic organism”, which is a system with both biological and artificial components. The term was originally coined in 1960 by Manfred Clynes and Nathan Kline in a paper about the advantages of human-machine couplings for surviving in space. The authors make a case for humans augmenting their physiology to better adapt to the vicissitudes of outer

6

Joseph Dumit and Robbie Davis-Floyd, “Cyborg Anthropology” (paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Anthropology Association, San Francisco, California, December 2-6, 1992). See also: Robbie Davis-Floyd, and Joseph Dumit, *Cyborg Babies: From Techno-Sex to Techno-Tots* (New York: Routledge, 1998).

7

Gary Lee Downey and Joseph Dumit, eds., *Cyborgs & Citadels: Anthropological Interventions in Emerging Sciences and Technologies* (Santa Fe, New Mexico: School of American Research Press, 1997).

8

Chris Hables Gray, ed., *The Cyborg Handbook* (New York: Routledge, 1995).

space,<sup>9</sup> which includes taking specialized drugs and using hypnotherapy. The idea was that if humans adapt to outer space rather than taking their environment with them, they could avoid “being a slave to the machine” and be “free to explore, to create, to think, and to feel”.<sup>10</sup> It is notable that at the very birth of the cyborg, the issue of agency is already paramount, but we will return to this issue later.

In certain respects, the use of any tool that functions as an extension of one’s abilities makes one a cyborg, but cyborgs are usually more narrowly understood to have physical, technological prostheses. Thus, in the narrowest sense, examples of cyborgs would include people with pacemakers, insulin pumps, or bionic limbs. In the broadest sense, the whole human-technological apparatus could qualify as a cyborg system (and since a cyborg system has no inherent limits, the entire ecosystem could qualify as a cyborg). The most rigid definition of the cyborg does not let us grasp the various combinations of biological beings and technological artifacts that surround us, while the most flexible conception runs the risk of being so vast that the discipline of Cyborg Anthropology cannot be defined. Couldn’t one call a Neanderthal with a rock a cyborg? What about a swarm of bees and their complex architectural creations? We would consider a human with a small implanted chip that allowed extra memory recall a human. But what about replacing 10% of the brain? What about 50%? What about 99%? Doesn’t any interaction with technology basically constitute a cyborg system? Should we consider a person who invests a substantial amount of time as an alter-ego avatar to have Multiple Personality Disorder? What about an individual who hoards news articles and photos on a computer? Is this any different from hoarding in one’s own home? These questions are all valid, and we do not want the cursory definitions given above prevent us from exploring the many permutations of the concept.

The cyborg became a perennial fixture in popular culture through works of science fiction. Iconic figures such as the 6 Million Dollar Man, Iron Man, Robocop, and Dr. No (to name but a few) caught the public imagination in the post-war period. Despite the widespread fascination with certain “pop” cyborgs, the concept did not become a topic of general scholarly interest until the publication of Donna Haraway’s essay “A Cyborg Manifesto” in 1985. It is here that the concept of the cyborg really developed its full theoretical force. Haraway inaugurates the cyborg as a border creature, a non-entity that rejects the very notion of essentialization. It is here that the metaphysical force of the cyborg becomes apparent. Haraway’s cyborg operates at the “borders of the self”. Other metaphysical systems posit an original unity that then gets destroyed by a (fill-in-the-blank-with-your-preferred-evil) system, whereas cyborgs

9

Manfred E. Clynes and Nathan S. Kline, “Cyborgs and Space.” *Astronautics* (September 1960), accessed January 10, 2011, <http://www.scribd.com/doc/2962194/Cyborgs-and-Space-Clynes-Kline>.

10

Ibid.

have no holistic unity to return to. They are assemblages of different elements that adapt to fit a certain need; their very birth was an act of splicing, copying, and pasting together different entities. Haraway takes the cohesive individual subject that has played such an important role throughout the history of Western philosophy and shows where its boundaries have become permeable and elastic through technological augmentation. In this sense, the cyborg is quintessentially postmodern and is therefore an ideal starting point for thinking about our future.<sup>11</sup>

Another way of thinking about cyborgs is to break down the term itself. As mentioned above, “cyborg” is short for “cybernetic organism”. For most, “Cybernetics” is a vaguely familiar concept that seems to have survived merely as a buzzword prefix, but the story of Cybernetics is actually key to understanding the future of technology. Cybernetics was pioneered between the years 1946 and 1953 during a series of conferences known as the Macy Conferences, in which scholars from seemingly disparate fields came together to build a new meta-science. At these conferences, the concepts of the feedback loop, information, and the system were brought together to address a wide range of phenomena, from brains and computers to weapons and rat behavior, ushering in a new era of information obsession.

In the heyday of structuralism and post-structuralism, Cybernetics quickly became fodder for an onslaught against the “sacred” notion of subjectivity that goes along with Cartesian dualism. Examples can be seen littered throughout the writing of the era, with complex system diagrams accompanying a variety of classic texts in theory. Their foray into Cybernetics made sense, too, for Cybernetics had a vocabulary offering notions that could not be easily borrowed from somewhere else. For example, instead of simple linear schemes of cause and effect, Cybernetics introduced the concept of the feedback loop, in which the effect fed back into the cause, so that the output of the system affected the input in a constant dynamic process. This is how complex systems — including living systems, social systems, and mechanical systems — actually operate, and it thus seemed appropriate to use vocabulary that captured this complexity.

Besides the ubiquitous prefix “cyber”, Cybernetics has seemed to slip into the cracks of historical obscurity. Theorists lost interest once they realized that Cybernetics was more about abstract systems than actual technology on the ground. People could theorize about machine-organism couplings, but it was too early to actually see it in practice. But the basic assumptions and metaphysics of Cybernetics are still found in the set of disciplines now called “Informatics”, reaching from robotics, artificial intelligence, bionics, information technology, and nanotechnology to genetics, artificial life, cogni-

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Donna Haraway,  
“A Cyborg Manifesto:  
Science, Technology,  
and Socialist-  
Feminism in the Late  
Twentieth Century,”  
in *Simians, Cyborgs  
and Women: The  
Reinvention of Nature*  
(New York: Routledge,  
1991), 149-181.

tive science, and neuroscience.<sup>12</sup> The common link lies in the pervasive concepts of information, systems, and feedback loops, and the implicit metaphor of the organism as machine, or the machine as organism, and everything understood as information. Every time someone says “I’m not wired for this type of work”, or “one second, my phone is thinking”, they are reactivating the metaphor as it was incubated at the Macy Conferences. Cyborg Anthropology takes the disciplines of informatics and the networks they are part of as its main point of departure.

The fields that make up informatics are at the forefront of researching and implementing the technologies that determine our cyborg condition — technologies including genetic engineering, brain-computer interfaces, smartphones, and prosthetic limbs. By grounding the cyborg in Cybernetics, we avoid studying all technology — a monumental task for any discipline — and also trace a specific history in a field where, in the excitement for future technologies, history is often overlooked. Whereas Cybernetics theorized about information in the abstract, now we actually have the bio-engineering, complex brain-machine interfaces, genetic medicine, advanced brain imaging techniques, and distributed network systems. If the late 20th century was the era of Cybernetics, the 21st century is the era of its prodigal son, the cyborg.

#### ART WITH A CAPITAL “A”

In terms of “Art”, there is little to be said that has not been hashed and rehashed through a variety of theories, texts, and mediums. Yet we think that Cyborg Anthropology can offer some hints on where art is heading and how our cyborg condition is going to affect the artistic landscape. This cursory article will not be able to do these questions justice, but we are going to offer two broad examples in the issues of interface and agency.

The cyborg is a creature of interface; it is a system in which mechanical and organic components are interfacing to create something that is more than the sum of its constituent parts. What are interfaces? All of technology could be considered in terms of interfaces and interfacing, but the interface is commonly understood to be the actual juncture at which the organic human interacts with the inorganic machine. The interface is the voice command, the display, the touchscreen, the MIDI player, the pretty buttons. As Haraway notes, the cyborg is a border creature, and it is precisely at this border that interfaces exist.

Despite the widespread practice of calling our time “The Information Age” (a term that was instigated by Cybernetics), we have

12

N. Katherine Hayles,  
*How We Became  
Posthuman: Virtual  
Bodies in Cybernetics,  
Literature  
and Informatics*  
(Chicago: University  
of Chicago Press,  
1999).

serious reservations as to the value of this term. The Information Age has passed. We spent the first years of Internet compiling content and marveling how much storage we had, but the limitations of simply compiling data became apparent rather quickly. We now have far more information than we know what to do with; companies like Google have petaflops of data just sitting in databases, but the question now is how we access this information. Enter the Interface Age! We need interfaces to allow us to visualize, organize, and fundamentally connect with these data. We need to make this information useful, and we need creative ways to allow us to access the data. Technologists need artists, and artists are going to answer the call. In a sense, the rise of digital design is a return to arts and crafts — the creations will be used by people everyday in a similar way that pottery was, thousands of years ago. As interfaces rise in importance, we will need artists to show us raw data in new ways, and we will see the world become increasingly aestheticized through their creations. In many senses, this is going to be a call for designers, but it goes further than mere design by virtue of the pervasiveness of the technologies and information being created. If the first thing we look at when we wake up is a screen, and the last thing we interact with before we go to bed a screen, we are dealing with an increasingly fundamental element of the human condition.

Far before Roland Barthes gave his eloquent funeral eulogy to the “Author” (with a capital “A”), scholars probed the questions surrounding authorship, artistic genius, and agency. These issues are not going to go away and are only going to multiply with the proliferation of technological actors. Cyborg Anthropology borrows heavily from Bruno Latour and Actor Network Theory to understand how systems engender novel creations and unique cultural landscapes. Rather than continue the Romantic “cult of the genius” and rather than understand Apple and its many fetishized creations as the product of a unique singular cognitive force (His Holiness Steve Jobs), Cyborg Anthropology prefers to look at how Zen Buddhism, Chinese labor, historically situated technological breakthroughs, and optimal consumer conditions act as nodes in a network that created our beloved iPhones.

The distinction between art and non-art will become harder to make as we infiltrate the environment and as technological actors or actants become more prominent. As technology plays a greater role in shaping the world around us, it is going to be harder to argue that a given object isn’t art, for intention will surround us everywhere we go. This is already somewhat the case. Look around you — how much of your environment is designed rather than “natural”? Chances are one of the few things that are not designed is your body, but



even this is already shaped by fashion, piercings, tattoos, and maybe aesthetic surgery. As our cyborg condition becomes more pervasive, our very person is going to become designed in ways we can barely guess. Add to this world the further complexity of art created by non-human and aggregate actors (such as AI art and cloud-created art), and the question of authorship and agency only gets stickier. Cyborg Anthropology and network theory allows us to look at the wide variety of actors, nodes, mediators, and technologies that go into any given development.

As the informatic disciplines rapidly evolve and churn out more technological systems, there are going to be opportunities for gaining a deeper understanding of how we interact with the world. Some of this will be a matter of design, but some of it will go far deeper. The technology is getting so powerful that we will be forced to question, dismantle, and reconstruct many of the concepts and systems that we currently take as given—everything from brains and dreams to happiness and existential angst. This goes beyond design and into the realm of what it means to be human, into the fundamental questions of art.

The cyborg era brings with it many unanswered questions, along with new systems in which to sense and understand behaviors and trends. Many models and systems have not yet been built. Many networks have not been discovered. How we learn as we transition from traditional epistemology to web epistemology, and the digital methods that go with it.<sup>13</sup>

We think that the traditional anthropology tool set for quantitative and qualitative analysis relies on surveys and deeply embodied ethnography. But online, there are more and more researchers making use of programmers to develop analytical software and in tandem create tools and use sensors to explore our newly shaped environments, and others that explore the effects of technology on the social fabric of culture.<sup>14</sup>

13

Richard Rogers.  
*The End of the Virtual — Digital Methods.*  
Text prepared for the  
Inaugural Speech,  
Chair, New Media  
& Digital Culture,  
University  
of Amsterdam. May  
8, 2009. [http://mega-fotos.ru/~NZd3d3Lm-dvdmNvbS5vcmc.ZN-rogers\\_oratie.pdf](http://mega-fotos.ru/~NZd3d3Lm-dvdmNvbS5vcmc.ZN-rogers_oratie.pdf)

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Plant, Sadie. *On the Mobile: The effects of mobile telephones on social and individual life.* Motorola 2005. 52. <http://classes.dma.ucla.edu/Winter03/104/docs/splant.pdf> Accessed 8 Aug 2012.

# The Use of Genetic Algorithms in Art

Manuel DeLanda

In this essay, I explore the use of simulated evolution in art, concentrating on a particular artistic field: architecture. Elsewhere I have used similar arguments to explore the potential of genetic algorithms in music — arguments that can be extended to painting, sculpture, and even choreography.<sup>1</sup> Algorithms are the soul of software. They are mechanical recipes for the performance of tasks such as sorting or searching. They are indispensable because computers lack the judgment necessary to use procedures in which every step is not specified unambiguously. Search algorithms, in particular, are highly valued in computer science because many routine operations in personal computing involve looking for and finding something: a document, an application, a web page, or just free space in a hard disk to store a file. But, more importantly, search algorithms matter, because many problem-solving processes can be modeled as a search: a space of possible solutions to a problem is constructed and a mechanical recipe is created to explore it. If the space of possible solutions happens to include a single best solution, then the process is called an “optimization”, a term familiar to engineers. If the search space is more complex in nature, its exploration may demand a more flexible type of algorithm.

While computer scientists are not normally drawn to biology for inspiration, those concerned with the design of search algorithms are. The reason is that biological organisms may be viewed as solutions to problems posed by the environment: by the climate or topography, by predatory or parasitic species. In other words, adapting to a particular environment involves finding the appropriate changes (in anatomy and in behavior) to cope with the challenges that it presents. Although individual organisms may be said to cope with challenges throughout their lives, evolutionary biologists are typically more interested in long-term adaptations, that is, in solutions to environmental problems found by a given species over many generations. In the 1960s, the computer scientist John Holland looked at evolution as a process involving a search for solutions, and abstracted its basic features from the details of its biological implementation. Or, as he put it, his task was “lifting the reproductive plans from the specific genetic context.”<sup>2</sup>

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Manuel DeLanda, “The Virtual Breeding Sound,” in *Sound Unbound: Sampling Digital Music and Culture*, ed. Paul D. Miller (Cambridge, Massachusetts: MIT Press, 2008), 219-226.

The result was a new type of search algorithm, the genetic algorithm, which differed from older procedures in that the space of solutions was not itself directly explored. The search was rather conducted in a space that coded for those solutions. This reflected the fact that in biology we face a double reality — that of the bodily traits of organisms (the phenotype) and that of a coded procedure to generate those traits (the genotype). Because the process of production of an organism can be coded into genes, the process can be repeated every generation, a repetition that is crucial to endow the entire species with the ability to find solutions to specific environmental problems. Another significant difference is that while other search algorithms may look at one solution at a time, comparing it to older solutions and adopting it if it is better, evolutionary searches can look simultaneously at many solutions, one for each member of the population.

This captures the insight that, in biology, the repetition of the process that generates organisms always includes differences — differences that are distributed throughout a population, making each member a slightly different solution. When applied to algorithms, this implies that evolutionary searches are conducted not serially, one solution at a time, but in parallel, as the entire population moves across the search space like a cloud. Finally, while genetic differences are generated by random processes (mutation, sexual recombination), the environment selects only those differences that increase the degree to which the solution fits the problem, giving the search process a certain directionality. This reflects the idea that natural selection sorts out the members of the population into those that get to leave many copies of themselves and those that do not, in the process capturing historical information about the adequacy of the solutions.

To architects, the concept of using a search process to solve design problems is not entirely new. They can easily come up with examples of procedures that have been used in the past to find forms, using the inherent tendencies of particular materials and structures to perform analogue computations. Search spaces structured by a single optimal point, for example, have been known to mathematicians for centuries and have been adapted by architects for design purposes. Such optimal points (minima and maxima) were first studied in the eighteenth century by Leonhard Euler, via his famous calculus of variations. One of the first variational problems to be tackled was the so-called “catenary problem”, which can be characterized by the question “what form will a chain find if allowed to hang freely while constraining both its ends?” Euler framed the problem in terms of the potential energy of the gravitational forces acting on the chain. He realized, and proved mathematically, that,

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John H. Holland,  
*Adaptation in Natural  
and Artificial  
Systems: An Intro-  
ductory Analysis with  
Applications  
to Biology, Control,  
and Artificial Intelli-  
gence* (Cambridge,  
Massachusetts:  
MIT Press, [1975]  
1992), 18.

of all the geometrically possible forms, the one realized by the actual chain is the one that minimizes this potential — the chain will be at equilibrium when its center of gravity occupies the lowest position.<sup>3</sup> In a sense, the hanging chain performs an analogue computation to find this form among all the other possible forms.

Among architects, it was Antoni Gaudí who, at the turn of the twentieth century, first realized the potential of hanging chains or ropes. He used them to find the form of the arches in the facade of his Sagrada Familia church. But chain models can be used for design problems that are more complex than arches or vaults:

Chain networks showing significantly more complex forms than freely suspended individual chains can be constructed from small pieces of chain or short bars fastened together flexibly. Freely suspended networks of this kind open up the gigantic formal world of the “heavy tents”, as the so-called gravity suspended roofs can also be named. They can be seen in the temple and pagoda roofs of the Far East, where they were originally made as flexible bamboo lattices. Today, roofs of this kind are made of rope nets with a wooden or lightweight concrete roof.<sup>4</sup>

The authors of this quote are Frei Otto and Bodo Rasch of the Institute for Lightweight Structures in Stuttgart. Frei Otto is perhaps best known for his use of soap film as a membrane-forming liquid, capable of finding minimal forms on its own. Form-finding for tent designs can also be performed with thin rubber films, knitted or woven fabrics, and thread or wire nets, but soap film is perhaps a better illustration of the technique. As is well known, soap film can spontaneously find the form with the lowest surface tension. Like the inverted chain, the space of possibilities associated with soap film is structured by a single optimum, a topological point that attracts the population of soapy molecules to a specific form.

Without any constraints (such as those exerted by a frame made of wire or rope) the form that emerges is a sphere or bubble. Adding constraints can break the symmetry of this sphere and yield a wide variety of other minimal surfaces, such as the hyperbolic paraboloid (saddle-shaped surface), which Frei Otto used for the roof of the German Pavilion at the Expo 67 in Montreal. That roof was the first of a series in which Otto deliberately used soap film as a form-finding instrument. Despite this exemplary achievement, some of Frei Otto's collaborators realized that performing form-finding procedures on search spaces structured by a single global optimum was too constraining. Peter von Buelow, for example, argued this point by contrasting the task of engineering analysis with that of architectural design:

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Stephen P. Timoshenko, *History of Strength of Materials: With a Brief Account of the History of Theory of Elasticity and Theory of Structures* (New York: Dover, [1953] 1983), 31.

4

Frei Otto und Bodo Rasch, *Frei Otto, Bodo Rasch: Finding Form: Towards an Architecture of the Minimal*, ed. Sabine Schanz (Fellbach: Edition Axel Menges, 1995), 62.

[Evolutionary search] goes beyond a set procedure of analysis to aid the designer in exploring form-finding problems in a creative way. Unlike analysis tools, it is not intended to yield one correct solution, but rather to supply the designer with stimulating, plausible directions to consider. [Evolutionary search] is intended to be used in the early, form-finding stages of a design problem. As such, it deliberately avoids leading the designer to a single “best” solution, but instead follows the designer’s lead in exploring the design space.<sup>5</sup>

While in engineering one normally tries to find a single best solution, and there is the expectation that different analysts will reach basically the same solution, in design there are always a variety of ways of solving a problem, and different designers will typically arrive at their own solutions. In the latter case, the search space is structured by multiple local optima, a condition that favors the use of simulated evolution to perform form-finding.

Let’s describe in some detail a typical implementation of evolutionary search. A simulation of evolution consists of the following components: a strategy to code a problem into a simulated chromosome (a way of mapping genotype into phenotype); a procedure to discriminate good from bad solutions to that problem (a fitness function); a procedure to translate this assessment into reproductive success (a selection function); and a set of operators to produce variation in each generation (at the very least, mutation and sexual recombination operators). Some of these components involve human creativity while others are used in an entirely mechanical way by the computer. Coding the problem to be solved and devising a way of correctly estimating the fitness of evolved solutions can be highly challenging tasks, demanding imaginative human intervention. But once the creative decisions involved in these preparatory steps have been made, the rest of the components can take care of themselves: a population of random chromosomes, most of which start with very low fitness, is first created; the few members of the original population that happen to be a little better than the rest are then selected for reproduction; pairs of chromosomes are mixed in a way that imitates sexual recombination, or single chromosomes mutated asexually, producing a new generation; the fitness of the offspring is evaluated; and the steps are mechanically repeated until a locally optimal solution is found.

The creative preparatory steps — inventing a mapping between a coded problem and a solution, and implementing a fitness function — are the points at which an artist or designer can make the greatest contribution. So we will need to describe these two steps

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Peter von Buelow, “Using Evolutionary Algorithms to Aid Designers of Architectural Structures,” in *Creative Evolutionary Systems*, Peter J. Bentley and David W. Corne, eds. (San Diego: Academic Press, 2002), 317.

in more detail. The task of coding the design problem depends crucially on the nature of the simulated chromosome. In the case of genetic algorithms, for example, strings of symbols play the role of chromosomes. This linear structure gives them a certain similarity with their real counterparts, except that unlike real chromosomes, the length of the strings is kept fixed, and the alphabet providing the symbols has only two entries (“one” and “zero”) instead of four (the four nucleotides used in DNA). In other words, the chromosomes in genetic algorithms are bit strings whose length remains constant throughout the simulation, and for which the variables defining a given problem must be represented by ones and zeroes.

If the variables happen to be switches that can be either on or off, the coding is trivially simple: each bit in the string represents a gene, and each gene codes for a switch. But most problems do not have this simple form. The variables may have, for example, numerical values, ranging from a minimum value to a maximum one. In this case, we must break down the range of continuous values of each variable into a discrete series. If this series contains, say, sixteen different values, then a string four bits long will be enough, the gene “0000” representing the minimum value and “1111” representing the maximum one. The fitness function that evaluates solutions on each generation can be used to handle values that are out of the range, that is, to enforce the constraint that values must belong to the allowable range by penalizing strings that violate it.<sup>6</sup>

The standard example of the kind of problem that can be solved by genetic algorithms is the control of a pipeline for natural gas. A pipeline must geographically link the point of supply of gas to the point of delivery, using a series of compressors linked by pipes. The problem is to determine the relation between the suction pressure of each compressor to its discharge pressure (the pressure gradient between its input and output) in such a way as to minimize the overall electrical power consumed. Coding this problem into a form that a genetic algorithm can use involves two steps. First, the gradient for each compressor must be given a binary representation (a bit string long enough to give a series of numerical values) and several of these bit strings must be concatenated into a larger one to capture the whole pipeline. Second, a fitness function must be created to evaluate the power consumption of each combination of values for different compressors as well as to enforce global constraints, such as the minimum or maximum of pressure allowed in the pipeline. Genetic algorithms have been shown to search the space of possibilities defined by problems like these in a highly efficient way.<sup>7</sup>

There are different ways to adapt this approach to the task of form-finding. The simplest one would be to define the space of

6

David E. Goldberg,  
*Genetic Algorithms in  
Search, Optimization,  
and Machine Learning* (Reading,  
Massachusetts:  
Addison-Wesley, 1989),  
82-85.

possible forms in a parametric way, so that it matches exactly the template offered by the pipeline example. Defining significant parameters that can be varied independently is not a trivial task: a good parameter should not be a single variable, such as the height or width of a particular design component, but a relation between different properties, at the very least a ratio of two carefully picked variables.

Another possibility, explored by the architect John Frazer in 1971, is to adopt a modular approach to design. In one implementation, for example, Frazer created two modules (two folded plate components) that could be oriented in eighteen different ways relative to each other. Then he devised an arbitrary code to match binary numbers to each of the modules and their transformations. Creativity enters here in the choice of pre-designed modules (they must have a great combinatorial productivity) as well as in the choice of transformations. In Frazer's case the latter were simple rotations, but more complex transformations can be used as long as they are adapted to the combinatorial capacities of the modules.<sup>8</sup> Frazer realized early on that the way one represents the design problem in order to be able to code it into a bit string — what he calls the “generic representation” — is a key step in the process, since it implicitly defines the space that will be searched. As he writes:

In step one, the generic representation largely determines the range of possible outcomes. A tight representation based on previously near-optimal solutions may be fine for some engineering problems but might seriously inhibit the range of more creative solutions in another domain. For example, parametrization is a valuable technique for exploring variations on a well-trying and tested theme, but it is limited to types of variation that were anticipated when the parametrization was established.[On the other hand,] a very open representation is often difficult to imagine and can easily generate a vast search space.<sup>9</sup>

Given the importance of the generic representation of a design problem, and more generally of an adequate mapping between genotype and phenotype, architects must consider all existing alternatives. The bit strings used by genetic algorithms not only force the designer to find a numerical way of coding the design problem, but the fact that the strings are of a fixed length implies that the complexity of a problem must be specified in advance. This limits the range of problems that can be coded and solved.

Although these limitations can be mitigated by allowing the string to vary in length (as in so-called “messy” genetic algorithms), other chromosome designs can afford more flexibility. In genetic

7  
Ibid 125-130.

8  
John Frazer, “Creative Design and the Generative Evolutionary Paradigm,” in *Creative Evolutionary Systems*, Peter J. Bentley and David W. Corne, eds. (San Diego: Academic Press, 2002), 260-262.

9  
Ibid., 257.



programming, for example, chromosomes are not static strings but dynamic computer programs capable not only of varying in length but also of breaking down a problem into a hierarchy of sub-problems, and then to literally construct the solution to the design problem following the evolved building procedure. The idea of using a procedural genetic representation of a problem instead of an arbitrary numerical code for modules and transformations may seem obvious to any architect that has built a 3D model using a script (in, say, Maya Embedded Language or MEL). However, most computer languages do not allow the creation of programs in which random substitutions of instructions can be made while the overall program remains functional. In other words, the functionality of most scripts or programs is destroyed after undergoing a few random mutations or sexual recombinations. There are some languages, however, that do possess the necessary resiliency: they use mathematical functions instead of step-by-step recipes, and generate control hierarchies by recursion, that is, by defining higher-level functions in terms of lower-level ones. With this kind of computer language, the range of design problems that can be coded into simulated chromosomes can be increased dramatically.

In genetic programming, the creative preparatory steps include selecting the right kind of elementary functions, out of which more complex ones can be built by recursive composition, as well as the constants and variables that can act as inputs to those functions. This elementary repertoire must fit the type of problem to be solved: if the problem is a logical one, the elementary functions should be operators like “And” or “Not”, while the variables should be True and False values; if it is arithmetical, the operators should be something like “Add” or “Multiply”, while the variables should be numbers or matrices; if it is a problem of robotic motion, it must contain functions like “Move Left” or “Move Right”, and variables specifying distances or angles; and finally, if the problem is creating a 3D model of a building, then the functions must include extrusion, surface of revolution, bending, and twisting, while the variables must be polygons or NURBS. In other words, the basic repertoire must be matched to the details of the problem’s domain. A chromosome in genetic programming is not a linear string but a branching graph — a “tree” in which each branching point is labeled with a function, while the “leaves” are labeled with variables and constants. These tree-like graphs capture the hierarchical relations between elementary and composite functions, and can be manipulated by the same genetic operators (mutation, sexual recombination) that are used in genetic algorithms.

Much as the oil pipeline problem is an exemplar of the use of genetic algorithms, the design of analog electrical circuits (filters,



amplifiers, sensors) has been the area in which genetic programming has demonstrated its full potential. Unlike digital circuits, in which the design task can be automated, analog circuits are basically handcrafted. To make the problem even more “human-like”, John Koza, the creator of genetic programming, chose as his targets designs that had already been patented. The reason is that for a patent to be accepted it must typically contain significant differences with respect to existing designs and these differences must be “creative”, that is, not logically deducible from a previously patented invention.<sup>8</sup> Using this criterion, the designs produced by genetic programming can be classified as true inventions rather than mere optimizations: in several cases, evolutionary search has rediscovered circuit designs that had been previously patented; in other cases it has matched the functionality of patented designs by using novel means; and in at least one case it has produced an entirely new patentable design.<sup>10</sup>

The repertoire of elementary functions that allow the circuit design problem to be coded include functions that insert a new component (a resistor, a capacitor, an inductor); functions that alter the connectivity of these components (the topology of the circuit); and functions that set the intensity (or sizing) of a component, that is, the amount of resistance of a resistor, the capacitance of a capacitor, and so on. Fitness evaluation is more complex than in genetic algorithms because the evolved programs must be run to construct the solution. In the case of analog circuits, once the topology and the sizing have been set for a given generation, a circuit must be built (as a simulation) and tested. To do this, a kind of “embryo” circuit (an electrical substructure with modifiable wires and components) is placed into a larger circuit in which no component is modifiable. Only the embryo evolves, but its placement into a larger functional setting allows it to be easily checked for viability.<sup>11</sup>

Koza decided to use existing software to check for the functionality of the circuits, a strategy that could also be followed by designers of architectonic structures, since these need not only be assessed for aesthetic fitness but also be evaluated as load-bearing structures. Like Koza, users of genetic programming in architecture could have the program build 3D models in a format that is already used by existing structural engineering software (such as finite element analysis) and use the latter as part of the process of fitness evaluation. And like Koza, only a certain part of a building need to be evolved (the embryo), the rest being a non-evolvable template into which the embryo can be placed to be checked for structural integrity.

It should be clear from these remarks that fitness evaluation is another aspect of simulated evolution that demands a creative inter-

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John R. Koza et al., “Genetic Programming: Biologically Inspired Computation that Exhibits Creativity in Producing Human-Competitive Results,” in *Creative Evolutionary Systems*, eds. Peter J. Bentley and David W. Corne (San Diego: Academic Press, 2002), 294.

vention on the part of the designer. The assessment of aesthetic fitness, in particular, can be particularly difficult. One approach here is to let the designer be the fitness function: he or she is presented with a population of solutions on every generation, perhaps one that has already been checked for structural integrity, to be ranked by their aesthetic appeal. This approach has the advantage that the designer has more control over the direction of the search, steering the evolutionary process into promising directions. Peter von Buelow's use of simulated evolution for form-finding uses this strategy, not only allowing the user to rank proposals as a way of measuring fitness, but also letting him or her add new variants to the population to redirect the search away from evolutionary dead ends.<sup>12</sup>

Replacing a fitness function with a human, however, has the disadvantage of making the process painfully slow and of limiting the evaluation of every generation to a small subset of the entire population, a subset small enough to be displayed on a computer screen and be surveyable at a glance. Given that aesthetic criteria are very hard to formalize, it would seem that using the "eye of the beholder" is inevitable when evaluating fitness in terms of fuzzy concepts like "elegance" or "beauty". But there is another alternative: not a mechanical assessment of aesthetic fitness but a means to store the taste or stylistic preferences of the designer so that they can be applied automatically. This can be done by the use of another type of simulation called "neural nets". Like Koza's use of external software to assess the functionality of electrical circuits, this would extend the meaning of the term "fitness function" so that it encompasses not only a fixed criterion coded mathematically but any complex set of procedures, using any existing software, that can be reliably used to assign fitness values.

Simply put, a neural net is a learning device that maps patterns into patterns, without any intervening representations.<sup>13</sup> One pattern may be, for example, a sensory pattern produced by features of the environment (captured via a video camera), while the other may be a motor pattern, that is, a sequence of actions produced as a response to the sensory stimulation. Learning consists in correctly matching the motor activity to the sensory information, such as fleeing in the presence of predators. Both sensory and motor patterns are implemented as activity patterns in simple computing units arranged in layers (input and output layers in the simplest designs) linked to each other by connections that can vary in strength. Unlike other implementations of machine learning, a neural net is not programmed but trained. In the simplest case, the training consists in repeatedly presenting a pattern to the input layer, activating some units but not others, while fixing a desired activation pattern in the output layer.

11  
Ibid., 280.

12  
Ibid., 284.

The reason the output pattern is fixed in advance is that, as with animal training, the human trainer has a desired behavior that he or she is trying to elicit from the animal. Once both activation patterns are set, the computing units in each layer can begin to interact with each other through their connections: units that are simultaneously active will strengthen their connection to each other, and vice-versa: simultaneous inactivity will weaken a link. Thus, during training, changes in the connection strengths store information about the interactions. After many presentations of the input and output patterns, the connection strengths will converge to the combination needed to match the activation patterns to each other. And after the training is over, and the fixed output pattern is removed, the neural net will be able to reproduce it whenever the right input pattern is present. In a sense, the neural net learns to recognize the sensory stimulation, a recognition signaled by the production of the correct motor response. And more importantly, the neural net can not only recognize patterns that were included in the training set but also patterns that are similar to those.

To be used as an aesthetic fitness function, a neural net needs to be trained with a set of examples corresponding either to the designer's taste or the stylistic preferences associated with a particular project. A set of photographs or 3D renderings of the appropriate architectonic structures would comprise the training set, presented to the input layer via a video camera in the case of photographs, or in some coded form in the case of 3D renderings. The output layer, in this case, would not have to perform any motor response but only produce a pattern of activation representing a numerical value: a number that ranks different inputs by their aesthetic proximity to the designer's taste or stylistic preferences. During training, these numerical values would be given explicitly by the designer (making sure that they do indeed capture his or her aesthetic values), but after training they would be produced automatically to be used as part of the fitness score. Using neural nets to replace the "eye of the beholder" has advantages and disadvantages. It can greatly speed up the process since there is no need for the designer to sit at the computer following a simulation, and it can evaluate as many evolving entities as needed, without the restriction of having to present these to the user on the screen. On the other hand, it can constrain the search space to those areas containing possible design solutions that are already pleasing to the user, preventing the simulation from finding surprising forms, that is, forms that the designer did not know he or she liked.

Another component of fitness evaluation that is important to architects is the kinds of activity patterns displayed by the human

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William Bechtel and Adele Abrahamson, *Connectionism and the Mind: An Introduction to Parallel Processing in Networks* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Blackwell, 1991), 106-107.

users of a given architectural space. Certain circulation patterns, for example, may be desired, with rapid and unobstructed circulation in some areas, and gatherings of small groups in other, more intimate zones. To check whether an evolved design does indeed facilitate such circulation patterns, we need to include simulated agents that are spatially situated with respect to one another, and that can interact with the simulated walls, doors, hallways, stairs, and other components of the 3D model of a building. Space can be structured through the use of cellular automata, populations of simple computing machines placed on a tiled plane (or volume) in which spatial relations like proximity are easily captured by the sharing of edges or vertices in the tile. Traditional cellular automata, like the famous *Game of Life*, use the simplest type of computing machine: finite state automata capable of carrying computations without any memory. They can, for example, perform multiplications as long as they do not have to carry a number. But the restriction to memoryless automata can be removed, allowing each automaton to perform more complex tasks. When this is done, the result is called a “multi-agent system”, a hybrid of cellular automata and object-oriented programming.<sup>14</sup> With the right set of rules, such agents can avoid collisions and plan motion paths in a given space that take into account the opportunities and risks afforded by the physical layout of a space, as well as the movements of neighboring agents. A small population of such agents can be unleashed into every proposed design solution in a given generation, and a simple piece of software can be added to check for the emergence of the desired circulation patterns, with a score given to each candidate relative to its distance from the ideal pattern. This score can then be added to the one produced by the neural net to determine the overall fitness value.

Thus, just as devising the right mapping between genotype and phenotype — and between coded design problems and their solutions — involves the creativity of the designer, so implementing a good fitness function demands the imaginative coupling of multiple simulation genres. Neither task can be accomplished by software engineers designing general products for general audiences, since it is only the specific artist or designer who has enough knowledge of his or her field to make the right decisions about how to code a problem, how to unfold the possible solutions embryologically, and how to evaluate their adequacy. In short, there is plenty of room for individual creativity in the use of evolutionary search as a form-finding procedure.

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Joshua M. Epstein  
and Robert L. Axtell,  
*Growing Artificial  
Societies: Social  
Science from Bottom  
Up* (Cambridge,  
Massachusetts: MIT  
Press, 1996), p. 179.



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China Miéville  
Rem Koolhaas



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# Future City

China Miéville

It was not long before spectacle overtook intent. The cathedral-adjacency of Occupy London's now-gone tent city felt instantly iconic. But St Paul's was not the initial aim of the protestors of 2011. Occupy had intended to reach Paternoster Square, the headquarters of the London Stock Exchange, but they were not allowed in. The square pretends to be some vulgar notional piazza, but it is private property, access to which can be instantly revoked.

To talk about the future of the city, we need to consider the pre-future of the city. And to consider the present "global", "post-national", "postmodern" city, that means starting with neoliberalism, with so-called austerity (a word favored by those with no need to be austere), and with violence.

The example of Occupy shows what a legal and social impact faux-public urban spaces have.<sup>1</sup> Their spread has accelerated in the UK, under first the Labour, and now our ConDem coalition government. The most important boost to the process came in 2004, when the Labour government changed the rules around Compulsory Purchase Orders, by which authorities appropriate land for development. No longer was proof necessary that a plan was in the "public interest": the phrase now used was "economic interest".

For developers, the use-value of streets is their exchange-value, which very often runs directly counter to the use-value they have for their inhabitants. This is no secret. Neoliberalism has its important specifics, yes, but the commodity nature of the built city has been clear at least since Friedrich Engels wrote "The Housing Question" in 1872.<sup>2</sup> To live in a city, particularly one as much of a mess as London, is to live in a coagulum of history and aesthetics — "a palimpsest of landscapes",<sup>3</sup> which is also a palimpsest of commodities, the impact of which is enormous on the human psyche.

A lesson from the culture industry: In 2004, Patrick Le Lay, CEO of the major French TV channel TF1, wrote: "TF1's job is to help Coca-Cola, for example, sell its product. [...] For an advertisement message to be perceived, the brain of the spectators must be available. The purpose of our shows is to make it available. That is to say, entertain it, relax it in order to prepare it between two advertisements. What we are selling to Coca-Cola is temporal space of available human brain."<sup>4</sup>

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See the excellent Anna Minton, *Ground Control: Fear and Happiness in the Twenty-First Century* (London: Penguin, 2009).

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Friedrich Engels, "The Housing Question," 1872, accessed February 27, 2013, <http://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1872/housing-question/index.htm>.

3

David Harvey, *The Limits to Capital* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1982), 233.

4

As quoted in Raphaël Paour, "The Purpose of Private Television," *The TransAtlantic Assembly Blog*, July 28, 2005, <http://transatlanticassembly.blogspot.com/2005/07/purpose-of-private-television.html>.



Buildings are, among other things, physical vectors for the monetization of human bodies. We live in commodities, we walk through them, we work and study, have sex and sleep in them. We are components of, and our lives are epiphenomena in, those commodities' actualization into profit. How does that effect the physicality of cities, and in turn our behavior? Is there an architectural equivalent of Le Lay's "making available" of humanity to "en-buildinged" profiteering?

The aspiration can be posed in grossly reductive terms, of a therapeutic or punitive architecture, a Skinnerian maze of buildings through which we, rats, scurry. We reject that model. But anyone who walks down one street rather than another just because they like the view, say, illustrates that architecture does, even if in complicated and mediated ways, impact our behavior. And sometimes in ways not even particularly complicated. This is what supermarkets pay for — the politics of space, layouts designed to extract maximum money from those who walk them. This is why bus stops and benches in London are designed so people cannot sleep on them — they become architectural collaborators with the police, helping to prod undesirables to move on.

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In London, a vanguard example of fake public space appeared in the 1980s. It is a cliché to criticize Canary Wharf, but there are some clichés in which it would be a dereliction not to indulge. It is both duty and a grim pleasure to attack the "development", which developed nothing, from which nothing has trickled down but contempt, which glassily enshrines class spite. We must urgently continue to attack it until, in the future city, it is pulled to the ground, an exorcism is performed over its malevolent girders, and salt is scattered on the grave.

This is not merely a matter of ugliness, though Canary Wharf is a massive aesthetic insult. Key, though, is that its ugliness, and what that ugliness and its buildings do, is inextricable from the area's privatized nature. Consider the prodigious recuperative powers of cities over even severely ugly architecture, and the steadfast refusal of this place to ever feel like anything designed by or for humans becomes almost impressive. It is possible not to be oppressed by Canary Wharf — but not if you attempt to relate to it as an inhabitant, a passer-by, a walker-through, let alone as a neighbor, as the poor of the East End must. To anyone who does not relate to it as a machine, it is a Herculean fuck-you.

The ideology of the small state and laissez-faire has always been a lie. For all the blather about such concepts, that mendacity has

never been clearer than it is with neoliberalism. Such clarity about its interventionism is one of the few silver linings in the neoliberal sludge-cloud. Science fiction uses the term “terraforming” to describe the transformation of an alien world into one that is similar enough to Earth to be safe for humans to inhabit. In neoliberalism, we see the quickening logic of “lucroforming”, a politico-geo-transformative agenda to make our entire planet, including at the semiotic level, the most fecund biome possible for capital.

This baleful capitalist utopianism is at work in contemporary London. We see it in the gigantism of crassness, the enormity of transformation in East London for the Olympics. Community gardens as well as local businesses and services are destroyed, social cleansing carried out, an aggressive regime of security and a staggering public bill incurred to transmogrify the area into a massively coiffed and neurotically policed moneyscape of bland and logoeid taste.<sup>5</sup> The likelihood that Stratford will be a sepulchre of behemoth dead edifices in fifteen years is, unfortunately, high. Of course it is perfectly possible to build big and fantastically well: the problem here is not size, but the philosophy of planning.

Walk the unfinished park and what strikes you — as has been catalogued by the writer Iain Sinclair, among others<sup>6</sup> — is the extermination of urban contingency. Nothing can be unplanned. The runnels one walks are swaddled, the square footage plotted at a totalizing scale. To be respectfully provocative, the purveyors of this bigness have, I think, managed almost combatively to contradict, in big matter itself, Koolhaas’s third theorem of bigness: “Where architecture reveals, BIGNESS perplexes; BIGNESS transforms the city from a summation of certainties into an accumulation of mysteries.”<sup>7</sup> This East London bigness, by contrast, is characterized not merely by the absence of, but the utterly neurotic antipathy to, mystery of any kind.

In the words of one organizer at the Olympic Park Legacy Company, who seems very aware of such issues, “[...] it’s a constant struggle. [...] [T]he planning decisions team [...] wants comfort and certainty [...]. [W]ell, the future lies a long way out, and we need to be a little light on our feet. [...] [P]lanning is very constrained, and it’s kind of a blunt tool. [...] [Y]ou want places that are like those grittier, more diverse places.”<sup>8</sup> But how do you plan for the unplanned?

Of course, it is not the case that urban neoliberalism can *only* operate by the imposition of grand schemes. Capital is more fleet-footed than that. But it does seem that the ambition of this phase of neoliberalism, as it instrumentalizes a crisis for purposes of social engineering,<sup>9</sup> has bolstered a post-Blairite middle-management messianism. In London at least, urban capital’s current

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There are a great many online resources for Olympic skepticism, see for example <http://www.gamesmonitor.org.uk>.

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See Iain Sinclair, “The Olympics Scam,” *London Review of Books* 30, no. 12 (June 2008): 17-23, accessed March 22, 2012, <http://www.lrb.co.uk/v30/n12/iain-sinclair/the-olympics-scam>.

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Rem Koolhaas, “Bigness or the Problem of Large,” 1998, accessed February 27, 2013, [http://varasfadu.com.ar/pu/Textos/Bigness-SM-LXL\\_ing.pdf](http://varasfadu.com.ar/pu/Textos/Bigness-SM-LXL_ing.pdf).

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Previously quoted in China Miéville, “London’s Overthrow,” 2011, accessed February 27, 2013, <http://www.londonoverthrow.org/london9.html>.

9

See, of course, Naomi Klein, *The Shock Doctrine* (London: Penguin, 2008).

dreams seem less to do with any mawkish hankering for the village than with a greater scale.

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It has become rote to point out quite how many sentimentalized urban apocalypses there are in recent movies. The colossal projects of urban “renewal” might represent a kind of anti-apocalypse, a mirror response to the same moment expressed in this cinema, performing a similar action of libidinally invested spectacular urbophilia. Where apocalypse prioritizes the baleful urban sublime, Olympic and Olympian urban planning stress the *corporate* urban sublime. Both do so at the expense of actual humans.

The excitement about cities without people, or through which people pass as briefly as possible — necessary evils, temporary interlopers — is visible in the real estate market as well as in the ideological daydreams of Hollywood, in moves directly connected with financialization. “Project Express” is a plan underway to lay a cable below the Atlantic that will take data on a round trip from New York to London in 59.6 milliseconds, rather than the current excruciating glacial pace of 64.8 milliseconds.<sup>10</sup> Those 5-and-a-smidgeon milliseconds are, to computer-wielding financiers, worth the \$300 million they are slated to cost. These timescales, of course, are inhuman.

110 8<sup>th</sup> Avenue is a pleasant-enough piece of New York Deco. Its external appearance is still that of a building for humans, but that is misleading. Like 85 10<sup>th</sup> Avenue, like 60 Hudson Street, like many other places, it is now a colocation center, a “carrier hotel”, a temperature-controlled, heavily protected hub for the cables and servers that high-speed data transfer necessitates. (One wonders what Henri Lefebvre, that compelling theorist of the facade, would make of *this* camouflage for *these* electronic inhabitants.) Such properties are increasingly desirable for algorithmic trading, which relies on colossal processing power and split-millisecond speeds, revolutionizing financial markets. Which in turn has an effect on real estate markets and the physical city itself.

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Where an aesthetic of humanlessness is part of a *neoliberal occult* — behind which there are, of course, actual, particular humans — a brasher, less elegiac flipside is neoliberalism’s brandscaping, the fairytale-bramble thickets of urban advertising, and a concomitant ongoing banalization of public art. Of course, great and/or subtle works can still be made, but the twin drives towards massiveness

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Matthew Philips,  
“Stock Trading is  
About to Get 5.2  
Milliseconds Faster,”  
*Bloomberg  
Businessweek*,  
March 29, 2012,  
accessed February  
27, 2013, [http://www.  
businessweek.com/  
articles/2012-03-29/  
trading-at-the-speed-  
of-light](http://www.businessweek.com/articles/2012-03-29/trading-at-the-speed-of-light).

and a drab decodability — the latter often glossed, misleadingly, as “relevance” — do nothing but accelerate a tendency towards the least provocative work, the least driven to withdraw. This is especially the case where such artworks also often have to operate as identifiable markers of corporate largesse.

As a first step towards a public art in and of the future city, I propose using the hardy weed-like advertisements that remain behind when the businesses they celebrate go bust. Thus de-thorned, they still litter psychic space. Perhaps, in the future city, we can, collectively, be new urban Capability Browns, landscape gardeners of such orphaned foliage.

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People do not trot into line in the face of social engineering. Another corollary of neoliberalism, then, is that the city of the pre-future, conceived of as a locus of threat by those in power, is massively and increasingly militarized. As the US Marine corps put it in 1998, “cities historically are the places where radical ideas ferment, dissenters find allies and discontented groups find media attention”, making cities “a likely source of conflict in the future”.<sup>11</sup> At the low level of sinister absurdity, this is manifested in the harassment of photographers legally taking photographs of the Olympic site. At the games, there were warships in the Thames, missiles on roofs, and more troops in London than in Afghanistan.<sup>12</sup>

Strongly militarized urban management has of course been common in the US in minority areas under, for example, the so-called War on Drugs. The shift is not to new techniques, but towards the mainstreaming of long-extant ones to parts of the populace previously somewhat insulated. Every city is a laboratory for urban management. Powers can watch, pick, and choose and tweak their cities this way — and that to create the most nurturing greenhouse for their aims. The Brazilian troops who helped occupy Port-au-Prince after the UN-sanctioned anti-democratic overthrow of Aristide were chosen in part because of their experience in militarized policing of favelas. They honed that expertise in Haiti and, full circle, brought it back to Brazil; the occupation of the Favela Rocinha in October 2011 was by Brazilian veterans of that occupation, trained in slum warfare.<sup>13</sup>

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Social control does not have to take overtly militarized forms. One of the characteristics of London has long been the jostling together of wealthy and not wealthy in much closer quarters than in many

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Stephen Graham, *Cities Under Siege: The New Military Urbanism* (London [etc.]: Verso, 2010), 27 and throughout.

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“London 2012: 13,500 Troops to Provide Olympic Security,” *BBC News UK*, December 15, 2011, accessed February 27, 2013, <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-16195861>; Robert Booth, “London Rooftops to Carry Missiles During Olympic Games,” *The Guardian*, April 29, 2012, accessed February 27, 2013, <http://www.guardian.co.uk/sport/2012/apr/29/london-rooftops-missiles-olympic-games>.

13  
Dady Chery, “What Happens in Haiti Doesn’t Stay in Haiti,” *San Francisco Bay View*, December 8, 2011, accessed February 27, 2013, <http://sfbayview.com/2011/what-happens-in-haiti-doesn-t-stay-in-haiti>.

other cities. The British government is capping housing benefit — a response, supposedly, to a profound housing crisis. The results of the new strategy are predictable: 800,000 households are likely, according to the Chartered Institute of Surveyors, to be pushed out of their communities.<sup>14</sup>

It should be perfectly clear that such pushing of the poor out of areas of central London is not a mistake based on flawed assumptions: it is the point. Lessons are being learned from the urban management strategies and class geography of, for example, Paris, where the locations of the rich relative to, and thus their relationships to, the riots and uprisings of 2005 was very different from those of their counterparts in London in 2011. Nor is stealth always necessary. Class engineering is being mooted with increasing candor. Colin Barrow, the leader of Westminster Council, one of the wealthiest in London, last year mooted making social housing for the unemployed conditional on unpaid work. “It is a legitimate question,” he said, “who will be given the privilege of being able to move into Westminster [...]”<sup>15</sup>

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There are many futures: the likely, the unlikely but possible, the unlikely but important, the impossible but important. Let us be optimistic and turn to cities worth living in, and architecture for emancipation.

The history of architecture is punctuated with astonishing utopian projects, like Le Corbusier’s “machines for living in” and Goldfinger’s villages in the sky. But how far can utopian architecture actually go? Not far at all, is the cool assessment of Manfredo Tafuri, the Italian architectural historian and critic: as one writer explains, “within the context of capitalism, practicing architects cannot hope to devise a radically different architecture ... Tafuri’s profoundly pessimistic conclusion is that architecture will only be possible once a total social revolution has taken place, therefore in an undefined future.”<sup>16</sup>

But what Tafuri’s critics call pessimism looks a lot like simple realism. Tafuri is oriented towards a radical alternative, the only future worth having. He neither denies nor is uninterested in the specifics of buildings. His skepticism, rather, is towards the project of “critical architecture”, because of “the contradictory quality of this attempt to compromise a structure endowed with its own synthesis, through a criticism that cannot enter it”.<sup>17</sup> A building that resolved the architectural and hence social contradictions it inevitably contains, under capitalism, would be a building, for him, simultaneously inside and outside its own history.<sup>18</sup>

There is nothing spatially determinist about this. It is not the

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Randeep Ramesh, “Housing Benefit Cuts Will Put 800,000 Homes out of Reach, According to Studies,” *The Guardian*, January 1, 2012, accessed February 27, 2013, <http://www.guardian.co.uk/society/2012/jan/01/housing-benefits-cuts-rents-study>.

15  
As quoted in Patrick Butler, “Westminster Council to Draft ‘Civic Contracts’ for Benefit Recipients,” *The Guardian*, December 12, 2011, accessed February 27, 2013, <http://www.guardian.co.uk/society/2011/dec/12/westminster-council-means-test-housing>. See also, Miéville, “Overthrow,” <http://www.londonsoverthrow.org/london17.html>.

16  
Xavier Costa, “Jameson, Tafuri, Lefebvre,” in *The Political Unconscious of Architecture: Re-Opening Jameson’s Narrative*, ed. Nadir Lahiji (Farnham: Ashgate, 2011), 317-18.

17  
Manfredo Tafuri, *Theories and History of Architecture*, 2nd edition, (New York [etc.]: Harper & Row, [1976] 1980), 116.

18  
For more on this, see China Miéville, “The Conspiracy of Architecture: Notes on a Modern Anxiety,” *Historical Materialism*, 2, no. 1 (1998), 26-26.

shapes in the palimpsest of London that fail to be an architecture for the alternative. Architecture embeds the social dynamics of its time of building into politicized space, of course, but that is only part of the story. To enter, say, the George Inn in Southwark is not to enter the social relations of 1676, when it was built.

The politics of embodied space, of vectors and building materials and the glass-and-steel spectacular and stone and the flying buttress and so on, are important, but they all exist *now* as specific articulations of commodified space under capitalism. This is why for Tafuri, “[f]irst among the intellectual illusions to be done away with is that which, by means of the image alone, tries to anticipate the conditions of an architecture ‘for a liberated society.’” Such efforts illustrate for Tafuri “how ineffectual are the brilliant gymnastics carried out in the yard of the model prison.”<sup>19</sup>

If this is correct, and I think it is, it does not mean architects cannot do interesting or beautiful things. “Brilliant gymnastics” are still brilliant, and they may be a joy to watch, even in a prison yard. They are “ineffectual” only insofar as their aim is to break people out of prison - because that they cannot do.

But even then, they might help one to prepare. There is no counsel of quiescence here. It is the *prefiguring* that Tafuri thinks is impossible. This does not preclude aiming, including at the level of the urban environment, towards a desired future. Which, if we wish to orient architecture towards a city of the future, must mean an architecture of conflict. It cannot prefigure, but it might be committed right now, a preparation.

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So, here is a utopian-realistic demand: for a Haussmannism of the Left. Haussmann, in the face of urban insurrection, famously made Paris the city we know by ripping up alleys and planning long straight boulevards down which police might shoot. We, by contrast, might issue a demand: an engaged architecture for the needs of change, reconfiguring streets and buildings ready for opposition.

How might one design an alleyway that lends itself to a barricade? A student common room that can repel authorities? A museum or factory or art gallery that can, as near instantly as possible, invert inherited dynamics of control?

Such buildings would obviously not be commissioned for such purposes. To be commissioned at all, they would have to be effective, in the now, as commodities. In other words, an engaged architecture of this type, which cannot prefigure the alternative but hopes for a shift towards it, has to be a dual-use item. The skill of the radical

architect might be in providing something that is effective in its commissioned role as whatever for the here and now, but that, like a transforming robot or Swiss Army knife, can change purpose, with little more than a quick snicking sound.

Nor might secrecy or dissembling be necessary for such transgressive functions. An architect might weaponize esteem, parlay it into a licence to perform this epochal provocation. Such projects could be a dare to financiers not to be Rockefellers, chickening out of showing Diego Rivera's mural. One might goad those who commission a great building into accepting it because it fulfills their brief, *even though* its alternative purpose is visible, waiting and hoping to unfold. The near-future cityscape might be a bet between radical architects and those who employ them in the very fabric of the buildings.

No, this is not likely. But a person can dream.

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The most utopian speculations, architectural dreams, such as Buckminster Fuller's domes and floating cities, should be honored. To think the city of the future, we have, urgently, to extend the horizons of the possible. We should also be talking about organic and biomimetic architecture, flocks of buildings, buildings that jostle into more convenient shapes when our backs are turned, and so on. But these are not and cannot be blueprints. It is just vanishingly possible that Fuller's city might one day float the oceans. But even if not, that does not invalidate it as a piece of city-thinking, a diagnostic of — and, just perhaps, heuristic for pressing against the constraints of — the now.

The task of utopian urbanism should not be “planning”, but rethinking and provoking. Which means we might massively expand the boundaries of our imaginative field. Speculative urbanism for the city of the future might include ghost stories, biography and autobiography, dreams of predatory buildings, misread historical plaques, music, the chance conjunction of tiles and trees, as well as “future-oriented architecture”. Inspiration is much wider than any planning applications, even those submitted to an imagined tribunal of emancipation.

In the coming of an alternative, we will all be in a state of perpetual astonishment. The building we designed as some counter-hegemonic tower block we might pick up like a hammer to knock in a nail, then throw away. The temporary Quonset hut where we made plans might become unexpectedly permanent, eventually be a palace of culture. Tafuri's ruthlessly unsentimental insistence on



historicizing opens this counterintuitive avenue of hope. The flip-side of his insight that the most radically and progressively thought-through building cannot escape its commodity nature is to remove that imperative, and even what looks to us as startlingly degraded specimens of the city might be utterly reconfigured in a new context. (Or almost utterly — it is unconvincing that limits are totally elastic. A rusty hut is an open question, but freedom can manifest at Canary Wharf only in a symphony of falling glass.)

If and when we enter the city of the future, transforming it and ourselves, we will not be who we were, and the city, even if it is, by some miracle, point for concrete point topographically identical to itself the previous day, will be a new one. We cannot know how we future citizens will inhabit it. That is perhaps what lies behind the discomfort — the disgust, even — that many of us feel in the face of Olympian ambition. Such a totalized vision is a betrayal of the city, and of us.

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How resilient is urban contingency? It is a bromide that many of the great urban avant-garde movements are built around using things, including elements of the city, in ways they were not intended to be used. Rap music misuses the turntable, Surrealism the conjunctions in shop windows, Situationism the map, parkour walls and roofs. London psychogeography misuses London as a text, which, doggedly, is then read. (That all such movements get incorporated is inevitable and melancholy, but, while a cautionary tale, not an invalidation.)

Where there is a setback in the fight against forces of urban totality, which are forces of banality, which are forces of capital, we might take comfort from our continuing ability to write and read meaning out of contingency even where the intent has been to banish it. Thus the recent delight taken in the discovery that a fox had found its way to the top of the Shard.<sup>20</sup>

It will probably be, if not quite an act of resistance, at the very least an enlivening and spirit-lifting one to trespass and to experience the Stratford Olympicscape, and to make art about it that runs against its desired narrative. This is the kind of work in which artists such as Laura Oldfield Ford are already engaged. Such work doggedly psychogeographically analyzes the totalizing drive of Cool Britannia 2.0, and reads those very resistant carapaces against themselves. In so doing, rather than by focusing on the more intuitively fertile London of neglected brick familiar from old photographs, it might, at its best, also act against any tendencies in

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"Fox Found on 72nd Floor of UK's Highest Skyscraper," *Metro*, February 25, 2011, accessed February 27, 2013, <http://www.metro.co.uk/weird/856572-fox-found-on-72nd-floor-of-uk-s-highest-sky-scraper>.



counter-public art to sometimes succumb to mere sentimentalism and *nostalgie de la boue*.

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Faced with the tendency of artists and writers to aggrandize their practice, we must insist on the very constrained limits of such acts of aesthetic rebellion. By far the most effective way to prepare the future city is not, say — or certainly not merely — to grumpily psychogeographize the present one, but to be part of concrete political fights against the lucroforming of London (or whatever place), such as those that are being waged by community organizations right now.

But artistic reminders of urban resilience can give joy, tinnily torquing the city out of its intended shape. On its own, that is not much; but, especially as part of a concerted strategy, it is not quite nothing, either.

Let us for a moment refuse to entertain the possibility that our descendants will be born in any future city other than the one they deserve. To be jealous of that is appropriate. But the city worth living in will be theirs by birth. They will be happier, but they will not live the transition, that urban sloughing off, which the passage out of now must mean. Anyone can experience a small jolt of that sense when they walk through a building that is being squatted well, as, for example, was the Bank of Ideas, the UBS building near Liverpool Street, taken over by members of Occupy in 2011.

It is not until we hear corridors echoing with a silence, with the lack of voices telling us that we are not allowed up here, and become aware that we will not hear them, that we realize how embedded in us is the expectation, most of the time, that we will — the sense that we have no right to our city. It is in that urban silence that we fleetingly and momentarily inhabit the space we are in. Just then, we are citizens — not of the future city, but walking publicly repossessed corridors towards it.

We look to light out for the future city: we inhabit the present one. And we change the past one, too. To take a term from comic books, we “retcon” the city, enact retroactive continuity. Make what it always was: something worth having been. This is activist and academic Larbi Sadiki, writing on the anniversary of the Egyptian uprising:

As if Tahrir Square was built for that day, awaiting to receive the deluge of waves upon waves of human crowds all converging on the square to help it live up to its name — liberation square — [...] taking over the public square to make it their own

and taking charge of time. That is when 31 years of dictatorial urban planning and of regimented timing ceased to have an effect. [...] A different clock started ticking away, *tahrir* time was on. Space too was changed. The Square [...] was returned to the people. [...] They were able to open up a space of protest and a geography of solidarity against tyranny. It was the onset of a different project: A public arena for reclaiming popular sovereignty and enacting peoplehood. Republic is the word.<sup>21</sup>

Our task is to make future cities that retcon the ones we have now into worthy foundations. As if that is what they were built for.

21

Larbi Sadiki, "January 25 and the Republic of Tahrir Square," *Al Jazeera*, January 25, 2012, accessed February 27, 2013, <http://www.aljazeera.com/indepth/opinion/2012/01/20121259355661345.html>.



# Countryside

Rem Koolhaas

It has become an enormous cliché that half of mankind now lives in the city, and that this proportion is only increasing. This has, ironically, been a pretext for architects to focus only on the city. My office OMA/AMO was perhaps partly responsible for the initial shift, but not for the maelstrom that followed: we are bombarded in architecture books with statistics confirming the ubiquity of the urban condition, while the symmetrical question is ignored: what did those moving to the city leave behind?

The countryside is 98 percent of the world's surface, and 50 percent of mankind lives there. But our preoccupation with cities creates a situation comparable to the beginning of the 18th century, when vast areas of the world were described on maps as *terra incognita*. Today, the *terra incognita* is the countryside. In this sense, our focus on the city makes us resemble the diagram of the relative sensitivity of body parts: some areas are swollen and over-represented, others withered and neglected.

The emptying of the countryside is having a more drastic impact than the intensification of the city. While the city becomes more itself, the countryside is transforming into something new: an arena for genetic experimentation, industrialized nostalgia, new patterns of seasonal migration, massive subsidies, tax incentives, digital informers, flex farming, and species homogenization. It would be difficult to write such a radical inventory of the city.

A Swiss mountain village in the Engadin valley epitomizes many of the changes underway in the European countryside. The village is emptying, its original inhabitants disappearing, but at the same time the village is growing: a simultaneous evacuation and extension. There are strict rules for maintaining the heritage of original buildings, but in the end these rules facilitate the conversion of traditional farmhouses into luxurious second homes. If you look between their curtains, you see the typical contemporary style of consumption: minimalism, but with an exceptional amount of cushions, as if to accommodate an invisible pain...

When I spoke to the farmers, I came across one who used to be a nuclear scientist in Frankfurt. In a classical Swiss meadow, the driver of the tractor is from Sri Lanka, and the only people in the typical village square are three South Asian women who are now

indispensable for maintaining Switzerland, looking after the pets, the kids, and the houses.

We are trying to understand what has happened in the century between Prokudin Gorsky's photograph of three women in the Russian countryside in 1909 — a highly stylized, highly ritualized environment — and this scene in the Swiss village square today, which illustrates a radically different condition.

In the midst of rampant urbanization, the world population is still divided roughly 50/50 between city and countryside. In the developing areas of the world, about half of those who live in the countryside still work in agriculture. So even in countries where rural depopulation is a fact, agriculture remains critical. But in Europe and the U.S., the percentage of the rural population working in agriculture is somewhere between two and eight — almost negligible. Globally, if we look at the 50 percent who live outside of cities, there are actually two billion people living in the countryside, not working in agriculture. They live in the countryside and we don't know what they do there.

To begin making an account, we visited a strip of north Holland, a municipality called De Rijp. It is a classically Dutch landscape. But when we asked people what was happening there, we discovered drastic transformations in the Dutch countryside. These aren't farms, but a recruitment office, a heritage mill, a yoga studio, etc. Only a few of the strip's inhabitants are connected to agriculture; the rest form a very contemporary array including a tax consultant, a band member, and an author of children's books. Most of the landscape is heritage, but inside the preserved buildings, contemporary, "un-rural" activities are unfolding.

Animal husbandry is increasingly automated: feeding, barn cleaning, and dung removal are taken care of by robots; the farmer has become an office worker, sitting in a cell behind a computer with a one-way mirror to the cows. The information he processes is digital, and in this sense he is like you and me, except that he generates two million liters of milk per year. There is now a paradoxical situation whereby the fewer people that work on a farm, the more it produces. The farmer works with spreadsheets, again like most of us, and if he wants free time away from the barn, there are mobile devices that enable him to leave.

Husbandry of the land is now a digital practice. The tractor, which revolutionized the farm in the 19th century, has become a computerized workstation with a series of devices and sensors that create a seamless digital interface between the driver and the ground. The digital is promising and delivering the ultimate exploitation of the last drop of potential of each patch of ground. Every

action, from planting to weeding, is specified for the smallest pixel to generate the largest possible yields. You could even say that landscape and tablet have become identical — the tablet is now the earth that the farmer works with. The countryside is a vast and unending digital field.

The life of the farmer in the 17th century was a stringent sequence of inevitable steps that actually left little time for improvisation. The contemporary farmer's calendar is a lonely regime of research, server management, administration, and holiday.

A comparison of the professions in rural Germany today and the professions in urban Germany reveals a huge degree of overlap. The countryside, in terms of how we work, is now very similar to the city. The farmer is us, or we are the farmer. He works on a laptop and can work anywhere. In this, he is like the Flex worker or the knowledge worker who is no longer connected to the city and who is discovering the countryside, for very different reasons. The Flex worker is converting the abandoned farms of the former farmers and turning them into excellent Flex spaces, where the wooden construction is a very welcome signal of the past, or of continuity.

Europe obviously doesn't rule anymore, but it does rule the rules. A considerable amount of its rules are exported to other countries and permits them to trade with the E.U. Special software is written to accommodate this kind of interaction, creating a new digital frontier in countries very far removed from Europe. One such piece of software, *Helveta*, enables people in the Amazon to identify and track every single tree in a certain region so that no illegal wood can go to the E.U. Swathes of the Amazon are now carefully inventorized environments where tribesmen-turned-digital informers report evidence of illegal logging. Every square meter of this "terra incognita" is actually extremely well known and better known than many parts of the city, even if we don't know that it is known.

In every part of the U.S., the geometric perfection of farming is blatant, but more surreptitious — and this is almost the same language as missile sites or nuclear sites — are the enormous pigsties that are built in increasing sizes, hidden in the desert, not only in the U.S. but all over the world. This architecture is not only applied to agriculture or livestock; it's also for server farms. A colossal new order of rigor is appearing everywhere. A feed lot for cows is organized like the most rigid city — the countryside being the ideal situation for these types of conditions; in the city, a monument aspires to formlessness. A hyper-Cartesian order is imposed on the countryside that enables the poeticism and arbitrariness reserved today for cities.

Part of that arbitrariness and poeticism is the city's production of theories about the countryside. And there are too few people in

the countryside to verify these narratives. The countryside becomes a blank sheet on which a narrative can be projected, whether it is a right-wing or a left-wing narrative.

One example is the “land grabs” in Africa and how dangerous China is in this respect. Peter Ho, a professor in Leiden, has shown that a miniscule proportion of these stories could be verified, and only a relatively modest amount of land was really bought. So what we hear from the countryside is utterly unreliable and utterly manipulated, whether it is good news or bad news.

The countryside is the most contested and emotive field, not least in the new forms of immigration required by new systems in the countryside: an Indian manning a milk farm in Italy, a former construction worker switching to farming in Ireland to accommodate the crisis. There is also, because of the immigration in the countryside, an influx or *volksverhuizing* (migration — see glossary) of complete populations. This is becoming an area of intense political protest. We are basically trained at this point to be indignant about workers’ conditions in cities like Dubai, but so far working conditions in the countryside remain unrecorded.

A series of upward trends converge in the countryside: the rise of the market economy, the increase in international tourism, and the growth of heritage sites. This makes perfect sense: you can pay for the heritage sites, and they are necessary for tourism. That means the countryside is becoming a playground not only for NGOs but also for an elite that can enjoy the emptied spaces and re-inhabit the authentic environment of the former farmer and his wife. That happens at enormous scales: entire villages in Tuscany are now bought by German businesses so they can preserve the aura of serenity for tourists.

We try to inhabit this emptiness with remnants of the cultures that used to animate this landscape, and we try to maintain, in the name of “Intangible cultural heritage”, the traditions that were once performed. Two different strains of artificiality run parallel: on the one hand the digital artificiality of the countryside today, and on the other the melancholy of the official and artificial maintenance of tradition through organizations like UNESCO.

The polarization of the city and the countryside in our imagination blinds us to similarities, like “thinning.” Both the city and the countryside are increasingly inhabited in a more provisional way. Thinning is defined by an increase in the area covered and a diminishing intensity in the use of the area. The house in the Swiss village is used two weeks a year, and constantly maintained and partly inhabited by maids from South Asia. But compared to the intensive activity of the people and animals who used to inhabit the village,

it's thin use. There are similar patterns in Dubai. Looking at recently completed buildings, it's impossible to detect real signs of life. So we looked for the second best thing: signs of irregularity. We found very few. This is the phenomenon of thinning, and it is taking place in both the city and countryside.

The countryside is now a weave of tendencies that are outside our overview and outside our awareness. Our current obsession with only the city is highly irresponsible because you can't understand the city without understanding the countryside.



## COUNTRYSIDE GLOSSARY

Far from being a repository of archaic words, the countryside generates so many new terms — and redefines the ones we thought we understood — that a glossary, or even multi-language dictionary, started to feel necessary. AMO also added a few neologisms of its own.

### ACURASPRAY 0:

Software optimizing the timing and quantity of the refill of crop spraying tanks, minimizing residual content during a change in spray agent.

### AGRI-APPS:

Mobile farming software, first developed for the Palm Pilot, now available for tablets and smartphones, for livestock management (iHerd), yield analysis (YieldCheck), weed recognition (Weed ID), fruit and vegetable recognition (GrowYourOwn), pesticide safety (Agrarian-Monile), sprinkler scheduling (Sprinkler Times), pest control (MyTraps), matchmaking (Rovimix Dairy Reproductive Efficiency Calculator), and counting sheep (CalcEWELator).

### ALBERGO DIFFUSO:

Heritage concept developed by Swede Daniele Kihlgren to revitalize abandoned Italian villages: acquire village, do minimal visible renovation while upgrading amenities to luxury standard, insert a pool, golf course, and turn entire village into a hotel.

### ANCIENT OX:

“Original” bovine inhabitant of Europe’s low-lands, in the process of being genetically recreated.

### ANTHROPOCENE:

Proposed name of current geological age, following the Holocene, now under consideration by the official designators of the names of eras, epochs, and eons, the International Commission on Stratigraphy. Their verdict is expected in 2016, though the media has already popularized anthropocene as the term for a kind of anti-ecology, whereby humans — and not a

“natural” order of things — are responsible for everything happening on the entire planet, through our manipulation of the climate, nitrogen, and water cycles, through the systematic elimination of biodiversity, and through the exploitation of 43 percent (and counting) of the Earth’s surface.

### ASTRONAUT 0:

Milking robot launched in 1992 by the Dutch company lely. The current lely Astronaut A4 milks 60 cows simultaneously. Free-roaming cows are lured to the machine by treats, and a robot arm attaches the sucking devices on to their teats. Milk is automatically checked for nutritional value and signs of impurity. The farmer receives an e-mail with any issues; soon he will be able to view the status live on his iPhone.

### AUTOCOPTER:

Helicopter drone used by farmers for normalized Difference Vegetation Index (nDVI) imaging.

### BRIC-A-BRAC:

Final resting place of rural culture. Old wheelbarrows, ploughs, oil lamps, religious statues, copperware for sale to tourists.

### CHICKEN HIGHWAY:

The A-7 autobahn between Soltau and Northeim in northern Germany, where 200 new industrial-scale chicken barns are planned, the largest of which will slaughter 27,000 chickens an hour, or 135 million a year — the largest slaughterhouse in Europe.

### COGENT TWIST 0:

“Twists ooze Dairy strength; they have width through the muzzle which they carry

throughout. They are tall, long, and clean in the bone. The power and strength combined with the dairy quality, udder texture, and temperament makes him a bull not to be missed. They hold the udders high and wide with a strong central ligament and outstanding veination running all round the udder. All of his daughters have style and move freely and easily on fantastic legs and feet. They milk extremely well and get back in calf easily. The one thing I like about them the most is that they are consistently fantastic.”

### CULTURAL VILLAGE OF EUROPE:

Antithesis to the E.U.’s annual Cultural Capital award, which is bestowed only on cities. The first Cultural Village of Europe was self-proclaimed by Wijk aan Zee, in northern Holland in 1999, an audacious move that won official support and was followed by Mellionec (FR, 2000), Bystré (CZ, 2001), Pergine Valdarno (IT, 2002), Aldeburgh (UK, 2003), Paxos (GR, 2004), Kilingi-nõmme (EE, 2005), Ströbeck (DE, 2006), Palkonya (HU, 2007), Porrúa (ES, 2008), Tommerup (DK, 2009), and Kirchheim (AT, 2010).

### DARWIN:

3D fruit tree scanner to enable flower reduction and improve yield.

### DNA:

Among those mapped so far: apple (57,000 genes), banana (36,538), black cottonwood (45,555), cacao tree (28,798), cannabis (30,000), maize (32,000), peach (27,852), pigeon pea (48,680), potato (39,000), rice (37,544), soybean (46,000), strawberry (34,809), tomato

## COUNTRYSIDE GLOSSARY

(31,760), and wheat (five times the human, the longest DNA decoded so far).

### DIGITAL INFORMERS:

Amazon tribesmen equipped with tablets and software, made by the European company Helveta, on which they log geo-tagged trees that have been illegally felled. Assists in sustainability certification for timber supply chains.

### DISCOVERY 0:

Automatic cow barn cleaning machine by Iley resembling a vacuum cleaner that navigates its own path through the livestock and pushes manure through slots in the ground. The latest Discovery0 model includes a water dispenser for hygiene and cow-comfort.

### ENVIROPIG:

Genetically modified Yorkshire pig that produces the phytase enzyme in its salivary glands to help digest plant phosphorus in cereals, reducing pollution in factory farm manure pits.

### EPOXY BREAD:

While traditional types of bread become endangered — German Kommissbrot will soon be on UNESCO's Intangible Cultural Heritage list — bread scientist Peter Reinhart has invented an alternative method for baking that combines modern taste requirements (sweetness from starch) with the nutritional obligations of wholegrain bread — a two-component bread made from fermented and unfermented dough: “where le pain ancien becomes le pain modern.”

### FARMER WANTS A WIFE:

Reality show franchise spanning 13 countries in which urban women compete for the hand of single farmers. Asked about their future dreams, Dutch winner Femke said: “a house, a garden, and a pet, that's it for me”; her new farmer husband Gijs:

“Settle down with a nice little lady, a milking robot, and to drive from Amsterdam to South Africa.”

### FLEX FARMING:

Mobile agriculture, conducted remotely from a laptop; also agriculture as a second job, hobby, or temporary career experiment.

### FLEX OFFICE:

Outpost for short-period business rental, often in repurposed rural architecture (barn), equipped with flip chart, Wi-Fi, still and sparkling water, and a coffee machine.

### GALACTOR 0:

Robotic throne that a farmer sits in to milk cows; it hangs from the ceiling and runs on tracks, like a gondola, the length of the barn.

### GLOBAL VILLAGE

#### CONSTRUCTION SET:

Open source set of 40 (and counting) DIY agricultural machines with interchangeable parts — all the equipment necessary “to create a small civilization with modern day comforts”. Generic GVCS machines are eight times cheaper than those made by industrial manufacturers.

### GROSSFLÄCHENDESIGNER:

Slogan on a T-shirt at Agritechnica (see Hannover), meaning “largescale Field Designer”. Farmer as land artist.

### HANNOVER:

Venue for EuroTier, the world's largest livestock fair, and Agritechnica, the world's largest agricultural technology fair. At Agritechnica 2011, the Guide-Connect driverless tractor was unveiled by Fendt, along with the NON-STOP hay bale press, the Braud 9090x Olive harvester (enabling a 20 percent more efficient olive yield), and the Potato-Suite driverless potato harvesting tractors.

### HERAKLES FIELD

#### ASSISTANT 0:

Social networking for tractors, which exchange data on fertilizer (prices and productivity), field activity, weather, and yield prognoses.

### INTANGIBLE CULTURAL

#### HERITAGE:

Rituals, performing arts, and other non-material traditions protected by UNESCO. Nearly all of the 232 endangered practices are based in the countryside, including the wood crafting knowledge of the Zafimaniry in Madagascar, bark cloth making in Uganda, the Peruvian scissors dance, the Mediterranean diet, Tango, and Georgian polyphonic singing.

### HYPER-CARTESIANISM:

Philosophy of the countryside that manipulates the landscape into geometric shapes, controlled and analyzed by computers. The enabler of urban whimsicality.

### ISOBUS (OR ISO\_11783):

Like the USB system for computers, ISOBUS, developed by the International Organization of Standardization, is the universal plug and socket system for agricultural technology, allowing the exchange of power and data between tractors, combines, sensors, and displays.

### ISF BARN:

Integral Sustainable Free Range barn, for cows, featuring open floor plan, polycarbonate climate-control automated walls, and milking robots, which cows walk towards slowly, voluntarily. Cows are allowed outside but usually prefer to stay in the barn. ISF Barns lead to 90 percent reduction in hoof disease and improved calf laboring in addition to enabling flexibility in cross breeding. One fully automated barn with 80 cows can be managed by a single farmer with two hours of work per day.

## COUNTRYSIDE GLOSSARY

### JOBS:

Google results for “countryside job”: lecturer in environmental biology, MFl teacher, psychology teacher, flexible PA, agricultural economist, logistics assistant, silo maintenance manager, biodiversity project officer, wetland advisor, countryside ranger, and seasonal ornithologist.

### LAND GRAB:

Alarmist phrase used by Western media to characterize as neo-colonial the purchase of allegedly massive swathes of nations by other nations (“How China’s taking over Africa, and why the West should be VERY worried,” *Daily Mail*, July 18, 2008). Debunked by Irna Hoffman and Peter Ho in *The Journal of Peasant Studies*, March 2012: “According to Oxfam, internationally ‘as many as 227 million hectares of land (...) has been sold or leased since 2001. ‘Oxfam claims that of these 227 million, 70 percent or approximately 160 million has been ‘grabbed’ on the African continent. When this figure is juxtaposed with our findings of a maximum size of three million hectares, by Chinese investors, the question arises who grabbed the remaining 155 million hectares or so in Africa?”

### MIGRATION:

“One Speaks German: Spanish Unemployed Move to German Countryside,” *Der Spiegel* (Issue 24, 2011); “Chinese Buy 16 Milk Farms in New Zealand,” *Volksskrant* (January 28, 2012); “Milking Cows in the Snow: Mexican Farmers in Canada,” *NRC Handelsblad* (February 18, 2012).

### NATURE:

Specialist scientific magazine triggering press agencies to report on otherwise esoteric research; source of credibility.

### NDVI IMAGING:

Normalized Difference Vegetation Index, using spectrum of green-to-red to indicate soil quality, etc.

### ORGANIC-GM MARRIAGE:

The union of opposites, embodied by Pamela Ronald (plant genetics and GM researcher) and Raoul Adamchak (organic farmer), wife and husband, and authors of *Tomorrow’s Table: Organic Farming, Genetics, and the Future of Food* (2008).

### PAPERLESS FARMING:

Movement to reduce quantity of paper used in farmers’ offices.

### PERENNIAL POLYCULTURE:

Clear and present danger to agribusiness; alternative farming system on the rapidly drying American prairies. Instead of harvesting and reseeding monocultures every year, perennial versions of corn, soy, and wheat can be used; their deep roots access more water and do not require pesticides, herbicides, or fertilizer.

### PRECISION FARMING:

Agricultural method, starting in the late 1980s, for analyzing and meeting crop and livestock needs through GPS, advanced sensors, and NVDI imaging. Minimizes feed and fertilizer waste, improves yield and food safety.

### ROBOCROP 0:

Weeding robot by UK-based Garford Farm machinery, using plant-recognition software to differentiate weeds from crops, adapting blades accordingly. Capable of removing three weeds per second.

### RUSTICITY:

Mannerist blend of the comfortable and the authentically rural. Applied — usually by magazines — to food, interior design, fashion, architecture, and city planning. Rusticity is

focused on the local, the inspirational, the seasonal, and the peaceful.

### SKYCHALET:

Swiss high-rise version of traditionally low-rise typology.

### SONOCHECK 0:

Machine mounted on feeding station that ultrasonically and surreptitiously examines sows for pregnancy while they feed.

### SOYBEAN:

A designed object, with radius of 5–11 millimeters, and microcosm of economic relations on the genetic level, catalyst of vast landscape homogenization.

### STATE SHIFT:

Scientific term for the tipping point from natural to human dominance of the surface of the Earth. Human activity now covers 43 percent of the planet’s land surface; at 50 percent of a given area, ecosystems collapse.

### TELECOTTAGE:

Renovated buildings for communal Internet access. A movement that gained traction in Hungary in the mid-90s.

### THINNING:

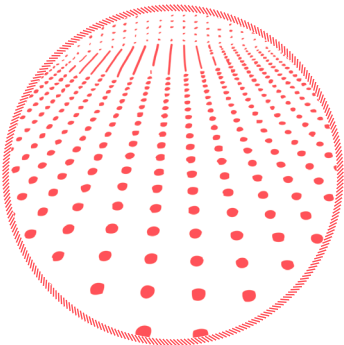
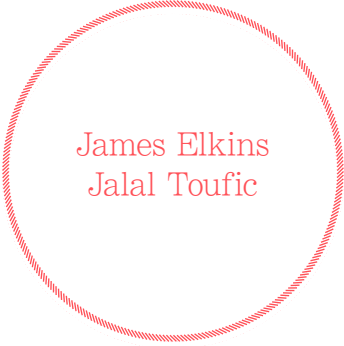
Rural and urban phenomenon whereby an activity claims more territory but decreases in intensity.

### WAL-MART:

The new farmers’ market: nine percent of the groceries it sells will be locally grown by 2015.

### ZOMIA:

Coined by Willem van Schendel and promoted by James C. Scott, a 2.5 million square-kilometer area of southeast Asia, running from Nepal to Vietnam, whose inhabitants have not been absorbed by a nation-state and who choose to live in non-advanced agricultural areas.



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# Thoughts on the State and Future of the Image

James Elkins

This essay is an informal report on a lecture: the original lecture was a digital presentation, with a hundred images, but no text. When I was asked to deliver the manuscript of the lecture for this publication, I was at a loss: there was no original text, no script. When it comes to images, I think one of the most important things is to let the images speak: let them lead, let them suggest, let them interrupt. For that reason I do not write out my lectures, and I don't speak from texts. This particular lecture did not theorize that point but was intended to enact it.

What you are reading now is a kind of betrayal, for three different reasons. First, it is a written text, which is precisely what I had hoped to avoid. Second, there are no images at all. That's because image copyright laws are in such a chaotic state. It takes disproportionate effort and expense to procure copyright permissions — and meanwhile, of course, those same images are usually available free on the Internet. And third, ironically, the ideas I am exploring here were all first adumbrated in the book *What is An Image?*, which appeared in early 2012 — and that book, too, has no illustrations. (It has a large scholarly apparatus, so I have omitted footnotes from this text.)

If this text has a virtue, it is probably just that sometimes the most complex issues are best approached in an informal way. It's even possible that the concerted attempts to theorize images have led to several of the difficulties of contemporary image theory: images are slippery, despite the fact that many people want to use them as illustrations, mnemonics, or examples of theories. An informal, open-ended approach may be helpful in this age of concerted theorizing. If my ideas strike a chord, and you would like to pursue them, I recommend the books *What is an Image?* and *Theorizing Visual Studies: Thinking Through the Discipline* (2012) — they offer more systematic and thorough accounts of some of these ideas, even if they do not come any closer to solving the puzzles that I will be presenting here.

## 1. WHY ASK: "WHAT IS AN IMAGE?"

I'll suggest three reasons, related to studio art, art history, and visual culture studies.

(A) In the studio art environment, it is often assumed that the visual exists in a cognitive realm separate from language, logic, and mathematics. In this context, artists still refer to the distinction between the left and the right brain, even though common assumptions about different competences associated with the individual hemispheres have been rendered problematic by recent research. Sticking to these assumptions is nevertheless a way of saying that there is such a thing as a specifically *visual* competence, which can't be touched by language. Claims like the right-brain/left-brain dichotomy entail the idea that some things can be communicated through the visual only, and not through other senses or media. In addition, it is widely assumed in art academies and in the art world that the visual is politically privileged, so that politically oriented practices are optimally situated in the visual arts.

(B) In art criticism, art history, and art theory, many historians and critics work with received ideas about what images are. Relatively few have developed explicit image theories. I might name Hans Belting, Gottfried Boehm, and W.J.T. Mitchell as examples of historians or critics who have taken the time to articulate their own accounts of how images work and what they are. But the general state of affairs in art history is that scholars use other people's theories about images — and surely that is not an optimal situation for people whose business is, after all, images. In addition, it can be claimed that much of what is visual is not taken on board in art history: the discipline of art history tends not to notice small surface details, textures, marks, and *facture* unless those things have overall significance (as they do, for example, in Impressionism), or unless they add to representations, iconographic elements, or otherwise legible semiotic elements. In other words, a lot of what makes any given painting a painting is not articulated in art historical texts. In that sense, the image enters the text of art history as a radically simplified object.

(C) In visual culture studies, enormous weight is put on the idea of the visual (of visual culture, pictures, the visual world). Visual objects are said to be characteristic of our period — this is a claim associated with, for instance, Baudrillard. Martin Jay, Nicholas Mirzoeff, Lisa Cartwright, and many other writers argue that we think and experience primarily through images. And yet, very few scholars of visual studies think about the nature of the visual itself. The reticence to speculate on the nature of images is different in visual studies and in art history: in the latter it has to do with the historian's

empiricism and lack of interest in philosophic work; in the former it may also have to do with a sensitivity to the way concepts are culturally constructed, which involves a mistrust towards trans-historical philosophic conceptualizations.

In all three areas (art production, art history, visual culture), the visual — and in particular visual art — is central but is often taken as a given. The brief observations above could lead to any number of questions. For me, an exceptionally interesting question is what is enabled by *not* pressing the question, “What is an image?”. Clearly, much of the writing in art history, art criticism, studio practice, and art theory must benefit from the dearth of theorizing about images. What practices, ideals, and narratives are made possible by *not* thinking about what images are? I suspect the answer is nearly co-extensive with the disciplines of art history, criticism, and theory.

## 2. ARE WE A VISUAL CULTURE?

It is widely, almost universally assumed that the forms of first-world late capitalism are intensely, deeply visual. From Guy Debord and Michel Foucault to Fredric Jameson, critiques of governmentality and politics have clearly been centered on the visual. At the level of textbooks, it is often asserted that ours is a deeply visual culture — that we are made and unmade by constructions of visuality, visual regimes, ways of looking and seeing. Nicholas Mirzoeff’s *Right to Look* (2011) is only the most recent of these texts. In the short introductory text to the theme of this chapter, a ubiquitous visuality and its bleak future are assumed as well: “the fact that we will live — or are already living — in a culture dominated by images is an assumption which is often used to paint a bleak picture of the future. Will the image really become so ubiquitous in the future, or will verbal culture based on experience gain more ground?”

It is interesting to see what critical distance we might be able to have on this most basic of assumptions. In a reduced form, the assumption might be that we are the most visually literate culture: we can read complex images, we multitask, we take in more images per minute or per day than any other culture; and in addition, or as a consequence, we are enmeshed by images, controlled by images, made over as images.

Consider, as a thought experiment, this counter-proposition: we are less visually literate than other cultures that have preceded us, exactly because we are so swamped by image culture that we have lost other forms of image encounters. For example, Barbara Stafford has argued that we no longer know how to read complex images: we need special training to consider such things as medieval schemata;



seventeenth-century emblemata; Renaissance frontispieces; mystical, alchemical, Masonic, and Rosicrucian pictures; and any number of idiosyncratic, complex, and demanding paintings from past centuries. In Stafford's account — and I largely agree with her — our images have become too easy, too self-similar, too quickly “read” and discarded. She is thinking of images in mass media, such as music videos — there may be millions more in a day's worth of music videos than in a lifetime's worth of seeing for a fifteenth-century priest in Liguria, but those millions of images come in only a few flavors, and they are easy to see, understand, and forget. The few altarpieces and other images an imaginary fifteenth-century Italian priest might encounter would be much more intensively seen, leading to more complex experiences and meanings. In that sense, we are not more literate but substantially less so.

This is not the sort of argument that can be decided, but it can be very helpful in opening a way to think about the unexamined starting point of so many recent texts on the image, including the introduction to the theme of this chapter. It is the condition of our interest, in the present, that often remains opaque to us.

### 3. CURRENT THEORETICAL IMPASSES

I will consider just four, in no special order.

(A) How many theories of images are there? In the summer of 2008, I convened a week-long summer art theory institute in Chicago, with the title “What is an Image?”. Thirty people spent thirty-six hours in seminars discussing over 2,000 pages of texts. None of the texts were by the participants, and no one presented a paper: the event was intended as a serious, protracted discussion of the most pressing issues concerning images. (That event was also the basis of the book *What is an Image?*.) The 2,000 pages of texts spanned the history of Western theorizing on images, from the Presocratics to Rancière, Badiou, Malabou, and Laruelle (and a small amount of non-Western theorizing); and they included excerpts from principal anthologies such as Laurent Lavaud's *L'image* (1999) and *Images: A Reader* (2006). None of us expected the texts to be a complete compilation of theories about images, but I think many of us assumed that we would get a sense of the basic, recurring ideas about images, and some of us, including myself, hoped that we would get an idea of the most significant or influential theories — a kind of general impression of the course of theorizing about images. Nothing of the kind happened. In effect, it proved to be impossible to make anything more than a provisional listing of theories of the image or images. The field proved to be much more chaotic than I think most of us ex-

pected. It remained unclear, in the event and also in the book, *why* images should be the subjects of such a disparate literature. That in itself is a subject requiring some work, especially because a number of current theories — Rancière's, Debord's, Wollheim's, Whitney Davis's, Nancy's — present images as manageably theorizable objects.

(B) There is a difference between accounts that explain images and accounts that begin by assuming that images themselves are understood and instead focus on what happens to them in the world. This may seem a marginal difference, but I think it is crucial to the coherence of the question "What is an image?" and to uses of the "image" concept in art writing. In the Chicago event, there seemed to be no concise way to name the subject that interested us. Some theories of images set out to explain them directly — Goodman's and Peirce's are examples, and so are Sartre's and Merleau-Ponty's. Other accounts take "image" as an undefined term, or one that has a commonly agreed-upon meaning, and consider what happens to images and pictures in the world. The difference between those two kinds of accounts is a fundamental reason why it is not possible to make a comprehensive listing, or even a classification, of theories. It is necessary, I think, to see what is gained by taking the concept of image as an unproblematic starting point in theories of politics, ontology, social effect, gender, identity, and other topics — as opposed to trying to see what coherence the concept of image has in such accounts. I will try to exemplify this in points (C) and (D).

(C) The ontology of images — whether or not they have a nature or essential properties — is one of the deepest problems in theories of images. There are scholars, like Gottfried Boehm, who are committed to understanding the nature of images — what makes them different from other things, such as language. For other writers, ontology can have a real power in the ways images are used and understood, but as something that *others* believe in — not themselves. This is W.J.T. Mitchell's approach.

In the summer of 2006, Mitchell and Boehm exchanged letters (later published in German) that touch on this issue. In one letter, Boehm reiterates the question that has guided him for a number of years: "How do images create meaning?" This question is articulated through a series of other concepts, including iconic logos. The recurrent idea is to ask how meaning "can articulate itself without borrowing from linguistic models... or from rhetorical devices" — in other words, before, under, or outside language. Nothing corresponds to this ontological interest in Mitchell's work. At the Chicago event (and this is also recorded in the related book), I asked him about this. I suggested that, even though his own work is, broadly speaking, deconstructive and rhetorical in nature, it still promotes a set of un-

derstandings of images that basically amounts to an ontology. I suggested that it appears as if Nelson Goodman's work delivers the ontological ground in Tom's writing, especially when he asks readers to agree that we all know more or less what images are. At such points in his texts, he sometimes refers to Goodman's ideas as if they were unarguable properties of images. Mitchell replied: "No, it's just that Goodman has provided one of the most powerful, systematic, and wide-reaching answers to the question. But it's a question everybody has an answer to. The answers can then be made intelligible, more coordinated, more systematic — by reference to Goodman. That is what I think is the great virtue of his generality". It's an interesting and open question whether Mitchell, or anyone else who writes about images, is free of ontological suppositions regarding images. This is also an example of point (B), because Mitchell's accounts of images in the world begin from consensus notions of what images are — either in a given context, as he says in his answer, or in general, as I think is the case with his use of Goodman — and Boehm's accounts begin by asking directly what images might be.

(D) The relation between images and the political is entirely undecided. This is exemplified by a line from the website for the original "Future Image" event from which this paper is extracted: "The recent and contemporary practice of art has placed the image in perspective, by both showing the strength of the image and by embracing production methods of art which are based more on text and processes". The way this is posed, it addresses the politics of the image, but in other accounts, images are problematically non-political or apolitical, or even non-discursive and extra-linguistic.

Perhaps the strongest version of this claim that images are by nature political is associated with the anti-aesthetic, and in particular with ideas about the relation between art and politics, or art and society — claims that entail the primacy of social change over aesthetic and other artistic purposes. This general orientation is predominant in the academic portion of the art world, where images are increasingly taken as political, and where the interest of images is increasingly taken to be their politics. At the same time, some of the most incisive recent politically engaged art practices, such as the Critical Art Ensemble, beg or defer their connection to art. (What, exactly, is the valence of the word "art" in their name, given that their productions are not aesthetic objects?) The image itself becomes the carrier of undetermined meaning: it enables the work, validating its status as art without requiring explanation. This, too, is enabled by a lack of interrogation of the image.

I think the principal difficulty with theorizing the future of the image as, or in, or into, politics, is that some accounts are primarily

concerned with the politics of images, and others are minimally concerned. Those two discourses can be difficult to connect. From the point of view of production, visual art is frequently seen as a potentially privileged vehicle for social action; and from the point of view of theory, visuality can appear to be something best conceptualized as politics.

Several things could be said that might help illuminate these claims. For example, it is helpful to note that political interpretations often take images as sites of relations between meanings, rather than as objects or events (and thus, not as objects of study, but as part of the hermeneutic study of subjects). (This is another instance of point (B).) A fitting example is a passage in Sartre's *L'Imaginaire* (1940): "Image", he writes, is "nothing other than a relation... a certain way in which the object appears to consciousness, or, if one prefers, a certain way in which consciousness presents itself to an object". Jacques Rancière also articulates an operative or performative sense of the politics of images in *Le destin des images* (2003; English: *The Future of the Image*, 2007): "Imaginess", he claims, is "a regime of relations between elements and between functions", an "interplay of operations". It is distinct from likeness, resemblance, etc. — what was called imagery. Images are therefore political; they "produce a discrepancy, a dissemblance". Modernists (postmodernists) have misunderstood developments such as abstraction, Rancière claims in his text "The Distribution of the Sensible", published in *The Politics of Aesthetics* (2004): images weren't medium-specific, but "implicated in an overall vision of a new human being lodged in new structures". The flatness of abstraction is "the flatness of pages, posters, and tapestries", of "interfaces". Abstract paintings are about the development of new communities, new spaces, new "bodily functions and movements".

Perhaps the clearest example of the distance between accounts that take the politics of the image as given and those that do not is again in the letters Boehm and Mitchell exchanged. At one point, Boehm states that his sense of the pictorial turn is "a criticism of the image rather than one of ideology". In his reply, Mitchell disagrees, and says: "My aim was to show... that the very notion of ideology was grounded in a specific image repertoire". It isn't easy to imagine a better articulation of the difference, which remains fundamental in image theory.

#### 4. ENVOI

This selection of four themes is taken from a list of ten that are addressed in the book *What is an Image?*. These four are, perhaps, the

ones least well addressed in the literature. They are all, I suppose, what used to be called “meta-problems”: they are problems about the ways that problems are put. But perhaps that is just the kind of thing that needs to be discussed if we are to move beyond the current static condition of theorizing about the image.

I would like to return, at the end, to one of the open questions from the beginning. Given the weight that contemporary culture puts on the idea of the visual, it is strange that so little attention is paid to what images (and other visual objects) are. The reason for our lack of interest is itself obscure, but it must be enabling. Our *lack* of interest in these issues of our own coherence and usages must itself be necessary in order for us to go on saying the things we continue to want to say about terrorism, politics, identity, and other pressing issues. My only concern is that our incoherence might run deeper than we suspect.

# The Future of the Creative Image

Jalal Toufic<sup>1</sup>

As I mentioned in the lecture I gave on December 14, 2011 at the Stedelijk Museum in Amsterdam, I am not going to address the future of the image in general — that would be prophecy<sup>2</sup> — but of a specific image, the *creative image*, since its creation requires untimely collaboration, *including with the future*. Untimely Collaboration?

## UNTIMELY COLLABORATION

It is out of thriftiness that the majority of people want to be able to count what is given to them or that the giver be able to do so.

One can never be sure what an idea or an ability requires in order to occur and hence how much is given generously to one.

Maxwell's wave equation for light has a *retarded solution* and an *advanced solution*. Retarded light waves travel forward in time, while advanced waves travel backward in time. In conventional radiation theory, an atom can emit a wave of light even if the latter does not get absorbed in the future; but in the Wheeler-Feynman *absorber theory of radiation*, in order for light to be emitted, a back-and-forth movement has to happen: a half-sized retarded wave must travel from the atom to the future absorber, and a half-sized advanced wave must travel from the absorber back to the atom. If there are no absorbers in a particular region, light will not shine in that direction.

Every time I create something, I know that there is a stranger somewhere who has received it. Many a time I stopped writing and went out with boring people who have money and time to waste: I did this most probably because there was no stranger to receive the new I might have created if he or she existed. An ethical imperative: to be available so that what has the possibility of being created can be forwarded to us rather than blocked.

1

In relation to any creative work which requires untimely collaboration, one is to assume an "et al." next to the name of the author or of the authors who engaged in an explicit, timely collaboration.

2

"No good explanation can predict the outcome, or the probability of an outcome, of a phenomenon whose course is going to be significantly affected by the creation of new knowledge. This is a fundamental limitation on the reach of scientific prediction.... Following Popper, I shall use the term prediction for conclusions about future events that follow from good explanations, and *prophecy* for anything that purports to know what is not yet knowable.... In 1894 the physicist Albert Michelson made the following prophecy about the future of physics: "The more important fundamental laws and facts of physical science have all been discovered, and these are now so firmly established that the possibility of their ever being supplanted in consequence of

The periods in his life when he failed to write were those when he lost his belief in the generosity of the world, or rather in the generosity of what in the world resists the world.

Jalal Toufic, Los Angeles  
10/23/1997

Dear Rēda Bensmaïa, Pawtucket, RI:

While at the California Institute of the Arts, I went into the reference section of its small library to check the English release title of a French film mentioned in one of this issue's [*Gilles Deleuze: A Reason to Believe in this World*, ed. Rēda Bensmaïa and Jalal Toufic, *Discourse* 20, no. 3 (Fall 1998)] articles. Noticing *The Oxford History of World Cinema*, 1996, I opened its index: the film's title was the same in English. Then it occurred to me to check for Deleuze: no mention. I then looked through the long bibliography: no mention. I will touch upon two salient characteristics of mediocrity. It is self-congratulatory: it has become customary these days for those applying for a teaching position in the field of cinema studies to get in response something along the lines of, "We received hundreds of applications. We are quite pleased with the very high level of many of the applicants. Such excellence portends very well for the field." It seems one has to brace oneself for a mild dose of displeasure and a large dose of indifference as this throng of academics begin to temporarily — for a decade or two — taint with pettiness and vulgarize through countless rehash in badly written papers expressions like *becoming-animal* and *line of flight*, as they have transiently vulgarized and made ugly such beautiful words as: *other*, *nomad*, *margin*. Second, it evinces a flagrant lack of embarrassment: how otherwise to explain that thirteen years after the publication of *Cinéma 1: L'image-mouvement* and ten years after its English translation; eleven years after the publication of *Cinéma 2: L'image-temps* and seven years after its translation into English, there is no mention of Deleuze, the author of these two volumes that compose the greatest work ever written in relation to cinema, either in the bibliography or in the index of *The Oxford History of World Cinema* (henceforth referred to as *Another Thoughtless Oxford Cinema Book*). Should one attribute this absence of Deleuze to Deleuze himself: as an effect of his becoming-imperceptible? While such a becoming may have been a contributing factor to this meager circulation and acknowledgment of his work, it is disingenuous to attribute the latter either fully or even largely to it. For Deleuze has a becoming-imperceptible not only for those who have opted to disregard his work, but also for those

new discoveries is exceedingly remote ... Our future discoveries must be looked for in the sixth place of decimals.' ... [Michelson] was prophesying the future. How? On the basis of the best knowledge available at the time... Michelson would not have put the expansion of the universe, or the existence of parallel universes, or the non-existence of the force of gravity, on any list of possible discoveries whose probability was 'exceedingly remote.' He just didn't conceive of them at all." (David Deutsch, *The Beginning of Infinity: Explanations that Transform the World* [London: Allen Lane, 2011], 197-198).

who love it. The imperceptibility of Deleuze will become both clearer and more outlandish when his work is better known. Yes, we have as yet sensed only a minimal part of his becoming-imperceptible.

Is Deleuze part of world cinema? Deleuze has made it quite clear that philosophy does not reflect on cinema, artworks, and literature, but that it creates its own entities: concepts. I would add that, not being wedged in linear time, philosophical and literary creation is sometimes additionally a collaboration with past cinematic or literary or artistic works.<sup>3</sup> Complementarily, any artistic or literary work is related to the future. Not so much because its quality and validity supposedly can be judged only by whether it successfully passes the test of time — if, taking into consideration Dogen's time-being, we view as time a Bosnian Serb aiming his artillery at the National and University Library in Sarajevo, or a *mujahidin* fighter not making any effort to spare the National Museum of Afghanistan, then, during the last decade, much great Moslem art and much great Bosnian and Ottoman literary and mystical works failed to pass the test of time. Nor so much because the majority of those living in the same period in which it was created need a surplus time to catch up with and become the contemporaries of the time in which they lived. But, fundamentally, because it collaborates in an untimely manner with future philosophers, writers, artists, etc. Since art, literature, and film are fundamentally related to the future, what is truly amazing about an artist, filmmaker, or writer is not the future component of his or her work, one that maintains its relevance far into the future (for that comes to him or her from his future collaborators), but that he or she is exactly of his or her time, rather than being, like the vast majority of the living, behind his or her time—how little fashionable it is to be the contemporary of one's time: Deleuze. I feel closer to Gertrude Stein's view of artists and creators in general than to Kafka's view of them.. In her book *Picasso*, Stein writes: "Wars are only a means of publicizing the things already accomplished, a change, a complete change, has come about, people no longer think as they were thinking but no one knows it, no one recognizes it, no one really knows it except the creators."<sup>4</sup> Gustav Janouch recorded a conversation with Kafka on Picasso: "There were some pictures by PicassoPicasso.... 'He is a willful distortionist,' I said. 'I do not think so,' said Kafka. 'He only registers the deformities which have not yet penetrated our consciousness. Art is a mirror, which goes "fast," like a watch — sometimes."<sup>5</sup> I find Kafka's expression less felicitous than Stein's although it overlaps with it, since it mixes two positions: the artist or writer as that rarity, someone who is the contemporary of his or her time, and thus who is in advance in the present over those who are living in the same period; and the artist or writer as ahead of his time.

3

See footnote 114 of my book *Over-Sensitivity* (Los Angeles: Sun & Moon Press, 1996) [cf. footnote 23 of the second edition of the book (Forthcoming Books, 2009; available for download as a PDF file at: <http://www.jalaltoufic.com/downloads.htm>), 177-178].

4

Gertrude Stein, *Picasso: The Complete Writings*, ed. Edward Burns (Boston: Beacon Press, 1970), 62. Lyotard is critical of the notion of creation as applied to art. Such a dismissal is too general and thus abstract. Reception from the other side of the *event horizon* that forms around a trauma, or from the other side of the threshold of death, does not always prove impossible. This successful reception could only have happened by a creation this side of these thresholds: the voice-over-witness, etc. Moreover, whenever an artist (Francis Bacon), writer (Alain Robbe-Grillet), or filmmaker (David Lynch) produces a structure of radical closure, some or all the entities that appear in the latter are possibly ahistorical and unwordly: creations. These can be attributed to the writer, artist, or filmmaker not in the sense that they were willfully and directly created by him or her, but in the sense that he or she set the structure that made their appearance out of nothing possible.



Deleuze was not starting to collaborate when he began working with Guattari in what ended up being one of this century's greatest such endeavors. He was switching modes of collaboration. For he had already collaborated with Lewis Carroll and with Nietzsche. How much has the latter, who was "6,000 thousand feet beyond man and time", collaborated with future writers and thinkers! Nietzsche's untimeliness will not cease in a hundred years from now, which would be around two centuries from the time he wrote in one of the notes of the preface (dated sometime between November 1887 and March 1888) to his *The Will to Power*: "What I relate is the history of the next two centuries. I describe what is coming." I don't consider *Dialogues* a collaboration between Deleuze and Claire Parnet; on the other hand, I am sure that Deleuze collaborated with Francis Bacon. It is true that Deleuze's forceful book on Bacon inflects its readers' interpretations and viewing of that painter's oeuvre, but it primarily affected that work in the past: it is a collaboration with Bacon, accessed by the latter through his intuition. Bacon's work would physically not be the same without *Francis Bacon: Logique de la sensation* (1981). Since I too have collaborated with Bacon through the section on radical closure in *Over-Sensitivity* (1996), his work would be physically different without my book. Cinema tends to be a collaborative medium not just because most filmmakers have to work with musicians, set designers, cinematographers, actors, etc., but additionally because being also an art form, even filmmakers or video makers who themselves shoot their films or videos, perform in them, edit them, compose their music, and distribute them collaborate in an untimely manner with future philosophers, writers, filmmakers, and/or artists. Deleuze has already collaborated with some of the filmmakers mentioned in his cinema book. Thus he belongs less in the bibliography of books on world cinema than in any chapter they contain that covers collaborators (cinematographer, screenwriter, etc.) and influences, therefore in their indexes. Does this sort of collaboration make it illegitimate to consider the affected filmmaker as an *auteur*? It does so as little as would Hitchcock's collaboration with composer Bernard Herrmann and title designer Saul Bass, and his use of a Boileau-Narcejac novel, make it illegitimate to call *Vertigo* a Hitchcock film. This century of cinema has been considerably influenced by Deleuze even if not many filmmakers have read his work between 1983 (the date of publication of the first volume of his cinema book) and 1996, and even if not many end up reading it between now and the end of this century. To have affected, through this untimely collaboration, past artists more than future ones is another manner of being imperceptible. Since they have already heeded it, it is certainly legitimate for great filmmakers to declare that they don't

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Gustav Janouch,  
*Conversations with  
Kafka* (London:  
Andre Deutsch, 1971),  
143.

read what is written on their work even by philosophers and writers — while legitimate, this attitude is unfortunate, for they are missing much — in the case of Deleuze, the utter beauty of his two volumes on cinema. Deleuze's work itself is a collaboration: with Guattari in the books the two co-authored; and with others — including possibly with Guattari — in Deleuze's own books. "The two of us wrote *Anti-Oedipus* together. Since each of us was several, there was already quite a crowd.... We have been aided, inspired, multiplied" (*A Thousand Plateaus*) — including by future philosophers, writers, artists, scientists, etc. One knows that a collaboration with a specific contemporary writer, philosopher, or artist is simply not working when our usual future collaborators no longer influence us and no new untimely collaborators take their place. Do artists and writers suffer unduly from an "anxiety of influence"? An artist cannot afford this reported anxiety of influence: he or she could not have created while having it, creation being an untimely collaboration. In *To Have Done with the Judgment of God*, 1947, his cancelled radio program, Artaud found himself forced to torturously collaborate with his voices; but he also collaborated in an untimely manner with Deleuze and with Deleuze-Guattari (and also with Jacques Derrida, the author of "La parole soufflée", an article in which Derrida is sometimes an untimely collaborator, sometimes a critic). It is mostly critics who, unaffected by and unaware of such an untimely collaboration, make a fuss about an anxiety of influence. A critic, especially a journalistic one, comes after; the artwork or literary work is truly finished for him or her by the time he or she arrives on the scene. Critics and journalists, who function well under deadlines, always arrive late for such untimely collaborations. Being late for a genuine collaboration, they are left with contributing to one more fashionable, for constitutionally late, anthology. Since they don't collaborate in an untimely manner with the artistic and literary works on which they reflect, it is understandable that they find it easy to write on commercial culture, which in the vast majority of cases is linear not only narratively but also in its mode of collaboration and influence: in it, there is no need for this collaboration with the future, which constitutes much of intuition. In academia and criticism, so many anthologies on a popular culture that has been reduced to and equated with commercial culture, and so little collaboration. Despite its eighty-two contributors, there is no collaboration whatsoever in *Another Thoughtless Oxford Cinema Book*. If philosophers and writers find it extremely difficult to write on commercial films and novels, it is not simply or mainly as a consequence of their negative value judgment of these works; it is fundamentally because their writings are not a reflection on films, paintings, dance and works of literature but

rather a collaboration with these, so that the fact that the vast majority of commercial works are linear not only narratively but also in their mode of collaboration and influence renders any untimely collaboration in them unfeasible. It is much easier for a philosopher or thinker to write in relation to Alain Robbe-Grillet, for his work is triply non-linear: from the least unsettling and least important level, that of narration (the tedious *Pulp Fiction* remains at this level); to that of the story, i.e., of the diegetic space-time; to that of an untimely collaboration with future thinkers and writers. Robbe-Grillet, one of the most articulate writers and filmmakers about his novels and films,<sup>6</sup> is a much more intuitive filmmaker than the majority of contemporary Hollywood filmmakers, who don't tire of repeating to us how crucial intuition is in their "creative process". If I already belong to world cinema, it is certainly far less as a result of my few videos than as a consequence of the untimely collaborations with filmmakers such as Robbe-Grillet, David Lynch, and Andrei Tarkovsky through *(Vampires): An Uneasy Essay on the Undead in Film and Over-Sensitivity*, as well as with Sergei Paradjanov through my coming book [*Forthcoming*, 2000]. I am sure I have collaborated with the latter two filmmakers although I never met them and although they died before any of my books were published. I had become so imbued with this form of collaboration by the time I was writing my third book that I had grown totally oblivious of the more obvious and discussed mode of influence, getting reminded of it with a sense of surprise on receiving a letter from performance and installation artist Carolee Schneemann in which she wrote in response to reading *(Vampires)*: "I wish you could see the piece; the influence of your 'space-time continuum' sweeps through each element of *Mortal Coils* [1994]." The consolidation of corporate monopoly over the distribution of films and books can mitigate this untimely collaboration, but it cannot stop it. The latter can be stopped by surpassing disasters, which produce a withdrawal of tradition; or by developments that lead to the destruction of the future, thus impoverishing our intuition; or by certain epochal events that create discontinuities in time. I would define epochs by whether this untimely collaboration is possible: what belongs to different epochs is what essentially cannot collaborate in an untimely manner. Despite the deep affinity an Iraqi poet or thinker may feel toward *Gilgamesh*, he will not have the impression when writing about it that he collaborated on its production. Despite being deeply impressed by the similarity between ancient Egyptian peasants and contemporary villagers in the vicinity of Edfu with regards to their physiognomy and the style and building materials of their dwellings, I am sure that, while making use of ancient Egyptian monuments and hieroglyphic writings in *The Night*

6

If it is infelicitous to ask an artist or a writer about his or her work, and if writers' and artists' answers to such questions are never fully satisfactory, it is partly that these works are untimely collaborations with another or others unknown to the artist or writer, one or ones in whose place he or she is ill-equipped to speak.

of *Counting the Years* (1968), at no point did Shādi ‘Abd al-Salām feel that he was collaborating through his film with the ancient Egyptians across chronological time. While one cannot become an untimely collaborator in relation to artistic works belonging to a different epoch, one can still possibly understand and appreciate them; use them in one’s work, as Armand Schwerner does with *Gilgamesh* and other Sumero-Akkadian writings in *The Tablets*; or affect their reception and interpretation as a critic. Deleuze is still a philosopher rather than a critic even in relation to other epochs, for though he cannot collaborate with them in an untimely manner, he still creates concepts in relation to them. Even when we are quite conscious of our changing views of them, we are also aware that there is something definitive about works belonging to another epoch: they are thus classics.

I presently admire the following people:

- The artist, writer, filmmaker, or philosopher, by constitution intuitive.

- Their future untimely collaborators.

- And the one, seemingly modest, whose aim isn’t to become a writer, a filmmaker, or an artist, but rather, with a wonderful extravagance, to incarnate *the audience implied by the artwork*. The dancer having lost the mirror-reflection on crossing the threshold to the altered realm in Agnes de Mille’s “dream ballet” for Fred Zinnemann’s *Oklahoma!*, he, an audience member, could not tell, not only theoretically but also physically, not only *de jure* but also *de facto*, that Laurey (played by Shirley Jones) was physically different from her subtle (performed by the ballet dancer Bambi Linn), that Curly (played by Gordon MacRae) also looked different from his subtle (performed by the ballet dancer James Mitchell), and that Jud and his subtle, both played by Rod Steiger, were physically identical. “His thing” was not to identify with and embark on the quixotic path of modeling himself on the protagonist (nothing has been as cheapened, programmed, and manipulated in twentieth-century culture); but to incarnate, to coincide with the audience implied by the artwork — a much more demanding endeavor. He had distanciation toward the actors and characters, but not toward the implied audience. While I despise those who remain solely empirical audience members, I admired him. He decried a widespread misrecognition that a painting, dance, or literary work implies and therefore has a specific, intrinsic audience. He felt there weren’t enough people who had tried or were trying to make the audience “part” of the artwork not by blurring the boundary between the performers and the audience (this resulting most often in sloppy, weak pieces), but rather by filling the position of the audience implied by the artwork.

By the way, is Duras' *L'Amant de la Chine du Nord* (Gallimard, 1991) — with its “This is a book. This is a film” — part of world cinema?<sup>7</sup>

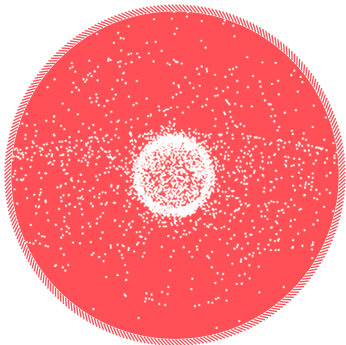
[Human but possibly also all] creation entails also reception [for example, from one's untimely collaborators.] (...) I [can] create only if I am not totally wedged in chronological time. All writing is in this sense a collaboration (it is always a joy to write on, that is, collaborate in an untimely way with, solitary artists like you [...]). Writers do not need readers — publishers do; they need strangers for their writing to occur at all (*Distracted*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., 32-33 [updated edition and pages]), and writers and artists to inflect it [through untimely collaboration], to be their enlarged intuition (were it not for this reception from strangers and artists, the writer's solitude would be too oppressive since he or she does not write in terms of a readership). How, from this perspective of viewing things, do we know that there is a future? We know that from our feeling that we still receive, from the continuing relevance of intuition in our work. Intuition is largely a sensibility to the future creation of others. The destruction of the future would be felt in the present by writers; if writers are avant-garde, they are that mainly through this collaboration with the future. Were the future [that still includes biological and/or artificial intelligence] to be abolished (through a nuclear conflagration, ecological catastrophe, etc.), then long before this happens, we will feel one of the main effects of such an absence: those close to the disaster in the future will to a large extent be unable to think properly since they receive from no one [who is not in their past], and we, who receive from them, will feel the effects of their reduced intuition and thinking, becoming increasingly less able to think, for increasingly less intuitive. Long before this disaster happens, we will no longer be able to think it; this disaster will be preceded by this other disaster: our inability to think the disaster (and not only because of our being too steeped in the kind of temporality/technology leading to it).<sup>8</sup>

7

Excerpt from:  
Jalal Toufic,  
*Distracted*, 2nd ed.  
(Berkeley, California:  
Tuumba Press, 2003),  
32-42; available for  
download as a PDF  
file at: <http://www.jalaltoufic.com/downloads.htm>.

8

Excerpt from a letter  
to Richard Foreman,  
July 28, 1993;  
see footnote 23  
of Jalal Toufic,  
*Over-Sensitivity*,  
2nd ed. (Forthcoming  
Books, 2009),  
177-178; available  
for download as a  
PDF file at: <http://www.jalaltoufic.com/downloads.htm>.



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# Just What Is It That Makes Today's Institutions So Different, So Appealing?

Iwona Blazwick

The work of art can make its public debut on a variety of stages. It might appear sandwiched between blocks of text as an ad in a magazine. It may crop up as the subject of a conversation. It might be installed in a room above a pub. But there is always some kind of structure, physical or virtual, supporting it. Today we are going to look at the institution as the supporting structure. We will look at contemporary galleries and museums and at one organization in particular — the Whitechapel Gallery — and how it has absorbed the dialectical Other of the institution: institutional critique.

Once representing the graveyard of art and the embodiment of authority and exclusion, the museum has, over the last century, enjoyed a remarkable turn in its fortunes. In his 1995 study of cultural institutions, *Twilight Memories*, cultural critic Andreas Huyssen noted:

Perhaps for the first time in the history of avant-gardes, the museum [...] has changed its role from whipping boy to favourite son in the family of cultural institutions [...]. The museum's role as site of an elitist conservation, a bastion of tradition and high culture gave way to the museum as mass medium, as a site of spectacular *mise-en-scène* and operatic exuberance.<sup>1</sup>

The title of this lecture is inspired by a collage created by the British artist and progenitor of Pop Richard Hamilton. His wry celebration of mass consumption was first premiered at the Whitechapel Gallery in 1956 as part of a groundbreaking show called *This is Tomorrow*. Its neo-erotic, Dadaistic absorption of mass culture offers an analogue for the pop power of contemporary museums.

And indeed, in the West, all the conventional platforms for art have come to share this new popularity — contemporary art shows, biennials, and site-specific commissions have crept into public consciousness as scenes of engagement. In 2000, the year of its opening, London's Tate Modern drew five million visitors; the famously arcane Documenta XII in Kassel, which charged a hefty twenty euros admission, attracted a record 750,000 visitors over its 100 days

1  
Andreas Huyssen,  
*Twilight Memories:  
Marking Time in  
a Culture of Amnesia*  
(London: Routledge,  
1995) 14.



in 2007. Huyssen marshals the arguments that have been made for this rise in popular appeal. He makes the case that

the mass media, especially television, have created an unquenchable desire for experiences and events, for authenticity and identity which, however, TV is unable to satisfy. Put differently: the level of visual expectations in our society has been raised to a degree where the scopical desire for the screen mutates into the desire for something else.<sup>2</sup>

Huyssen was writing in 1995 — but all we have to do is swap the idea of the TV screen for the computer screen to realize that we still occupy the same virtual universe.

The twenty-first-century art institution is drawing on the legacy of artists and alternative spaces to metamorphose from dead repository to vital cultural resource. As artist and writer Brian O'Doherty, who was one of the first to define the so-called white cube in the 1960s, was to comment in a lecture twenty years later:

[...] much of the art of the late sixties and seventies had this theme: How does the artist find another audience or a context in which his or her minority view will not be forced to witness its own co-optation? The answers offered — site-specific, temporary, non-purchasable, outside the museum, directed towards a non-art audience, retreating from object to body to idea — even to invisibility — have not proved impervious to the gallery's assimilative appetite. What did occur was an international dialogue on perception and value-systems — liberal, adventurous, sometimes programmatic, sometimes churlish, always anti-establishment and always suffering from the pride that demands the testing of limits. The intellectual energy was formidable.<sup>3</sup>

American artist Andrea Fraser has traced a brief history of what has become more than an attitude — in fact, it is now a canonized art practice in its own right — termed “institutional critique.”<sup>4</sup> In fact, what artists such as Michael Asher, Marcel Broodthaers, Daniel Buren, Hans Haacke, Cildo Meireles, Gustav Metzger, or Martha Rosler proposed in the 1970s incorporated both institutional and artistic practices. As Hans Haacke has stated:

“Artists” as much as their supporters and their enemies, no matter of what ideological coloration, are unwitting partners [...]. They participate jointly in the maintenance and/or development of the ideological make-up of their society. They work within that frame, set the frame and are being framed.<sup>5</sup>

2  
Ibid., 32.

3  
Brian O'Doherty, “The Gallery as a Gesture,” in *Thinking of Exhibitions*, eds. Reesa Greenberg, Bruce W. Ferguson and Sandy Nairne (London: Routledge [1980/1981] 1996), 330.

4  
Andrea Fraser, “From the Critique of Institutions to an Institution of Critique,” in *Institutional Critique and After*, ed. John C. Welchman, vol. 2 of Southern California Consortium of Art Schools Symposia (Zürich: JRP Ringier, 2005), 129.

5  
Hans Haacke, “All the ‘Art’ That's Fit to Show,” in *Conceptual Art: A Critical Anthology*, eds. Alexander Alberro and Blake Stimson (Cambridge, Massachusetts: MIT Press, 1999), 302-304.

Artists' critique of the institution was further inflected in the 1980s by the influence of feminism and identity politics. They in turn foregrounded psychoanalytic and postcolonial theory. In the 1990s and the early twenty-first century, artistic practice, characterized by so-called "relational aesthetics", embraced the politics of design, the research potential of the archive, and the concept of participation. Through objects, environments, and actions, artists have proposed a historical and political understanding of the aesthetics of space and situation.

Fraser — like Carsten Höller, Mark Dion, Liam Gillick, Renée Green, Tino Sehgal, Rirkrit Tiravanija, or Carey Young — have all, in their way, taken up this legacy and brought it into the present. As Fraser has noted, "[t]he Gallery and Museum figure less as objects of critique themselves than as containers in which the largely abstract and invisible forces and relations that traverse particular social spaces can be made visible."<sup>6</sup> Furthermore, these artists acknowledge that "the institution of art is not something external to any work of art but the irreducible condition of its existence as art."<sup>7</sup> There is no view from outside looking in — all social relations including resistance and opposition are in some way institutionalized.

The intellectual energy defined by Brian O'Doherty has nevertheless percolated through Western institutions to effect a radical transformation. I would argue that this is more than pure co-optation and is quite different from the way advertising adopts activism as just another sales pitch. As Western societies have shifted away from manufacturing towards service economies, and a wider demographic has gained access to further education, arts organizations are benefiting from a greater mobilization of personnel, who in turn question and invigorate their management and programs. Exclusion on the basis of gender, geography, or media is increasingly untenable. The museum is not a static monolith but an evolving entity — it may have absorbed its own opposition but, as we shall see, it has not remained unaltered.

The design of art institutions has become the most sought after of all architectural commissions. We have only to think of Rogers and Piano's Centre Pompidou, or Frank Gehry's Guggenheim Bilbao, Álvaro Siza's Museu Serralves, or Zaha Hadid's MAXXI in Rome. Signature architecture has developed hand in hand with rampant expansionism in the museum sector. Museum buildings have become icons, brands, even franchises, deployed in urban regeneration schemes, adopted to enhance private property developments or hired out to aspirational developing economies. They can suck huge sums of money out of the public purse or put unbearable strain on philanthropic giving; they can stand as a monument to the thirst for power

6  
 Andrea Fraser,  
 'From the Critique  
 of Institutions to  
 an Institution of  
 Critique', *Artforum*,  
 September 2005,  
 Vol.44, Issue 1, New  
 York, USA, 103

7  
 Ibid., 103

and recognition of a collector, director, or board. They must justify themselves with ever-increasing audience figures and revenues.

But might we also see them as a public affirmation of how highly a society values art? Is the high visibility of the museum of art also a vital way of offering a sign post — as potent as any church spire or mosque tower — a ‘come this way’ to the uninitiated city dweller or visitor? The iconic nature of museums has the advantage of offering a destination. Like cathedrals and temples, nineteenth-century railway stations, or Moscow’s palatial underground stations, they are designed to offer a temporary sense of grandeur. The wow factor of riding the Centre Pompidou’s exoskeleton escalators or sauntering down the vast Turbine Hall at Tate Modern is certainly entertaining, spectacular but nonetheless compelling. It is a form of communication like any other advertising campaign. “Come in, feel exhilarated, get involved”, and better still, “it’s free!”. The worst of the new museum architecture often adopts the visual rhetoric of the corporate headquarters, using scale to diminish both art and viewer. The best — for example the New Museum’s stack of radiant boxes on the Bowery — says, in the words of artist Ugo Rondinone, “Hell, Yes!”.<sup>8</sup>

Among the most interesting architectural approaches to twenty-first century art institutions have also been those that take the fabric of an existing building and retranslate it. The French architects Lacaton & Vassal tempered the grandiosity of the Palais de Tokyo, an enormous exhibition hall built for the Paris World Fair of 1933, with a remarkable lightness of touch. They made it watertight and weatherproof, but effectively left it as a ruin. They re-instilled the sense of what artist Liam Gillick has proposed as a “what if scenario”, making it again a place of artistic imminence.

Also taking the lead from artists who spend their lives turning industrial and commercial ruins into studio and exhibition spaces, the Ghent-based architects Robbrecht & Daem created an interface between the architectural vernacular of an existing site and a contemporary sensibility. The new Whitechapel Gallery combines two nineteenth-century buildings, one a purpose-built art gallery and the other a public lending library. The latter was designed in the 1890s with unusually large windows, conceived as a ‘lantern’ of learning, illuminating the dark regions of one of Europe’s poorest urban neighborhoods.

The architects revived two façades that had succumbed to the grime of a traffic-congested highway and the creeping invisibility that afflicts all public monuments over time. Each facade exemplifies an architectural period — neo-Jacobean late Victorian (library) and early modern Arts and Crafts (gallery). They also celebrate the Enlightenment projects envisaged by their founders, which are embedded in every decorative feature of these buildings, from two an-

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A Rainbow sign installed on the façade of the New Museum when it opened its new building in 2007

gels flying over the library entrance bearing a palette and a book to 'trees of life' flanking the gallery's façade. The Canadian artist Rodney Graham created a new weathervane installed for the building's reopening in spring 2009. Spinning in the wind atop the expanded Whitechapel Gallery is a horse and rider — the sixteenth-century philosopher Erasmus, riding his horse backwards whilst reading *In Praise of Folly*. Graham has revived a semi-obsolete architectural feature to give the London skyline a symbol that combines rationalism and humanist values with the delight of the absurd. The façade of the institution offers a public face that must be mindful of its location and its social, environmental, and architectural context. It is both symbol and sign.

Internally, another relationship is built with the unknown exhibitors, who will mask, destroy, or complement the spaces in which they find themselves. The internal spatial organization that Robbrecht & Daem have created also draws on the sedimentation of previous uses. The Whitechapel Gallery was purposely designed in 1901 to have no steps between the street and the galleries. Internally it offers not white cubes, but rather a series of clearly defined rooms. These offer artists a choreography of volume, surface, and light which is neither purely neutral nor dictatorial. It is not an architecture of denial, of burying a past structure behind white stud walls and concrete floors. Rather, it takes as its *modus operandi* what Gordon Matta-Clark proposed in his epithet of 1977: "[...] taking a normal situation and retranslating it into overlapping and multiple readings of conditions past and present".<sup>9</sup>

If architecture is a form of advertising, a mass medium, what is the message?

Having been enticed by the façade of a building, what will we confront inside? The institution has rightly been challenged for its orthodoxies and exclusions. But if we look at what is on offer in galleries and museums today, we see a different story, and that story is directed by the curator. As we are all aware, the selection of artists is not a neutral or objective activity. According to activists such as the Guerrilla Girls, there is the continuing issue of gender. It happened that the new Whitechapel Gallery opened with a survey of sculptor Isa Genzken and a commission by Goshka Macuga; its second season celebrated the paintings of Elizabeth Peyton; and the third season, a major show of Sophie Calle. As it was, some members of the press described this as a programme of 'women's art'. If these had been four males in succession, would the program be characterized as 'men's art'?

Hence, representation is still an issue today. If institutions have obtained a temple-like status within the fabric of a city, then this can

and must be exploited to accord public visibility to all those who by virtue of gender or geography have been invisible. And it is the case that today a visitor is more likely to encounter a work of art that resonates with their life experience, as contemporary art becomes privileged in museums and *Kunsthallen*. This may be in the form of a revision of art history, such as *WACK!*, the recent survey of art and feminism conceived by MOCA in Los Angeles. It may offer a journey of political awareness, such as the New Museum's 2009 juxtaposition of the work of South African photographer David Goldblatt and Black Panther graphic designer Emory Douglas.

Even as museums mutate to reflect the prevailing interests of their political or financial benefactors, the range of artists and what they show has dramatically expanded. In a 1983 lecture on power relations in art institutions, artist Adrian Piper commented:

I believe that artists and other concerned art practitioners would benefit by taking seriously the consciousness raising model with respect to their participation in existing art institutions [...]. Galleries and museums are public space. Public spaces are political arenas.

The street is routinely cited as the authentic space of public address — but can it function as agora? Public space bristles with the imperatives of commercial and municipal power. In tandem with social media, it offers a world stage for protest, but also for surveillance and brutal reprise. The work of reflection and renewal requires interiority. The space of the institution can offer freedom to contemplate, to become immersed in the eros and the ethics of aesthetic consciousness. The artist Robert Smithson once remarked: “I think the nullity implied in the museum is actually one of its major assets.” The “neutrality” of the white cube has been exposed as politicized and socially specific. But isn't its endurance testament to its utopian potential? Can we exploit its appearance as a non-place? The tabula rasa of the white cube hosts a dynamic sequence of changing exhibitions, enabling artists to displace the stasis of orthodoxy. Its apparent timelessness paradoxically allows artists to give histories and subjectivities buried by the past the urgency of the here and now.

Judith Barry is an American artist whose work is informed by both exhibition design and questions surrounding the role of the spectator. She has commented:

Minimalism allowed for the spatialization of experience. Numerous other contemporary discourses produce different subjects within spaces that are ideologically coded [...]. Given these conditions, the exhibition becomes the set for a play with objects de-

scribing various possible subject positions and making the viewer spatially as well as visually aware.<sup>10</sup>

The challenge, which artists since the 1960s have offered, has been to use the gallery itself as a site of production, taking architecture, history, location, or the viewer as subject and object. The commissioning of site-specific works is a high-risk venture. What evolves may be successful; it may be a spectacular disaster. It is an act of faith that can both challenge and expose practitioners. It also positions the curator in the role of production assistant — researching and sourcing materials, negotiating permissions, working out the technicalities. It's exciting to enter the creative process and mirror theater or cinema, where a production is a group enterprise. Inspired by the DIA Foundation, founded in the 1970s in New York to give space and resources to artists for the production of new works of art, the Whitechapel Gallery is commissioning artists to create something in response to a very distinct space.

The central reading room of the former library has been transformed into a gallery. The architects have exposed its Victorian brickwork and renovated its stocky pillars. Shafts of light fall from each corner of its cruciform ceiling. This former library was a meeting ground for artists and intellectuals throughout the twentieth century. Its history offers the starting point for the creation of a work of art. Here we abandon the authority of curatorial arrangement in favor of the artistic process. Every year, we offer the Bloomberg Commission to one artist to create a work for this space.

In 2009, the Polish artist Goshka Macuga created the inaugural work for the library — *The Nature of the Beast*. She poured over our archives to unearth a remarkable story: in 1939, the Stepney Trade Union approached the Whitechapel Gallery with an exhibition proposal. They wanted to present the work of a young Spanish artist who wished to raise consciousness about the Spanish Civil War. The Gallery turned them down. The Trade Unionists offered money (25 guineas), and the Gallery finally agreed. The young artist turned out to be Picasso. He exhibited just one work — *Guernica*, perhaps one of the greatest masterpieces of the twentieth century. Currently, this great statement against war is permanently housed in the Reina Sofía Museum in Madrid. It will never travel again. Macuga discovered, however, that in 1955, Nelson Rockefeller, who was to become Governor of New York in 1959, had persuaded Picasso to make a tapestry of *Guernica* with the Atelier J. de la Baume-Dürbach in Paris. Rockefeller wanted to raise awareness of modern art in New York and concluded that one of the most durable, portable, and accessible ways he could represent great modernist masterpieces was by reproducing them as tapestries. He commissioned 22

10  
Judith Barry,  
“Damaged Goods,”  
in *Public Fantasy:  
An Anthology of  
Critical Essays,  
Fictions and Project  
Descriptions*, ed.  
Iwona Blazwick  
(London: ICA, 1991),  
104.

tapestries of Picasso's paintings and put them on display in public buildings and later at his mansion in upstate New York. In 1985, his widow, Happy Rockefeller, contacted the United Nations headquarters, which had been built on land donated by Nelson. She offered them the Guernica tapestry on permanent loan, on condition that it would hang outside the Security Council Chamber as a deterrent to war. It was still hanging there in 2003 when Colin Powell persuaded the UN to make a pre-emptive strike against Saddam Hussein, then-leader of Iraq, on the pretext that the Iraqis possessed weapons of mass destruction aimed at the United States. The press announcement of the invasion of Iraq was made, as with all UN press conferences, against the backdrop of the Guernica Tapestry. Except this time, the work was covered up behind a blue cloth. The Whitechapel Gallery negotiated the loan of the tapestry for Macuga's installation; she presented it in front of a blue cloth in a complex installation that revealed the extraordinary history of protest embodied in the work — and its journey through the century and across Europe and America.

This kind of collaboration between an artist and the institution can also take the form of the artist becoming him/herself the curator. *Richard of York Gave Battle in Vain* is a single work of art articulated through the display of other artists' works, ranging from the sixteenth to the twenty-first century, which were selected and installed by Cornelia Parker. Another American artist, the great feminist Mary Kelly, has observed:

In terms of analysis, the exhibition system marks a crucial intersection of discourses, practices and sites, which define the institutions of art within a definitive social formation. Moreover, it is exactly here, within this inter-textual, inter-discursive network that the work of art is produced as text.<sup>11</sup>

The actual point when a work of art meets its public is when it goes on exhibition. Until historians such as Bruce Altshuler or Mary Anne Staniszewski began their research into the histories of exhibitions, modern art history had focused on artist biographies, individual works, and stylistic movements. Yet, as Staniszewski has commented,

[...] they have rarely addressed the fact that a work of art, when publicly displayed, almost never stands alone: it is always an element within a permanent or temporary exhibition created in accordance with historically determined and self-consciously staged installation conventions [...]. Exhibitions, like the artworks themselves, represent what can be described as conscious and unconscious subjects, issues and ideological agendas.<sup>12</sup>

11  
Mary Kelly, "Re-Viewing Modernist Criticism," *Screen* 22, no. 3 (1981), 53

12  
Mary Anne Staniszewski, *The Power of Display: A History of Exhibition Installations at the Museum of Modern Art* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: MIT Press, 1998), xxii.



It is this contextuality of individual works that is addressed in artist-led curatorial projects, often including an “installational” approach to making exhibitions.

Artists’ spaces, commercial galleries, and *Kunsthallen* do not collect works of art, but one might regard their archives as collections. Because they are ephemeral and mass-produced, private view cards, posters, and flyers get thrown away — and thus become surprisingly rare. Their design, the choice of typeface, the glimpses they offer as to which young artists showed with whom and when — these call for close study. Letters from artists (who knows what to do with the anonymous and ephemeral nature of email?), drawings for installations, the artwork for publicity materials, photos, and interviews — all offer a rich pedagogic resource. As artists today have demonstrated in their use of archival materials and methodologies (examples include Minerva Cuevas, Mark Dion, Emily Jacir, Goshka Macuga, Walid Raad), the archive is itself a limitless source of display, debate, and speculation. This also reflects on the increasing globalization of the art world itself, as it incorporates artists whose histories have been lost or distorted as a result of war or state control. The display of archives today has become a dynamic and revelatory strand of programming that also coincides with art practice.

Can we think of the Gallery as a community? And the institutional space as a social space? Apart from offering someone a show, what can art institutions do for artists? Well, one important thing they can do is to offer them a job. Nearly every technician, gallery assistant, conservator, educator, or guard in this city is an artist. Crucially, the institution and space also offers us the audience. “We” are hungry for experience — “we” also make judgments, “we” analyze and identify with what “we” see. The process of exhibiting work triggers criticism, exposing experiment to peer review and provoking debate. The spatial conditions of the enduring if battered white cube can bring reciprocity between artists and their audiences through poetic, erotic, and revelatory encounters.

For society itself — and what the critic Brian Hatton has described as “the tools and sacraments of its subjects, the triggers and table-settings of their meetings, the gear and equipment of their acts” — are part of the trappings of the institution and of its physical spaces.

The bookshop for browsing and for taking away a part of the experience — even if it is only a postcard; the cafe to check your messages and have a reviving shot of caffeine; the auditorium to get close to the big ideas. This social aspect is the connecting tissue that can make the art institution one of the vital organs of twenty-first-century society.<sup>13</sup>

13  
Brian Hatton,  
‘Building Regs’,  
*Gamma City*,  
NATO magazine,  
Architectural  
Association, London,  
1983, unpaginated





# The Plurality of Art Worlds and the New Museum<sup>1</sup>

Hans Belting

## I

As we reach the global age, museums no longer represent a master narrative of art, as was the case in modernity. On the one hand, contemporary art production is expanding across the globe. On the other hand, this practice no longer follows a single mainstream notion of art, for which the museum was invented. It is true that the museum was also a place of competition and conflict — this was restricted to the Western art world, however. In general, the museum was the official address of a shared idea of art even in such cases when it was expected to defend art's history against non-believers and avant-garde activists. This profile of the art museum is obviously not applicable to every part of the world, but it is apt to change in such cultures where museums may respond to other demands. And finally, new art spaces (whether they are called museums or not) function — in the age of accelerated art traffic — even as places for the production of contemporary art and thus no longer resemble the traditional museum that collected art of the past (including that of modernity).

In many parts of the world, art museums either lack any history or are suffering from the history of colonization. It is therefore likely that alternative art spaces will change or substitute the profile that was developed through the Western history of museums. Such spaces are expected to respond to the complexity of a given society they are built for, ever since migration and issues surrounding the position of minorities have started to determine the social dynamics of societies everywhere. The Community Museum, as an example, was first developed in the US but is spreading quickly to places where the growing number of socially aware minorities calls for a flexible idea of art's role in society.

“Art” was for a long time undisputed as a shared concept. Its ethnocentrism excluded any other notion of art as an expression of “Otherness”. This disparity was the reason why, starting in the 1950s, conceptualism was welcomed by artists from the former periphery, who started to question the concept of art as it had been imposed on them. Thus, conceptual art in such cases was not one of several

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An earlier version of this text has already been published in Hans Belting, Andrea Buddensieg, and Peter Weibel, eds., *The Global Contemporary and the Rise of New Art Worlds* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: MIT Press, 2013), 246-255.

currents, as it was in the Western art scene, but a critical response to the concept of art in general. For the same reasons, the self-referential aesthetics of “art for art’s sake” became controversial whenever local audiences started to request artists to play a more political role. In the 1990s, the only two biennials in South Africa after the end of apartheid caused “an ongoing debate about the *autonomy* of art vis-à-vis the social and political worlds in which it is embedded”.<sup>2</sup> Colin Richards reminds us that, as soon as contemporary art had gained momentum, art’s claims for protection and autonomy seemed to weaken its public presence and political role. He therefore asked the rhetorical question: “What remains distinctive and beguiling about art?”

## II

The last remaining stronghold of the Western art concept was the notion of an Art World in the singular, which survives even today as the belief in a “global art world”, again in the singular. In other words, what was once a prerequisite of the West is believed today to survive in global expansion. This resistance to (or fear of) giving up the belief in a single art world, with an official authority even on a global scale, may be explained in part by the history of the term and by its theory in recent Western philosophy and sociology. Art worlds, in the plural, were only acceptable when they designated different arts including literature, music, and dance, but they did not apply to the visual arts alone.

As a matter of fact, we are experiencing an increasing plurality of art practices today that would recommend a plural usage of the term. The mapping of art regions with a transnational character is clear proof of the intention to organize art worlds in parts of the world that before felt marginalized by the center-periphery map as we know it from modern times. In what follows, art museums will provide a case study to elaborate on this concept. Museums are no longer defined by a single art world but testify to the rise of independent art worlds that are all contemporary while differing among themselves, both in a horizontal way (geography) and in a vertical way (audiences, markets, and museums). Hence, it appears that the former art world in the singular, hitting its peak in the modern age, ceases to offer a single-line genealogy for new museums to follow. It may be argued that markets act against the new regional mapping and strive to preserve art’s ubiquity in sales and trade, which means branding the artwork as an easily replaceable object of speculation. But the market status of a work of art, a fiction in itself, is equally linked to the diversity, and speci-

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Colin Richards, “The Wounds of Discovery,” in *The State of the World*, ed. A. Pinto Ribeiro (Lisbon: Gulbenkian Foundation, 2006), 18 et seqq.

ficity, of new art worlds, which carry their own cultural codes and art practices.

The newly emerged class of curators seems to level the different art worlds in that they apply similar concepts with respect to an international clientele, in biennials and art fairs across the globe. But their audience is nevertheless local and divided by different experiences of art or no experience at all. It is true that art practice has become a global condition, but that does not mean that a single work or project acquires the same global significance and acceptance. One and the same artwork may change its meaning when traveling from one place to the next. Similarly, the notion of art in general neither simply *owns* one single meaning nor can it lay claim to universal significance. In other words, it needs an audience who identifies with the cultural and social premises that make a specific art world.

With respect to the *plurality of worlds* as a contemporary condition, the recent “anthropology of the contemporary”, which is also the subtitle to Paul Rabinow’s *Marking Time*,<sup>3</sup> is developing a pertinent model. Marc Augé describes the new field work as *An Anthropology for Contemporaneous Worlds* when he writes: “The world’s inhabitants have at last become truly contemporaneous, and yet the world’s diversity is recomposed every moment: this is the paradox of our day. We must speak, therefore, of worlds in the plural” in order to cope “with the coexistence of the singular entity implied by the word contemporaneous and the multiplicity of worlds it qualifies [...]. Every society is made up of several worlds.”<sup>4</sup>

The Contemporary, in a symbolic and even ideological way, has been recognized as the all-defining feature of today’s art production. But at the same time, it “is made up of several worlds”.<sup>5</sup> In other words, the global is no longer synonymous with the totalizing term *world*. It denotes the space of a “multiplicity of worlds” in societies and cultures at large. This also applies to a multiplicity of art worlds instead of one independent and unitary “art world” as we know it from modern times. This is partly due to the fact that the production of art is presently turning into a production of culture, especially in regions where “Art” is still a new experience and is looking for its cultural roots in order to reach a local audience.

The one and only art world created by Modernism depended on the distinction between art and the real world. But even then, this distinction simplified the case. As a matter of fact, the Western art world was never as unified as the theory suggested. We only need to recall the debate about the pre-war art world in Europe and the postwar art world in America, which have up to now been presented in terms of a contrasting juxtaposition, for instance at the Museum of Modern Art in New York. Today, the coexistence of several art

3

Paul Rabinow,  
*Marking Time:  
On the Anthropology  
of the Contemporary*  
(Princeton,  
New Jersey [etc.]:  
Princeton University  
Press, 2008).

4

Marc Augé,  
*An Anthropology for  
Contemporaneous  
Worlds* (Stanford,  
California [etc.]:  
Stanford University  
Press, 1999), 89 et  
seqq. Cf. Francis  
Affergan, *La pluralité  
des mondes:  
Vers une autre  
anthropologie* (Paris:  
Albin Michel, 1997).

5

*Ibid.*, 90.

6

Arthur C. Danto,  
“The Art World,”  
*Journal of Philosophy*  
61 (1964): 571-584.  
See also Arthur C.  
Danto, “The Art World  
Revisited: Comedies  
of Similarity,” in:  
Arthur C. Danto,  
*Beyond the Brillo  
Box: The Visual Arts  
in Post-Historical  
Perspective* (New  
York: Farrar, Straus,  
Giroux, 1992), 33-53.

worlds has not found an appropriate discourse, but is instead either taken for granted or covered up by the retrospective look at the former unity of a single art world. However, effectively, the concept of a “multiplicity of worlds” renders the very idea of art as a world of its own problematic. If art nowadays is slowly giving up its distance (as defined by aesthetics) to the social world, and if the latter consists of several worlds (contemporary and traditional), then art is equally as “multiple” as the world it explicitly or implicitly addresses.

Therefore, it may be useful to quote Marc Augé once more on his distinction between “the world of the image” and the real world: “The problem of how images are received cannot be resolved merely by analyzing [its] [...] institutions, since the image also functions as memory, reference point, imaginative creation and/or re-creation.” In a similar way, art, too, cannot be defined only by its institutions and markets, but acts via “memory” and imagination as a symbolical representation of “contemporary worlds”. *Picture worlds*, in the sense of visual cultures, as they were distinguished from *real worlds* in the ZKM exhibition *The Global Contemporary* (2011-2012), simultaneously differ from art worlds, ever since art turned against the mass media. However, today’s global art increasingly appropriates popular images (such as Nollywood clichés in Africa), and it is therefore no longer the exhibition art of the white cube as it was theorized in modern times. Of the threefold composition that makes up an “art world”, namely “audiences, markets, and museums”, I will take a closer look at the part of the museum.

### III

Before turning to the museum, it may be useful to recapitulate the discourse of “the art world” as begun by Arthur S. Danto in 1964. His famous text with the same title was written in the capital of modern art, New York, where Danto was surprised by the encounter with Pop Art. His point was the distinction of the Brillo Box that Andy Warhol exhibited in the art gallery from the Brillo Box in the supermarket, while they actually looked alike. As a result, they could only be distinguished by the authority of what Danto identified as “the art world”. The art world, as he would later defend his functional theory against George Dickie’s institutional view, is not just another word for its institutions but “is the discourse of reasons institutionalized”.<sup>7</sup> He argued that it was now the age of the philosopher, after “traditional art” had reached the end of its previous history and was no longer based on evolution and novelty of form. It is hardly a coincidence that five years later, in 1969, the Hungarian-born conceptual artist Joseph Kosuth, also living in New York, turned the

7

Danto, *Brillo Box*, 46.

tables and published his essay “Art After Philosophy”, in which he insisted that art would take over what had been part of “traditional philosophy”.<sup>8</sup>

The cultural bias of such a debate was the belief in one art world that went equally uncontested as the belief in one philosophy. In 1976, the American sociologist Howard S. Becker distinguished “art worlds and social types” that were “coexisting at one time”, whether “in conflict or in some sort of symbiotic or cooperate relation”. But he thought of various arts of which each formed an art world of its own.<sup>9</sup> He therefore distinguished artists, as “integrated professionals”, from “naïve artists” and “folk artists” in terms of their art. As a result, an art world, with all its contradictions, would “mirror society at large”. In a later essay, Becker considered the art world as “a network of cooperative activity” whose conditions changed with the arrival of communication technologies such as the Internet.<sup>10</sup> But Becker still lacked the experience of globalization that decentralized the former art world. Pierre Bourdieu, too, based his theory of the “art system” on the Western art scene, which he chose as his one and only “field” of study.

James Clifford, in the meantime, introduced a new argument into the discourse of the art world. An anthropologist by profession, he was confronted with a binary situation that in fact contradicted the belief in a single art world. There was on the one hand “culture collecting” as a colonial practice, and on the other hand, the “art collecting” in the mainstream art world. Two types of museums and two types of art, “tribal art” and “modern art”, had for a long time not only excluded but also mutually defined each other. James Clifford, in retrospect, could therefore speak of *the modern art-culture system* “in which culture ideas and art ideas” were supplementing each other and “through which exotic objects had been contextualized in the West”.<sup>11</sup> It had become apparent that this dual type of collecting was “a local story” which had come to an end when art and culture ceased to be understood as opposition and new claims of ethnicity began to surface in the global practice of contemporary art. Cultural issues, in the sense of an artist’s cultural background, for the first time began to matter in what had been a rather ethnocentric art world. The time was gone when the one and only art world had protected itself against the participation of other cultures with the universalism of mainstream art.

Since the 1990s, art’s new outposts, called biennials, have reached the most unlikely places. As recurring events, they serve not only the recovery of “alternative modernities” but also the emergence of new art worlds, which had been marginalized during Modernism. Their agents, a class of multinational curators, bring internation-

8

Joseph Kosuth, “Art After Philosophy,” *Studio International* 178 (October 1969): 134 et seqq. [reprinted in: *Joseph Kosuth, Art After Philosophy and After: Collected Writings, 1966-1990*, ed. Gabrielle Guercio (Cambridge, Massachusetts: MIT Press, 1991), 13-32.]

9

Howard S. Becker, “Art Worlds and Social Types,” *The American Behavioral Scientist* 19, no. 6 (1976): 703 et seqq.

10

Howard S. Becker, “A New Art Form,” in *Commentarios a: tores@uv.es*, Valencia 2000 [Is this a book, a journal?]

11

James Clifford, *The Predicament of Culture: Twentieth-Century Ethnography, Literature, and Art* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1988), 215 et seqq.

al and local artists together and hence change the rules that had supported the authority of a single art world. In this way, they take over the traditional role of art critics and museums. In 1989, Yves Michaud published a pamphlet with the title “The artist and the curators” (*L'artiste et les commissaires*), in which he attacked curators as the new players “who have replaced the artists in making art”.<sup>12</sup> The usual criticism sees, rightly or wrongly, curators in complicity with art fairs. The markets certainly play a dominant role in art's globalization — yet, it is a matter of debate whether the emerging art worlds will end up in the grip of the markets or will attain a certain independence from the mechanisms of the global art trade and sales.

The global art production certainly leaves behind the earlier theories of one mainstream art world. It is merely a question of preference if one speaks of a “global art world” in the singular, or if one rejects the notion of such an all-encompassing entity, with its loss of any distinction, as being a contradiction in itself. Some, however, even ridicule the term “art world” as such by offering an ironic insider view, like Paul Werner does in a pamphlet about the Guggenheim Museum with the title: *Museum, Inc.: Inside the Global Art World*.<sup>13</sup> Charlotte Bydler, in her book *The Global Art World Inc.*, discusses the role of biennials as vectors of a progressive “culturalization” that is breaking up the modern art concept.<sup>14</sup> For Pascal Gielen, “the worldwide art system is in fact a meshwork of countless international sub-networks”.<sup>15</sup> The present concern is the “mapping” of new art regions like that of the “Asia Pacific Triennial” or that of the Gulf Region rushing to replace the former art world with a new art geography. Peter Weibel's 1996 Graz show *Inklusion: Exklusion* similarly intended to draw “a new map” in order to cope with artists' “global migration”.<sup>16</sup>

In 1987, Rasheed Araeen introduced his London magazine *Third Text* with “the aim of providing a critical forum for third-world perspectives on the visual arts”.<sup>17</sup> The notion “Third World”, which collapsed with the end of the Cold War, is sometimes replaced by “Global South”,<sup>18</sup> but the issue is still the same. *Third Text* was to represent “a historical shift away from the center of the dominant culture to its periphery”. In its first decade, *Third Text* was “devoted to revealing the institutional closures of the art world”. In its second decade, its aim was to examine “the assimilation of the exotic Other into the new world art”, as Sean Cubitt reminds us. A new type of “art-institutional racism”, as he remarks, forced the “assimilation of newcomers” by the art world. “Others have abandoned the concept of art altogether” and look for “alternative modes of cultural practice.”<sup>19</sup>

12  
Yves Michaud,  
*L'artiste et les  
commissaires: Quatre  
essais non pas sur  
l'art contemporain  
mais sur ceux qui  
s'en occupent* (Paris:  
Hachette Littératures,  
1989), 210.

13  
Paul Werner, *Museum,  
Inc.: Inside the Global  
Art World* (Chicago,  
Illinois: Prickly Para-  
digm Press, 2010).

14  
Charlotte Bydler,  
*The Global Art World:  
On the Globalization  
of Contemporary Art*  
(Uppsala: Uppsala  
University 2004), 242.

15  
Pascal Gielen,  
*The Murmuring of  
the Artistic Multitude:  
Global Art, Memory  
and Post-Fordism*,  
trans. Clare McGregor  
(Amsterdam: Valiz,  
2010), 192 et seqq.

16  
Peter Weibel, ed.,  
*Inklusion:Exklusion*  
(Graz: Steirischer  
Herbst, 1996).

17  
Sean Cubitt, prologue  
to *The Third Text  
Reader on Art,  
Culture and  
Theory*, ed. by  
Rasheed Araeen  
(London: Continuum,  
2002), 3 et seqq.

18  
Beral Madra, “Reflec-  
tions on the Global  
South,” in Peter Weibel  
and Andrea Budden-  
sieg, *Contemporary  
Art and the Museum:  
A Global Perspective*  
(Ostfildern: Hatje  
Cantz, 2007), 110 et  
seqq.



## IV

Jean-Hubert Martin, with his exhibition *Magiciens de la terre* (1989), seemed to deprive the existing art world of its privileges when he opened up its frontiers to newcomers who had for a long time been labeled as “native”, “traditional”, or “indigenous”.<sup>20</sup> He thus juxtaposed the minimalist Richard Long, a star of the art world, with a group of Aborigines who did their “earth painting” on the floor before his installation. The French curator, then still director of the Centre Pompidou, even chose the same number of (former) outsiders with name and provenance as “integrated professionals” of the art world. The designation as “magicians” stood for “artists” in a metaphorical sense, who, almost with Malraux’s words, allowed “an inquiry into creation in today’s world” (*une enquête sur la création dans le monde d’aujourd’hui*).<sup>21</sup> Martin’s exhibition would not have been possible earlier, at a time when the art world was still in command, and it lost its momentum soon thereafter, when the art world surrendered its right to exclusive power.

Museums were of central importance for the formation of the modern art world. The Museum of Modern Art in New York, the first of its kind in the world, is a case in point. “The MoMA made us modern”, to quote Arthur S. Danto, emphasizing the importance of the institution for a new canon of art and aesthetics. It was due to two MoMA exhibitions of the 1930s that Modernism became a myth early on.<sup>22</sup> The Americans, who had felt culturally colonized by European Modernism, soon began to colonize Europe with the help of the museum. The MoMA thus opted for the double canon it had created itself when it re-opened its galleries in 2004. One floor was reserved for European prewar Modernism, while the other floor, with a few exceptions, presented American postwar Modernism. It became abundantly clear that the museum officials had decided to represent the museum’s own history as a solid myth. But a MoMA conference, which followed the reopening in April 2005, did discuss the question *When Was Modern Art?* It was, as the subtitle added, a “contemporary question” that could not have been asked when modern art was still in power.

More than two decades before, William Rubin had again staged the modernist myth with two complementary exhibitions, both defending Modernism as a living past for the last time. After the Picasso show, which opened in 1980, six years after the artist’s death, the exhibition *Primitivism in 20<sup>th</sup> Century Art*,<sup>23</sup> which followed in 1984, could just as well have been called *Picasso and Primitive Art*. Its aim was to retell the story of the avant-garde, but, in fact, it reiterated once more the colonial perspective that reduced

19  
Cubitt, prologue to  
*Third Text Reader*.

20  
Thomas McEvelley,  
“Ouverture du piège:  
L’exposition postmod-  
erne et Magiciens de  
la terre,” and Homi  
Bhabha, “Hybridité,  
heterogenéité et cul-  
ture contemporaine,”  
in *Les magiciens de la  
terre*, ed. Jean-Hubert  
Martin (Paris: Centre  
Georges Pompidou,  
1989), 20 et seqq.

21  
*Ibid.*, 8.

22  
John Elderfield,  
*Imagining the Future  
of the Museum of  
Modern Art* (New  
York: Museum of  
Modern Art, 1998).

23  
William Rubin,  
“Picasso,” in *Prim-  
itivism in 20<sup>th</sup>  
Century Art: Affinity  
of the Tribal and the  
Modern*, vol. I, ed.  
William Rubin (New  
York: Museum of  
Modern Art, 1984),  
241-340.



the masks and fetishes to a mere “inspiration” for Western artists. Today, ethnic arts and crafts, which had been the favorite child of colonial teachers and collectors, no longer continue as a living tradition, even through they survive as a commodity for global tourism. “The death of authentic primitive art”, to quote the title of a book by Shelly Errington, opens a space that contemporary art invades with its double character: as *post-historical*, with respect to the West, and as *post-ethnic*, with respect to colonial history.<sup>24</sup>

It appears that the history of art has become a burden for Western artists, similar to the ethnic tradition for “non-Western” artists (also, this latter term loses its distinctiveness). The global experience, in retrospect, allows “multiple” or “alternative modernities” to come into view.<sup>25</sup> Thus, to be “modern” has become a historical notion that in the West might even take the shape of a local past, the way other cultures are viewing their past. “Modern art” becomes a source of memory and identity at MoMA, as its audience wants to see what it loves. Even the name MoMA, with its nostalgic charm, has been generally replaced by the brand name MoCA (Museum of Contemporary Art) in many parts of the world where contemporary production is celebrated as an art without geographic borders and without “history” in Western terms. The art market followed the MoCA principle when Christie’s and Sotheby’s replaced the trademark “Modern” with new labels such as “Contemporary” and “Postwar Art”.

How do museums cope with the rise of new art worlds? It may be useful to consult the recent history of the Guggenheim Museum, which has opted for quite some time to be what Karsten Schubert called “a global museum”.<sup>26</sup> When Thomas Krens joined the staff in 1988, he soon developed “the idea of global expansion” through the creation of “a network of semi-satellite institutions”. But the “global branding of mass-produced goods” proved to be a difficult model. Only the Bilbao museum, due to Frank Gehry’s spectacular building, has fulfilled the expectations so far, but this branch, too, is handicapped by its financial dependence on the New York home base.

It remains to be seen whether Guggenheim’s Abu Dhabi branch, its building also a project by Frank Gehry, will mark a successful entrance into a new art world or suffer from neo-colonial politics of the old art world, such as pretending to be, like the Louvre branch, a “universal museum”. The local audience is the crux in Abu Dhabi. But what is a local audience in the Gulf States beyond the ruling class? The global rhetoric hardly conceals the political and economic interests of the Western and Arab partners in planning a “Cultural District” (like the West Kowloon District in Hong Kong with its plans for a “Museum Plus”). Western star architects, as a rule, make such a site prestigious. Also, the international and local markets (galleries,

24

Shelly Errington, *The Death of Authentic Primitive Art and Other Tales of Progress* (Berkeley, California [etc.]: University of California Press, 1998). Cf. Sally Price, *Primitive Art in Civilized Places* (Chicago, Illinois: University of Chicago Press, 1989) and Raymond Corbey, *Tribal Art Traffic: A Chronicle of Taste, Trade and Desire in Colonial and Post-Colonial Times* (Amsterdam: Royal Tropical Institute, 2000).

25

Dilip Parameshwar Gaonkar, ed., *Alternative Modernities* (Durham, North Carolina [etc.]: Duke University Press, 2001); Prafulla C. Kar, Santosh Gupta, and Parul Dave Mukherji, eds., *Rethinking Modernity* (Delhi: Pencraft, 2003).

26

Karsten Schubert, *The Curator’s Egg: The Evolution of the Museum Concept from the French Revolution to the Present Day* (London: One-Off Press, 2002), 113 et seqq.

auction houses, and art fairs) are heavily involved in the two museum projects, since they strive to make their profit with instant museum acquisitions and steer the institutions to displays of sensational exhibits with a global or Arab link-up. Pace Gallery President, Marc Glinscher, states that the Abu Dhabi Art Fair “is associated with the Guggenheim. Their collection has to be in order if they are going to fill that new museum space.” And Paris-based dealer Kamel Mennour adds: “There may be no collectors in Abu Dhabi, but there are museums being built. And they all need art.”<sup>27</sup>

In the meantime, the Guggenheim has announced a new venture for expanding its collection. On April 12, 2012, the Guggenheim Foundation and the Swiss bank UBS contracted the project “Guggenheim UBS Map”, in which the bank supports the Guggenheim officials in building up a global art collection in their home base in New York. The new parts of the collection, each related to a specific area of the globe, will be shown in two venues abroad. But what is a “global art collection”? Is it at all possible to simply globalize a *posteriori* an existing museum collection without depriving it of its history and profile? Should such metropolitan museums not finally accept that they will remain what they have always been, institutions with a Western profile that, however, need redefining in the face of the global era?

## V

The question is not whether these museums qualify as models for “a global museum” anywhere in the world. The question is rather whether, in the global age, the art museum will survive at all as an institution with a single purpose and a common appearance. In many ways, the educational part will be its strong side, and this also applies to the need for a public forum where a community looks to art as a social practice rather than at art for exhibition. Western dominance, accompanied by corporate funding and missionary zeal, will not do where institutions search for a dynamic role and an individual profile. Museums today are called to inform a local audience but are in turn informed by their public. They need to familiarize new audiences with art. Contemporary art, which starts together with its audience, lacks the kind of history that art collections used to live from. It is often hailed as liberation from Modernism’s baggage and from art history, with its Western-based narrative. Avant-garde, originally a military term, acted as history’s spearhead in the guise of a certain *art history*, whose narrative, in turn, needed *art museums* to be displayed in.<sup>28</sup> Since there was no such art history in most parts of the world, however, its narrative cannot be appropriated as something ready-made.

27  
Marisa Mazria Katz,  
“Satellite Report,  
Focusing on the  
Middle East” *The Art  
Newspaper* XIX, no.  
216 (September 2010):  
57.

28  
Hans Belting, *Art  
History after  
Modernism* (Chicago,  
Illinois: University of  
Chicago Press, 2003).

The quest for new art worlds will provide museums with a new and critical role. The mapping drive which aims to develop interacting art worlds in geographic (but not in national) terms calls for places on the map that symbolize an art world in the making. But such places do not require the same kind of institutions. As a result, museums will vary from one place to the next and from one institution to another, as it is the participation of the local public that matters here. Art museums have inherited a notion of art (sometimes as colonial baggage) that, presently, does not divide one society from another but instead separates the economic elite from the majority in any given culture. The global art market is a distorting mirror, as it is a market for global players, whereas museums await a local audience, providing that they keep their independence as non-profit places with an educational mission.

Museums of contemporary art in many parts of the world are expected to represent an expanding global experience, using the mirror of local art. Their boom does not mean that they all subscribe to the Western idea of an art museum. Rather, they differ more in what they consider to be art than they do in their architecture, which is more easily transferable from one place to another. In this sense, museums increasingly turn into an ephemeral stage for living art, as it is mainly site-specific and installation art, which they often call for and even commission. A museum collection has always been based on the need of selection for the public's memory and excluded what did not deserve to be remembered. But there are no longer general (global) rules for what is to be excluded and included with regard to past and present art. By implication, even Western museums may suddenly look "local" when they continue to exclude what remains outside their tradition of collecting.

Art museums once used to be regarded as off territory, in the terminology of Michel Foucault, a *heterotopia*, i.e. a site different from real sites or, in other words, an enclave with a time and reality of its own in the midst of any given society.<sup>29</sup> In such a capacity, they served to transform the *presence* of the world into art and, thus, into a symbolic *representation* of that presence. But today, practices such as installation art create their own place (a place for the here and now) and in this way continue the heterotopic tradition. For museums, on the other hand, the term "contact zones", coined by James Clifford, gains more acclamation as a description of their role. Such zones not only offer contact with art but contact between one group and another in a given society. They represent, in Clifford's words, "the different agendas — aesthetic, historical, and political — that diverse *publics* bring to contexts of display".<sup>30</sup>

29

Michel Foucault, "Of Other Spaces," *Diacritics* 16, no.1 (1986): 22-27. Talk delivered in 1967, first published in French in 1984.

30

James Clifford, *Routes: Travel and Translation in the Twentieth Century* (Cambridge, Massachusetts [etc.]: Harvard University Press, 1997); James Clifford, *On the Edges of Anthropology (Interviews)* (Chicago, Illinois: Prickly Paradigm Press, 2003), 36 et seqq. (see interview with Alex Coles).

Clifford, to be sure, primarily spoke of ethnographic museums on the Pacific Northwest coast. But Masaaki Morishita appropriated the same term for art museums in Japan that, like the Tochigi Prefectural Museum of Fine Arts, “attempt to negotiate different cultures in the local artistic field”.<sup>31</sup> He describes the struggle of local artists to conquer the “empty museum” (to use his term) for their own work, as a kind of “Salon”. But in the end, the artists accepted the idea that a museum had to serve the community as a whole and thus be available as a public stage for themes of common interest. Similar controversies are also going on in other parts of the world where artists demand a museum for their own interests but eventually have to admit that a museum is not a rentable art space. Clifford, however, sees “the museum — that most stodgy and Eurocentric of institutions — as a dynamic, disseminating institution which could take a diversity of forms in particular local/global conjunctures”.

## VI

There is, as yet, no typology in sight for museums of contemporary art that represents their new diversity. But the international GAM conference (2007), which addressed “the global challenge of art museums”, discussed several museum types that specialized on a particular audience. A new type of university museum, focusing on the survival of a local culture in a global world, is a case in point. One example is the Jorge B. Vargas Museum (founded in 1978), a museum at the University of the Philippines, based on a private collection and acting as a forum to link the local tradition with reflections on the present state of the country. Furthermore, there is the Santral-istanbul (founded in 2007) in the precinct of a private university at the Golden Horn, or the Museo Universitario Arte Contemporáneo (founded in 2008) in Mexico City, which addresses the students of the National Autonomous University with an ambitious program of contemporary art and culture.<sup>32</sup> The educational role, in all such cases, is the condition for the museum’s activity and art practice, since the audience is a given.

Another case is the community-based museum, which also has a given audience or is even demanded by such an audience. This type has for instance been introduced, against much resistance, in São Paulo, where artist Emanuel Araújo runs the Museu Afro Brasil.<sup>33</sup> In the US, “minority groups will become the majority in a few decades, and art museums will have to diversify to survive”, as Martha Lufkin wrote in *The Art Newspaper* in 2009.<sup>34</sup> Arnold Lehman, director of the Brooklyn Museum, considered diversity “a critical issue”, and Graham Beal, director of the Detroit Institute of Art (DIA), stat-

31  
Masaaki Morishita, “Museums as Contact Zones,” in Belting and Buddensieg, *The Global Art World*, 316 et seqq.

32  
R. Samano Roo and K. Cordero Reiman in *ibid.*, 348 et seqq.

33  
Emanuel Araújo in *ibid.*, 180 et seqq.

34  
Martha Lufkin, “America is Changing, But Are Its Art Museums?” *The Art Newspaper* 204 (July/August 2009): 29.

ed that “the community wants to see itself distinctly defined within the museum” as a place for all people.<sup>35</sup> The future Museum for Afro-American Art will not be the last link in the chain of community museums on the Mall in Washington, DC.<sup>36</sup>

Collector-run museums reveal the invasion of the art markets into museum territory with the trade of “museum quality” works. Some museums in Asia are built like airports awaiting the arrival of international art. Collectors with a market competence (a kind of VIP in the art world) build their own museums and unduly gain prominence in places where there is no balance with a “free” art scene to speak of. Today, corporate-funded museums are on the move. Japanese department stores began to attract their clients with museums on their grounds in the 1980s. The Mori Art Museum in Tokyo (founded in 2003) is situated on the 53rd floor of a skyscraper close to shopping areas, restaurants, and a sky view. Thus, we are in a period of transition in which art museums are under strong pressure from the outside. This situation explains the contradiction that exists between boom and crisis (the boom of museum buildings and the crisis of their purpose).

Meanwhile, the Asian museum boom attracts institutional criticism from within. Kao Chien-hui from the Taipei Museum of Contemporary Art launched the show *Trading Place* as a “commentary exhibition” to address the vicissitudes of the art scene.<sup>37</sup> The artists in this show dealt with topics such as “stealing, exchanging, trading, re-presenting, and misappropriating” art, and mounted a “replica exhibition arena” in order to challenge the concept of art and mobilize the local audience. In China, the museum boom has just begun, but it is already a building boom while suffering from the controversy over the meaning of contemporary art for the Chinese audience. Abroad, contemporary Chinese artists rank prominently on the art markets. At home, the interest of the general public is still very low. Fan Di’an, head of the National Gallery in Beijing, held the collectors responsible, since collecting had become a “business rather than a service for the community”.<sup>38</sup> In Beijing’s District 798, the Ullens Center for Contemporary Art, owned by the Belgian collectors Guy and Myriam Ullens, still holds a key position, but the founders are retreating from their sponsoring.<sup>39</sup> The “World Art Museum”, a public institution at the China Millennium Monument in Beijing (founded in 2000), presents invited shows of Western art from Europe, such as nineteenth-century French painting. The newly emerging discipline of “world art history” in China reverts the perspective of “Museums of World Cultures” in the West.

In the Middle East, the museum situation is both spectacular and uncertain. There was no proper museum tradition in the Gulf

35  
Ibid.

36  
On this subject, see Paul de Bruyne and Pascal Gielen, eds., *Community Art: The politics of Trespassing* (Amsterdam: Valiz, 2011).

37  
“Trading Place,” MOCA Taipei, accessed July 2, 2012, <http://www.mocataipei.org.tw/english>.

38  
Chris Gill, “Beijing Plans Major Museum,” *The Art Newspaper* 196 (November 2008): 22.

39  
See “MOCA of the Month: May 2012,” accessed July 2, 2012, [http://www.globalartmuseum.de/site/moca\\_of\\_the\\_month/146](http://www.globalartmuseum.de/site/moca_of_the_month/146).

States when the foreign museum projects in Abu Dhabi started to make the global news. Among local museum foundations, the Art Museum in Sharjah, together with the related biennial, was the first project of its kind. The Mathaf Arab Museum of Modern Art in Qatar that collects works “from the Middle East, from North Africa all the way across to Iran”,<sup>40</sup> opened in 2010 in a former school building. The United Emirates, beyond their narrow confines, are attracting collections of art with a common religious and cultural background, which exemplifies a newly emerging art world. In 2008, Art Dubai, in conjunction with *The Financial Times*, organized a *Global Art Forum* with the topic “Branding of Museums”. Key issues were the education of the audience and the training of professional local curators. Some of the participating artists protested against the power of prestigious museum collections that would not serve their interests but instead would prevent the community from a first-hand encounter with living art. An artist from Beirut wondered whether such institutions might not be “a danger for artistic production” if they promoted “national or institutionalized artists” only.<sup>41</sup>

The African museum scene still suffers from the colonial past and lacks the backing of a trained audience. In postcolonial times, African artists were early on the global art map but they encountered a drawback due to continuing colonial interference and the missing infrastructure of art institutions. However, this situation is slowly changing. In 2010, an exhibition in Brussels with the title *GEO-graphics: A map of ART practices in AFRICA, past and present* listed a number of new “art centers” across the continent. They are increasingly supported by private collectors and public funds.<sup>42</sup> The role of traditional art (with the colonial bias of its ethnographic history), however, remains a problem and, in addition, the powerful diaspora scene, with its overseas institutions, has no such equivalent in Africa.

## VII

The concept of a single art world reached a turning point at the time Arthur S. Danto, who had once coined the term, wrote an essay for the Venice Biennale of 1993. Curator Achille Bonito Oliva had asked him to comment on the Biennale’s topic, “compass points of art” (*punti dell’arte*), which was meant to guide people through the unity of the art world, against the diversity displayed in the same Biennale’s national pavilions. This was still the old idea, but it was already seriously challenged when Danto received an invitation to contribute to the first Johannesburg Biennale, whose curators had taken the decision to “put that city on the map (...) of art”. The author realized that the new concept stood against the Venetian one,

40  
Wassan Al-Khudhairi, in *Global Art Forum 2* — Transcripts (Dubai: Art Dubai, 2008), 257.

41  
Lamia Joreige, in *Global Art Forum 2* — Transcripts (Dubai: Art Dubai, 2008), 263.

42  
The exhibition was organized by BOZAR, Brussels, in the summer and fall of 2010.



but he could not figure out what the difference would be in the end. Surely, the artists in South Africa had claimed “a place on the map of international art. That is, because that map is of a single world, the internation of art.” But what would the new map be like? Danto was aware that “when Africanism strengthens, Internationalism will belong more and more to the past.” He wondered whether “national centers of national art” would take its place.<sup>43</sup>

But the days of the national idea in promoting art were already passing. In fact, Australia had taken a transnational turn when the Queensland Art Gallery in Brisbane, with strong government support, launched a triennial in the same year, 1993, when the former West still seemed to be unchallenged in Venice. The idea was to create the region of “Asia-Pacific art”, whose twelve countries plus Hong Kong had discovered their cultural affinities via contemporary art. Caroline Turner, as curator, insisted on the priority of internal relations that connected the new region (“intra regionalism”), as opposed to the external view of Australia’s position on the periphery of art (“extraregionalism”). “While there have been exhibitions of South-East Asian Art and East Asian Art within Asia”, this exhibition was to “focus on the Asia-Pacific region” for the first time.<sup>44</sup> Australia had political reasons for reconsidering “its place in the world” by embracing the visual cultures of Asia.<sup>45</sup> Interestingly enough, it was an art museum, the Queensland Art Gallery, which took the lead in the creation of a new “art region.”

Today, Australia can also be considered an “art world” on its own. This is evident from the museum scene, whose distinct features are not to be found elsewhere. Gerard Vaughan has described the emergence of what he calls “the cross-cultural museum” in the sense that Asian and especially Aboriginal art has become an integral part of both the collection and the exhibition policy of public art museums: “When Sydney’s new Museum of Contemporary Art was constituted in 1989 (the Gallery opened to the public in 1991), it [...] developed a strong curatorial policy to support [...] contemporary Indigenous art” with an emphasis on “city-based Indigenous artists”.<sup>46</sup> The Australian National Gallery in Canberra (renamed the National Gallery of Australia in 1993) also considers “Indigenous art (...) as part of the contemporary Australian main stream”. In the first Asia Pacific Triennial, the curators invited three Aboriginal women artists among the nine participants from Australia and drew a map of Australia on which the places of Aboriginal art production were marked. Such museum strategies demonstrate Australia’s claims to be recognized as an independent “art world”.

The art museum is closely connected with the rise of competing “art worlds”, whose mapping indicates the tendency to break the

43

Arthur C. Danto, “Mapping the Art World,” in *Africanus: Johannesburg Biennale, 28 February-30 April 1995* (Johannesburg: Transitional Metropolitan Council, 1995), 24.

44

Caroline Turner, “Introduction: From Extraregionalism to Intra regionalism,” in *The First Asia-Pacific Triennial of Contemporary Art* (South Brisbane: Queensland Art Gallery, 1993), 8.

45

Gerard Vaughan, “The Cross-Cultural Art Museum in Australia,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Australian Art*, Jaynie Anderson, ed., (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 288.

46

*Ibid.*, 271.

global panorama down into smaller units with a geographical or cultural profile of their own. The same decentralization undermines the very concept of art, whose universal claims are contested today. Also in this respect, museums are called upon to serve the politics of representation in the name of a local community or the society at large. Traditionally, the significance of museums was based on their role to relate a master narrative that was shared by its audience. This narrative no longer allows for the universal claims of modern times. There exist today competing histories (religious, ethnic, or postcolonial) that deconstruct an exclusive significance of "Art". Nevertheless, museums still qualify as outposts of what is considered to be art. Today, they have been "transformed from a temple of beauty into a kind of cultural fair".<sup>47</sup> As such, they are expected to offer more immediate contact with people than the art museum has traditionally provided.

47

Danto, Brillo Box, 11.









# Freedom from Everything: Freelancers and Mercenaries

Hito Steyerl

In 1990, George Michael made a music video to his song *Freedom '90*. This was the time when everybody was deliriously singing along with Beethoven's *Ode to Joy* or the Scorpions' *Wind of Change*, celebrating what people thought was the final victory of liberty and democracy after the fall of the Berlin Wall. Most abysmal of all these sing-along songs was David Hasselhoff's rendition of *Looking for Freedom*, delivered live on top of the Berlin Wall and describing the trials and tribulations of a rich man's son trying to make his own fortune. But what George Michael did was something entirely different. In Michael's song, freedom is not some liberal nirvana of opportunity; instead, "[...] it looks like the road to heaven / But it feels like the road to hell."<sup>1</sup>

1

Lyrics of George Michael's *Freedom '90*:

I won't let you down  
I will not give you up  
Gotta have some faith in the sound  
It's the one good thing that I've got  
I won't let you down  
So please don't give me up  
Because I would really, really love to stick around

Heaven knows I was just a young boy  
Didn't know what I wanted to be  
I was every little hungry schoolgirls pride and joy  
And I guess it was enough for me  
To win the race? a prettier face!  
Brand new clothes and a big fat place  
On your rock and roll TV  
But today the way I play the game is not the same  
No way  
Think I'm gonna get me some happy

I think there's something you should know  
I think it's time I told you so  
There's something deep inside of me  
There's someone else I've got to be  
Take back your picture in a frame  
Take back your singing in the rain

I just hope you understand  
Sometimes the clothes do not make the man

[Chorus]

All we have to do now  
Is take these lies and make them true somehow  
All we have to see  
Is that I don't belong to you  
And you don't belong to me yeah yeah  
Freedom!  
I won't let you down  
Freedom  
I will not give you up  
Freedom  
Have some faith in the sound  
You've gotta give for what you take  
Freedom!  
I won't let you down  
Freedom  
So please don't give me up  
Freedom

So what sort of freedom is George Michael's song describing? It is not the classic liberal freedom defined by the ability to do, or say, or believe something, but a negative kind of freedom. It is characterized by absence, the lack of property and equality in exchange, the absence even of the author and the destruction of all props suggesting his public persona. And this is why the song feels much more contemporary than all the odes to liberty from a bygone age — the age of the end of history. It describes a very contemporary state of freedom: the freedom from everything.

Let me explain. What we are used to regard as freedom is mainly a positive freedom, the freedom to do or have something.<sup>2</sup> However, many positive freedoms — the freedom of speech, the pursuit of happiness and opportunity, or the freedom of worship — have been marked as culturally specific, or, more precisely, Western. That is, they are not supposed to pertain to everybody, but only to specifically ethnically demarcated groups. I am sure that many other culturally specific freedoms are claimed for and by non-Western people, too. Arguing for or against these types of freedom cannot happen outside the invisible framework established by more than a decade of a culturalized rhetorics of war.

But now the situation is shifting. Especially in the current economic and political crisis, the downside of liberal ideas of freedom — namely the freedom of corporations from any form of control as well as the freedom to relentlessly pursue one's own interest at the expense of everyone else's — have become blatantly apparent as the only universal freedoms that are effective today: the freedom from social bonds; the freedom from solidarity; the freedom from certainty or predictability; the freedom from employment or labor; the freedom from culture, public transport, education, or anything public in general.

These are the only freedoms that can be found around the globe nowadays. They do not apply equally to everybody, but in relation to our economic and political situation. They are negative freedoms, and they apply across what has been carefully constructed and exaggerated as cultural "alterity".

The freedom from social security; the freedom from the rule of law; the freedom from the means of making a livelihood; the freedom from accountability and sustainability; the freedom from free education, healthcare, pensions, and public culture; and the freedom from standards of public responsibility — these are the universal freedoms experienced today around the world. As Janis Joplin sang: "Freedom's just another word for nothing left to lose." And this freedom is what people in many places are sharing today. Contemporary freedom is not primarily the enjoyment of civil liberties as a traditional liberal view has it, but rather, like the freedom of free fall,

2

On the distinction between positive and negative freedom, see Isaiah Berlin, "Two Concepts of Liberty," in *Liberty* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, [1958] 2002), 166-217. It should be mentioned that there is also a tradition of debate around negative freedom proposed with and after Charles Taylor, in which the term is defined differently than in this essay.

experienced by many who are thrown into incertitude and an unpredictable future. At this point in time, these negative freedoms are also the freedoms that helped propel very diverse protest movements around the world — movements that have no positive focal point or clearly articulated demands, because they express the conditions of negative freedom, of the loss of the common as such.

### NEGATIVE FREEDOM AS COMMON GROUND

Now the good news: There is nothing wrong with this condition, except of course that it is devastating for all those affected. But it also reshapes oppositions in a very welcome way. It takes discussions away from the freedom to do, buy, say, or wear this or that — discussions that usually end up constructing an Other, who will not allow you to buy, say, or wear, or not wear the thing in question: the Muslim fundamentalist, the communist atheist, the feminist traitor to the nation or culture — whoever fits the bill. Insisting on speaking about negative freedoms opens up the possibility to claim more negative freedoms and to explore new forms of relationships between people who have more or less become fair game in a world of free trade and its vast deregulation.

Let me explore one particularly pertinent aspect of the condition of negative freedom nowadays, the condition of the freelancer. What is a freelancer? Let's look at a very simple definition:

1. A person who sells services to employers without a long-term commitment to any of them.
2. An uncommitted independent, as in politics or social life.
3. A medieval mercenary.

A freelancer is a free lance, or a mercenary:

The word's etymology derives from the Medieval term for a mercenary soldier, a "free lance", i.e. a soldier who is not attached to any particular master or government and can be hired for the task at hand. The term was first used by Sir Walter Scott (1771—1832) in *Ivanhoe* to describe a "medieval mercenary warrior" or "free-lance" (indicating that the lance is not sworn to any lord's services, not that the lance is available free of charge). It changed to a figurative noun around the 1860s and was recognized as a verb in 1903 by authorities in etymology such as the Oxford English Dictionary. Only in modern times has the term morphed from a noun (a freelance) into an adjective (a freelance journalist), a verb (a journalist who freelances) and an adverb (she worked freelance), as well as into the noun "freelancer".<sup>3</sup>

3  
 "Freelancer,"  
 last modified on  
 March 18, 2003.  
<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Freelancer>.

Today, the lance for hire takes on many different forms. From stone crushers, shovels, baby bottles, and machine guns to any form of digital hardware. But the conditions of employment have not changed as dramatically as the variety of the lance. Or rather: perhaps they did change in the meantime. As day laborers were drafted into huge industrial assemblages of conveyor belts and time-regimented factories, they turned into workers. But now it seems that in many instances the factory is falling apart again into autonomous and subcontracted micro-units, producing conditions that are not far from indentured and day labor. And this widespread (though by no means universal) reversal to historical forms of feudal labor possibly just means that, indeed, we are living in neo-feudal times.<sup>4</sup>

In the history of Japanese cinema, there is a long tradition of portraying the figure of the itinerant freelancer. This character is called Ronin, a wandering samurai, who knows no permanent master and has lost the privileges of this status in circumstances of Hobbesian warfare of all against all. The only thing he has left are his fighting skills, which he rents out. He is a lumpensamurai, down-sized, degraded, but with key skills nevertheless. The classical itinerant-freelancer film is Kurosawa Akira's movie *Yojimbo*, made in 1961, which has also become popular in the West because it has been adapted in the form of a so-called Spaghetti Western by Italian director Sergio Leone. *A Fistful of Dollars* (1964) launched both Clint Eastwood and the super wide super close-up, usually of sweaty males staring each other down before decisive shoot-outs. But the original Japanese version is much more interesting. In its opening sequence, we are faced with a surprisingly contemporary situation. While the freelancer walks through windswept and barren land, he approaches a village and meets people in different degrees of anguish and destitution. The closing shot of the introduction is of a dog that strolls past with a human hand in his muzzle.

In the film, the country is in a transition from a production-based economy to a consumption- and speculation-based one. The village is ruled by two rival warlord-capitalists. People are giving up their manufacturing businesses to become brokers and agents. In the meantime, textile production — a profession deeply associated with the creation and development of capitalism — is being outsourced as domestic labor for housewives. Hookers abound, as well as security personnel to which they are catering. Sex and security are valuable commodities, just like coffins, which, apart from textile production, seem to be the main industry in town. In this situation, the freelancer appears on the scene. He manages to set the warlords against each other and liberates the villagers.

4

In an abstract sense, the multifaceted political geography of the feudal order resembles today's emerging overlapping jurisdictions of national states, supranational institutions, and novel private global regimes. This is, indeed, one of the prevalent interpretations of globalization studies.

## THE MERCENARY

While the story of the Ronin is a fitting allegory for the conditions of contemporary freelancers, the mercenary is not just a historical or allegorical figure, but a very contemporary one. Indeed, we are living in an age in which mercenary forces experience a surprising comeback, especially during the recent Iraq War, which — as we already may have forgotten — started out as “Operation Iraqi Freedom”. The question whether US contractors of private security companies could be called “mercenaries” according to international law was hotly debated during the Iraq War and the ensuing occupation. While US military contractors do not perhaps fulfill all the criteria to be called mercenaries according to the Geneva Convention, the existence of about 20,000 such individuals during occupation highlights an increasing privatization of warfare and an increasing lack of state control over the action of these individuals. This development, as many political scientists have noted, is a symptom of an overall weakening of the structure of the nation-state. The privatization of warfare is a sign of a loss of control over military power by nation-states and undermines accountability and the rule of law. It calls into question the state monopoly on violence and undermines state sovereignty, replacing it with what has been called a “subcontracted sovereignty”.

We thus have two figures that gain importance in the scenario of negative freedoms and complement each other: the freelancer in an occupational sense and the mercenary or private security contractor in the military occupational sense. Both freelancers and mercenaries increasingly lose allegiance to traditional forms of political organization, such as nation-states. Nation-states are not providing any dependable framework for sustaining livelihoods for many. Both freelancers and mercenaries engage in free-floating loyalties, which are changeable and subject to economic and military negotiation. Thus, the concept of democratic political representation also becomes an empty promise, since traditional political institutions grant them only negative freedoms: the freedom from everything, the freedom to be outlaws, or, rather, to be fair game in a game that is not fair — fair game of the market, fair game of the forces of deregulation of states, and, in the last instance, also of the deregulation of liberal democracy itself.

Arguably, both freelancers and mercenaries are related to the rise of what Saskia Sassen calls *The Global City*.<sup>5</sup> This concept has been beautifully summarized in a recent lecture by Thomas Elsaesser. He describes global cities as “[...] ‘world cities’ that, due to a number of distinct factors, have become important nodes in the global

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Saskia Sassen,  
*The Global City: New  
York, London, Tokyo*,  
2nd edition  
(Princeton, New  
Jersey [etc.]:  
Princeton University  
Press, 2001).



economic system. The idea of the Global City therefore implies thinking of the world in terms of networks that come together at certain points, in cities whose reach and reference go beyond a single nation, thus suggesting transnationality or post-nationality.” They express a new geography of power, intrinsically linked to economic globalization and its many consequences, which substantially transform the role of the nation-state and its political institutions such as representative democracy. This means that traditional modes of democratic representation are deeply in crisis. Not because of the interference of some culturally alien Other, but because political representation itself has been both undermining and exaggerating the political power of the nation-state by relinquishing sovereignty on the one hand and inflating it through emergency legislation, restriction of the freedom of movement, and digitized surveillance on the other. The liberal idea of representative democracy has been deeply corrupted by the unrestrained forces of economic liberalism and nationalism alike.

At this point, a new negative freedom emerges: the freedom not to be represented by traditional institutions, which decline any responsibility for you but still try to control and micromanage your lives as closely as possible, potentially by using PMCs or other private security companies. So what is the freedom to be represented differently? How can we express a condition of complete freedom from anything, from attachment, subjectivity, property, loyalty, social bonds, and even oneself as a subject? And how could we even express it politically? In my lecture for the *Facing Forward* series in Amsterdam, I showed a picture of protesters wearing Guy Fawkes masks. This mask depicts a very famous mercenary. The likeness of this mercenary has multiplied within recent protests. Its main purpose for protesters is to remain anonymous. In 2008, the Fawkes mask was appropriated by the hacker group Anonymous as its public face for a protest against Scientology. And, from then on, the image spread as a viral visual symbol of contemporary dissent. But it is virtually unknown that this is an appropriation of the face of a mercenary. Guy Fawkes was not only the person who got executed because he wanted to blow up the English parliament, but he was also a religious mercenary, fighting for the cause of Catholicism all over the European continent. While his historical persona is more than dubious and frankly unappealing, the re-appropriation of his abstracted likeness by the hacker group Anonymous shows an interesting if certainly unconscious reinterpretation of the role of the mercenary.

But this mercenary — the new mercenary that is free from everything — is no longer a subject, but an object: a mask. It is a multiple, a commercial object, licensed by a big corporation and pirated accordingly. The mask first appeared in the film *V for Ven-*

*detta* (James McTeigue, 2005), telling the story of a masked rebel named V, who fights a fascist future British government. This explains why it is licensed by Time Warner, which released *V for Vendetta*. As a consequence, anti-big-corporation protesters buying official versions of the masks are in fact helping enrich the very economic players that are the target of their demonstrations. But this also triggers counteractions: “One London protester said his brethren are trying to counter Warner Bros.’<sup>6</sup> control of the imagery. He claims that Anonymous UK has imported 1,000 copies from China, and the distribution goes ‘straight into the pockets of the Anonymous beer fund rather than the Warner Brothers.’” This overdetermined object represents the freedom not to be represented like this. A disputed object of copyright provides generic identities for people who feel they need not only anonymity to be represented, but can only be represented in the form of objects and commodities because, as freelancers, as fair game and even as mercenaries, this is what they are: free-floating commodities.

If one has a look at other uses of masks or artificial personas, the trope of the mercenary can even be taken further. The Russian punk band Pussy Riot, for instance, used neon-colored balaclavas in order to conceal their faces in highly publicized appearances on the Red Square in Moscow, where they told President Putin in unmistakable terms to go packing. In addition to its apparent use value in (at least temporarily) concealing faces, it also references one of the most famous icons of good-humored militancy of past decades: the pipe-puffing figure of Subcomandante Marcos, the unofficial spokesperson for the EZLN, also known as the Zapatista movement.

And this also shows us how to flip the figure of the mercenary into the figure of the guerilla. Indeed, both are linked historically quite intimately. During the second half of the twentieth century, mercenaries were unleashed on insurgent groups of all different sorts, particularly during conflicts in postcolonial Africa. But paramilitary “advisors” were also deployed against guerilla movements in Latin America during the dirty proxy wars to maintain US hegemony in the region. In some sense, guerillas and mercenaries share similar spaces, except for the fact that guerillas usually do not get paid (obviously) for their efforts. Of course, it is not possible to even remotely try to characterize all guerilla movements along these lines: they are much too different. While in many cases, they do not differ structurally from the mercenaries and paramilitaries deployed against them, in some cases they reorganize this paradigm and reverse it by taking up negative freedom and assuming it. If mercenaries and freelancers are figures of contemporary economic reality, they are always free to break free from their employers and reorgan-

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Tamara Lush and Verena Dobnik, “‘Vendetta’ mask becomes symbol of Occupy protests,” *Associated Press* | AP, November 4, 2011.

ize as guerillas, or to put it much more humbly, as the gang of Ronin portrayed in Kurosawa's master piece *Seven Samurai* (1954). Seven freelancers team up to protect a village from bandits. In situations of complete negative freedom, even this is possible.

## CONCLUSION

And now we can come back to George Michael's video for a final twist — all these elements are already expressed in his video, which may have looked silly at the time and does so even now in its unabashed and completely over-the-top veneration of heteronormative celebrities. George Michael never appears in the video but had himself represented by supercommodities and supermodels, who lip-synched his song as if they were human mikes. All the insignia of his stage persona until then — the leather jacket, the jukebox, the guitar — are blasted in explosions as if they were the British parliament blown apart. The set looks like a foreclosed house, in which even the furniture has been pawned and nothing remains but a sound system. There is nothing left. No subject, no possession, no identity, no brand, voice, or face is to be distinguished. It is just masks, alienation, commodification, anonymity — freedom from (almost) everything. Freedom looks like the road to heaven — but it feels like the road to hell, and it creates the necessity to change, to refuse to be this subject that is always already framed, named, monitored, and fair game.

So here is the final good news: Only once you accept that there is no way back into the David Hasselhoff paradigm of freedom, with its glorification of self-entrepreneurship and delusions of opportunity, does the new freedom open up. It may be terrifying like a new dawn on the site of hardship and catastrophe — but it does not exclude solidarity. It says clearly: "Freedom: I won't let you down. Freedom: I will not give you up. You got to give what you take." Even in the dystopia of negative freedom, in which we are atomized, no one belongs to anybody (except banks) and not even to oneself. Not even in this situation will I give you up. Nor will I let you down. Have some faith in the sound. It's the only good thing we got.

Just like Kurosawa's freelancers and mercenaries, who turn around to form bonds of mutual support in situations of Hobbesian warfare, feudalism, and warlordism, there is something what we are free to do, when we are free of everything. The new freedom: you've got to give for what you take.

# Duchamp, or Freedom: A Comedy

Paul Chan<sup>1</sup>

In 1917, Marcel Duchamp became involved with the newly formed Society of Independent Artists. A coalition that organized the famous 1913 Armory show in New York had disbanded after that exhibition ended. And this new group wanted to mount something like the Armory, but with a few differences. First, it would be bigger, because second, it would be more democratic. By taking on the policy of “no jury, no prizes”, any artist could join the society and be entitled to show two works in the exhibition, as long as he or she paid six dollars in membership fees.

This was not a new idea. The society consciously modeled the policy after the *Salon des Indépendants*, an annual exhibition in Paris. But it was new in America, where group shows routinely used juries and prizes to evangelize certain notions and standards of artistic quality. What is interesting is how promoting quality depends a great deal on its opposite: quantity. The surest way to advance what one means by artistic excellence is to show many examples of it. In trying to defend against the influences of Cubism and other European movements, groups like the National Academy of Design mounted shows with works that all more or less exemplified a kind of romantic realism — painting after painting of idyllic scenes depicting cattle or ships or boys with rifles or bored but pleasant-looking young women. It was as if quantity is how quality is expressed.

Allowing anyone to exhibit so long as the dues were paid was not the only way the Independents tried to make the show more novel and democratic. As head of the hanging committee, Duchamp came up with the idea of installing the works in alphabetical order, based on the artist’s last name. And the show would start with the letter R, because that was the letter that had been drawn out of a hat. When the exhibition opened on April 10, 1917, viewers were treated to a cacophony. Fauvist landscapes hung next to military photographs; Brancusi showed alongside paintings of cats. It was the biggest art exhibition that had ever been mounted in America, with 2,215 works by more than 1,200 artists.

But history remembers only one work from this show, and it wasn’t even exhibited because it was the only piece rejected from

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A version of this essay appears in *Paul Chan: Selected Writings 2000-2014*, published by Schaulager and Badlands Unlimited on the occasion of his exhibition at Schaulager, April-September 2014.

this experiment in artistic democracy. It is of course *Fountain*, a readymade by Duchamp. The story is that two days before the opening, an anonymous package containing an envelope arrived at the venue. Inside the envelope, an artist named R. Mutt submitted his \$6 membership fee and the title of his artwork on a piece of paper. Inside the package was an upside-down porcelain urinal with the artist's signature painted in large black letters on the lower left rim. A debate erupted between the board of directors—which included Duchamp. Some found the work indecent and refused to show it. Walter Arnesberg, who was not only Duchamp's friend but also accompanied him to buy the urinal at a plumbing supply store, spoke in favor of showing it. He is reported to have said, "A lovely form has been revealed, freed from its functional purpose, therefore a man has clearly an aesthetic contribution." *Fountain*, incidentally, was not the only fountain submitted. Elizabeth Pendleton's *Drinking Fountain For Birds* was the other, and no one objected to showing that. *Fountain*, on the other hand, met a more fortuitous fate. It was rejected by a close vote just hours before the private opening on April 9. Duchamp and Arnesberg immediately resigned from the board in protest.

In 2011 at the Museum of Modern Art in New York, a protest organized mostly by artists in solidarity with the Occupy Wall Street movement used a Diego Rivera exhibition as the grounds for a public conversation about, among other things, social and economic liberation. It is hard to imagine the same thing happening in front of an artwork like *Fountain*. There are perhaps many good reasons for this. It's hard to rally around a urinal, for instance. There is nothing particularly political about it, either. And aesthetically speaking, it's not much to look at. But I suspect the main reason is that *Fountain* doesn't fundamentally do what people want art to do, which is to inspire people to think or feel something about themselves, or others, or an element of our experience of the world. I imagine all *Fountain* inspires is perhaps the nagging suspicion that it is not art at all, but a joke.

The story behind the work all but confirms this suspicion. But this only makes it more pertinent. For what we understand about freedom we glean from art. But how we come to be free is determined by our relationship with—and against—authority. Duchamp was already part of an effort to subvert the traditional ways art was legitimated, by making the Independents show open to anyone willing to pay \$6. He sidestepped curatorial authority by hanging works in alphabetical order. But then he went on to undermine his own interests and authority by submitting *Fountain*, which caused enough of an uproar to subvert the democratic claims of the entire enter-

prise, which he supported and helped organized. With *Fountain*, and perhaps even the rest of Duchamp's creative life, he was arguably in greatest command when he lived and worked against the expectations of authority: in art and its history, in the increasing dominance of commercial interests in artistic life, and even the authority from within oneself.

But no amount of historical exegesis or critical analysis can mitigate the degree to which Duchamp's most known works tend to feel like gags. The moustache. The peephole. His oeuvre looks unneringly like the back stock of a gift shop that specializes in whoopee cushions and the like. So it is surprising and even dismaying to those who believe art is suppose to be more than a joke that his art should cast such a long shadow over the history of art, and perhaps even culture in general. Knowing Thomas Mann once said art is a higher form of prank does not help. Nor will it really illuminate the situation by admitting to you, as a poet once did to me, that art is "whatever you can get away with". Because as true as this may (just ask an artist some time), museums do not bill themselves as places to see the most important gags ever made. They are instead where people go to experience what is supposed to be the best and most beautiful forms of expression other people have found the time and energy to create. The case can be made that art is found in many places today. And that works from popular culture can enrich us as much as what hangs in museums. This was Walter Benjamin's hope. But I think the most that popular culture can aspire to today is to distract us from the airless, rough ride that is social reality: it's what we watch and listen to on planes. Looking at and thinking about art can yield a kind of experience different from what we pay attention to in order to not feel so trapped on that endless flight. The difference comes from how art is valued.

The amount of labor it takes to make art does not add up to its worth. A work doesn't get better simply by being worked on more: that usually makes it worse. And neither is art prized for its usefulness, like a tool, although it can be used. Forms of expression that end up being art hold value differently from objects of utility, although the way that value is created is the same. In a sense, value is nothing other than what it is socially. A thing's value is not inherent in the thing itself but is determined by the connections and ties that are bound up in it. In other words, value is transfigured relations. Value is worth, as measured by the historical, material, and social relations that bind a thing into conception and hold it dear. So art — or anything else for that matter — becomes valuable insofar as it manifests those relations as apparently objective properties that express the import of those relations with the weight of material re-

ality. Picture, for a moment, something that is valuable to you, something that you hold dear. Now ask yourself whether it is the money it is worth or the material it is made of that makes it valuable. Or whether it is how someone you care about or want to remember, or a particular history or place you call your own, has been absorbed somehow into the form of the thing you have in mind, so that it radiates the color and feel of those ties out of the very properties that make it sensuous and real. Form is sedimented social content. And expression is the power of relations made eloquent.

Artists experience art by making it. Everybody else does so by flipping through magazines and scrolling web pages. Or they visit institutions like museums or kunsthallen. Broadly speaking, an institution is the form that authority takes to assert what is worthy of being a common good. Authority can take on many forms, and not all of them have buildings and paperwork. It appears whenever a public empowers a person or a group to perform on the social stage as *if* they represented a general will. An authority — be it an institution, a leader, or even an informal congregation — turns a crowd into a chorus.

Museums are, for example, places where people come together to see what the power of an authority has entrusted as publicly worth seeing. An important element of this experience is how works that are exhibited take on the value of that institution as a semblance of the works' own worth. Value being essentially social, what becomes valuable in art when it is collected and exhibited is the fusing of notions of beauty, use, and significance with the ruling and ennobling presence of that institution. Art, in other words, takes on the authority of an institution's power to preserve and maintain the relations that best represent art as a common good. And in the process, this particular relation becomes the dominant measure of its value, to the diminishment of all others. There are many pleasures to be found at museums. Among them is the opportunity to experience things that are beautiful and perhaps even profound. It may be the case that whatever it is that we find beautiful is objectively so. That is to say, the lines, shapes, and forms that constitute the work create in us feelings and thoughts that heighten our sense of well-being. On the other hand, what I want to suggest is that beauty is agreeable because it helps us to see what is worth relating to. So what is most pleasing about valuing art as an object of beauty may be that it serves to bind us in a more harmonious relationship to authority.

The Greeks understood beauty as the expression of harmony with a divine order that ruled one from above and from within. Qualities like symmetry, proportion, and balance were prized because they represented dispositions that best suited the order of things. What

is beautiful has a long history with who rightfully rules. Art in the West after the Greeks existed in general as cultic objects for institutional religions. Forms of expression were valued as sensuous representations of the power of God and the command of the church. Works of art were venerated for their expressive powers to stir feelings within believers that pulled them in line with the dictates of heavenly reign. Today, even if God no longer runs our daily affairs, art still seems to inspire and motivate from above, perhaps because it tends to inhabit the same plane of existence as the people who do run us today, like bankers and oligarchs. If authority rules by law, then beauty is the appeal to order by way of the senses. Works considered beautiful often evoke a feeling of agreeableness that reflects a moral sentiment, as if beauty has something to teach us about being good. Law is the mediating concept here. Insofar as morality can be defined as inner law, beauty is morality felt as a pleasure rather than as a duty.

This is why beauty is interested in us as much as we are attracted by it. It wants to show us what is good about being right in the world, even if it means not being right with ourselves. The value of appreciating beautiful art therefore feels meaningful because it bears a resemblance to the sense of fulfillment that comes from abiding by the laws of an authority entrusted to represent the power of a public. One recognizes in authority the longing to belong to a greater self. A word comes to mind: *Nomos*. It means law in Greek. But it also means song. So in this ancient word, the power of forms of expression to shape feelings is in direct relation with the rules that an authority wields to organize and command.

Artists, I think, understand this relationship instinctively. Law is technique. And order is what one makes from the mess of it all. John Cage and Merce Cunningham are examples of artists who followed a notion of law as an external system of rule. Using the *I Ching* and other writings as guides for composition, they created works that belonged as much to chance as they did to the mind and hand. Chance is the operation that expresses the essence of the universe as the law of perpetual change. Using chance to generate randomness in art was their way of abiding by an aesthetic authority they believed was greater than any single artist. Cage and Cunningham — and Duchamp to a certain degree — used chance to play with, and slacken the pull from, another law they felt artists were all too willing to follow, but one that is fundamental to how art is made: self-expression. In other words, law as inner tendency. Think the law of nature, as opposed to a law against littering. By following their intuitions wherever they may lead, artists grant themselves the right of artistic freedom to create whatever they want. And the more rigorously they



follow their own law to make work, the more free and insistent the work becomes. In art, autonomy is authority.

But just because art is made freely does not mean it remains free. Expressions that are truly expressive are momentary by nature. Paul Valéry claimed that fireworks are prototypical of art in general. They exist only for the moment, but the impression they make on the minds of those who experience them can be as lasting as anything made out of stone or steel. Earlier I mentioned that what is understood by freedom can be gleaned from art. And what I mean is that in being an artist making and showing work, I learned that freedom is but a moment, or a stage, in a process. The needs and wants that shape how a work is made do not determine how it is valued in culture. Art acquires a value different from what the artist had intended by virtue of the new web of relations that enters into the work as it appears in the public realm.

Being in public is decisive. Art finds its true place there: at the center of debate and in the midst of commercial, intellectual, and political exchange. I'm sure there are artists who create solely for their own pleasure and feel no need to show their work to anyone else. I personally don't know any. The public is where an artist's work is more than what it is and becomes what it wants to be: a common currency for what is good. And the institution that brings the work to the public becomes invested with the value the public finds in the work as a semblance of its own authority. In other words, the quality of freedom that defines art reemerges — in the process of it entering the public realm — as the reason that gives authority purpose, as if freedom depends on authority to secure and maintain a place for it in social life. If freedom is but a stage in a process, it can now be said what that process ultimately develops into: the justification of authority as a public good.

This process is apparent in any self-respecting liberal democracy, where protecting certain freedoms for individuals, however they may be defined, forms the basis of why a public needs authority in the first place. But it is also evident on the other end of the political spectrum, where authority is most ardently desired—namely, right-wing populist parties and movements. They literally name themselves after “freedom” to symbolize what they offer to a public ready to join them: a platform for a will to power. The Freedom Party of Austria. Your own Party of Freedom. In the US, the biggest corporate contributor to the Tea Party movement comes from a group with an appropriately Protestant take on the matter: FreedomWorks. But nothing illustrates the degree to which freedom empowers authority more than what happened in 2011 in Egypt, where the first democratically held election for parliament took place after the Arab

Spring swept Mubarak away. The results? Two groups of conservative Islamists won 70 percent of the seats. And the coalition formed by the young leaders of the revolt who actually organized and toppled the old regime? The very people who arguably freed Egypt? Less than 3 percent.

Duchamp had a low opinion of freedom. In a 1963 article in the magazine *Show*, Duchamp said,

All artists since Courbet have been beasts. All artists should be in institutions for exaggerated egos. Courbet was the first to say, “take my art or leave it. I am free.” That was in 1860. Since then, every artist has felt he had to be freer than the last. The pointillists felt they had to be freer than the Impressionists, and the Cubists freer still, and the Futurists, and the Dadaists, and so on and so on. Freer and freer and freer—they call it freedom. Drunks are put in jail. Why should artists’ egos be allowed to overflow and poison the atmosphere? Can’t you just smell the stench in the air?

Duchamp, it seems to me, is being serious insofar as he is joking. The year 1963 was also the date that his first retrospective opened, at the Pasadena Art Museum. He was 76. In the 1960s, there was renewed interest in his work. He began keeping company with younger artists like Jasper Johns and Robert Rauschenberg and was becoming the icon he never set out to be. Retrospectives are complicated affairs for artists, because it’s never clear whether they are meant as a celebration or a funeral. Duchamp wore his fame lightly and gracefully, but he rarely missed an occasion to denigrate art, especially as his own work was being venerated. It was during this period that he said to William Seitz, a Museum of Modern Art curator, that unfortunately, as far as he could tell, art does not last long and has a relatively short lifespan. About twenty to thirty years, he guessed.

One of Duchamp’s most well-known concepts is the “delay”. He used it to describe his piece commonly referred to as *The Large Glass*. He wrote, “use ‘delay’ instead of picture or painting. ... It’s merely a way of succeeding in longer thinking that the thing in question is a picture, to make a delay of it in the most general way possible.” The key phrase here is “the most general way possible”. For what Duchamp embodies for me is the idea that the experience of freedom is truly free only when it is delayed from becoming what it is socially compelled to be: an expression of authority. The patently comedic, almost absurd lengths to which Duchamp went in order to suspend this operation only underscores how serious he was about it. From repeatedly disparaging artists and art (including his own), to making the kind of work that practically invited derision, ridicule,

and misinterpretation, to his retirement from art-making altogether in the 1920s in order to play more chess: Duchamp lived and worked as if art mattered most when it mattered least.

After Duchamp, one wonders whether art was ever as serious as culture had convinced people it was. And the fact that he is taken so seriously today only makes matters worse. He is now an authority figure, which means the joke, as history tells it, is ultimately on him. It's a shame, but not surprising. The surest way to pacify a person's ideas is to make them into an icon. How he lived and what he actually did play a relatively minor role in what he has come to represent for those who need heroes and villains to get on with the day. As for the rest of us, life is luckily less stark, and perhaps we can remember Duchamp that way, too: for making art, and what we want out of art, less stark, more unpredictable, and more accommodating to a different conception of the good life—one beholden to no higher authority than how it is lived, and what pleasures can be had, moment by moment. It is the image of life lived surprisingly.

It seems to me that this is what Duchamp's work was trying to get at. He made art as a moment at a standstill. And he used the tension between the serious and the light or comic to heighten the effect. It is his dialectic. Given that boring art tends to be either too serious or not serious enough, Duchamp made works that were more or less both. This is why they feel like gags. Something has been pulled off, but nobody is sure what. Isn't that what freedom is suppose to feel like?

6

David Summers  
Amelia Jones



EVERY  
HISTORY



# Is Future Cultural History Possible?

David Summers

It is difficult for me to lose hope in the possibility of a future cultural history — especially art history, which I have always considered to be a primary and indispensable part of cultural history — because I have done what I could to provide the theoretical basis for such history, or histories. And so, from my point of view, it is certainly possible to continue to do cultural history, although it is less certain that people will want to do so, and I hope it is not simply wishful thinking on my part to think they will. The very idea of culture is, of course, thoroughly entangled in world politics, and as power in the world shifts — or, more positively, as power relations normalize in the world after a century of world war — and after de-colonization, it is devoutly to be hoped that the broader world will have learned the very hard lessons of Western nationalism, racism, and general cultural essentialization. Whether or not those lessons have been learned, many nations will most certainly have mastered the powerful technologies invented and produced in the same murderous century.

Much of the anxiety about the *future* of cultural history can be attributed to the fact that the theory and practice of history is deeply embedded in the Western intellectual tradition, about which there is also great uncertainty. There was a steady loss of confidence in the intellectual foundations of Western institutions throughout the twentieth century, and if it is decided that Western history is incorrigible, and incompatible with other traditions of history, then the future of cultural history is dim. If cultural history is understood to be *essentially* Western, then it will be hard to sustain. I do not think that that must be the case. Culture, an idea that arose in parallel to the history of art, is now widely diffused and instituted, and is essential to the identity of modern nations. The close association of culture and nationalism, however, must be approached with the greatest caution and circumspection.

The title of my paper is a close variation on the title of an essay by E. H. Gombrich, “In Search of Cultural History”, first read in 1967.<sup>1</sup> Gombrich’s critique of universal history is still timely, and the alternatives he offered deserve close consideration and further

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E. H. Gombrich, “In Search of Cultural History,” in *Ideals & Idols: Essays on Values in History and in Art* (London [etc.]: Phaidon, 1979), 24-59. See also David Summers, “E. H. Gombrich and the Tradition of Hegel,” in *A Companion to Art Theory*, eds. Paul Smith and Carolyn Wilde (Oxford: Blackwell, 2002), 139-149.

development. The idea of universal history is the backbone of what Gombrich called “Romantic historiography”, stemming from the philosophy of Hegel and his successors, idealist and materialist. Gombrich considered Hegel to be the founder of the cultural history he rejected, but described himself as a “runaway Hegelian” because he still believed cultural history to be possible. In general, Gombrich criticized Romantic historiography for its habits of hypostatization and essentialization.

To take a familiar example: according to Gombrich, the nineteenth-century characterization — still often encountered — of the Middle Ages as “Christian” and the Renaissance as “pagan” is Hegelian and “Romantic” because it reifies both historical periods and implies that all cultural manifestations within those periods are essentially alike, expressions of the same “Spirit”. I will press Gombrich’s argument to say that Romantic habits of hypostatization and essentialization apply not just to historical periods, and to whole cultures, but to the ideas of “past” and “future” themselves. Although language — and not just Hegel — allows us to speak as if past and future *are* one thing, neither *is* one thing.

We moderns owe our acute sense of time to the clocks that have been ticking among us since the late Middle Ages, and to Isaac Newton, who made the universe into one huge clock, the sensorium of God, as he called it, the ongoing companion to meta-optical “absolute” space, to use jargon of my own invention. As is well known, absolute time raises problems both in theory and in everyday practice. It is necessary, for example, to have time zones. For me to catch my plane in Washington and come to Amsterdam, it must be and not be the same time everywhere. It may be that it is the same time in some sense in the whole Newtonian universe, but then the planet turns, and it is 6:01 AM in Washington, D.C., when it is 12:01 PM in Amsterdam. The :01 is the same, but the 6 and the 12 must accommodate the rotation of the Earth. The point of this example is that “absolute time” is a notional framework relative to which many kinds of change may be plotted, but it is crucially important that all these many kinds of change not be reduced to that framework.

We find ourselves in a world of places and things (not to mention people) that are already there, things and places that are incessantly being made and unmade. Broadly understood, the making and unmaking of places and things *is* the history of art. I will argue that, if absolute time is a notional framework relative to which we have come to understand ourselves to live and die, *cultural time* is yet another kind of change, or another category of *kinds* of change, which, although they may be plotted for one reason or

another in relation to notional, absolute time, must be addressed in their own right.

In intellectual historical terms, absolute time is a necessary predecessor of universal history. Newton's sensorium of God sustained the cosmos from one instant to the next, but if this continuity is not simply time's arrow but also teleological, or providential, then we may translate Newton into Hegel. In these terms, history is both universal and progressive, and — here is a most important point — from this position, cultural differences were explained — in fact could *only* be explained — in terms of early and late. Biological evolution and its application to universal history only seemed to corroborate such views, thus dragging all the history of the world into the wake of Western culture and thus to serve transparently ideological purposes.

As I understand the educational principle of the hermeneutic circle, the theoretical basis for the humanities, the past was to be studied in order to act best in the present for the sake of the future. When this scheme was devised, there was little question about the worth of the past, or about what was best in the past, and its study amounted to the encouragement of a kind of collective virtue of prudence. For many people now, however, the past as a whole is discredited. There are a number of reasons for this, but it is sufficient to note that there is a deep strain of modernism that utterly rejects the hermeneutic project, which was an essentially conservative project — “conservative” not in the contemporary right-wing sense of the word but rather in the sense of both assuming and maintaining continuity. As Karl Marx famously wrote in 1852, “the tradition of all dead generations weighs like a nightmare on the brains of the living.” The French Revolution, Marx continued, justified itself with respect to the Classical past, but no such strategy is necessary. The slate can and should be clean. The modern metaphor of revolution means that another great circuit is beginning, and beginning from zero, as one moment became implicit zero when the birth of Christ began the so-called Common Era.

To the dreamer, a nightmare seems like a world, and if there is nothing to be retrieved and brought into the waking present, no desirable alternatives to the present to be found in the past, nothing should be continued into the future. This is a schematic presentation of what has become an increasingly commonplace view; if the past was *essentially* hierarchical, or *essentially* patriarchal, it follows that everything about the past is essentially irrelevant and undesirable. This is not just an academic attitude, and, at a more popular level, we might imagine that we live in a New Age, despite the fact that catastrophe looms on all sides.



If there is distrust and rejection of the past, or of the continuation of the past, there is also at present great trepidation about the future precisely because it seems that it will be so different from the past and present. If there are those who see the past as dystopia, and the future as utopia, there are also those who feel precisely the opposite. Either choice, however, is once again totalizing and tardo-Hege-  
lian; both are unrealistic, perhaps even delusional in their totaliza-  
tion. But the possibility also exists that, if the past is not one thing,  
and the future is also not one thing, the two are continuous in ways  
to be critically determined. This does not mean that the problem of  
the relation of past and future is solved — on the contrary, it means  
that there is a real urgency in finding what is and is not desirable in  
cultural pasts for the sake of present and future.

Contemporary Australian aboriginal art descends from one of  
the oldest traditions of place, sign, and image-making in the world,  
and the purposes and meanings of this art can only enrich anyone's  
understanding of art taken altogether. Aboriginal art has provided  
the focus for intense political debate at the same time that it has  
made a transition from its multi-millennial ways to Western formats  
and markets. Looking from the deepest human past to the present  
and future, contemporary conditions of place and image-making  
are now utterly different from any that have ever existed, and it is  
and will continue to be crucially important to understand the condi-  
tions of the images of photography, television, and modern media  
in general.

I wish to return briefly to the question of the "West", which  
should also be rescued from Romantic historiography. Consider the  
following simple example. I once attended a conference at which an-  
other participant recounted the experience of teaching the history  
of art in post-colonial circumstances. Students were unimpressed by  
Donatello's *St. George*, but they readily embraced photography. Both  
the saint and the technology are "Western", but not at all in the same  
way. Understanding *St. George* requires an extensive foreknowledge  
that must be admitted to be deeply culturally specific, whereas pho-  
tography is immediately about local conditions and issues. The Inter-  
net was devised under the shadow of Mutual Assured Destruction,  
but it spans the globe, with much greater resistance to some of its  
messages than to the medium itself. Cell phones are everywhere,  
and these fundamental changes in human communication and rela-  
tions, and in the "real spaces" of modernity, originated in the "West".  
The point of these examples is that technology is different from, for  
example, Christianity and capitalism, in the relation of the West to  
other cultures. Technology at least offers the possibility for a kind  
of commonality, while the other two are "cultural" in ways that dif-

ferentiate. At the same time, the spread of technology also presents common problems, among them energy and resources.

Is art history Western? That remains to be seen. The conceptual basis of the discipline of the history of art was understandably shaped by, and continues to be shaped by, the art it addressed, namely European art. Art, however, cannot be separated from culture, and, to cite a familiar example, Heinrich Wölfflin's "history of vision", his famous transition from Renaissance to Baroque — from "closed" to "open" form, and from "linear" to "painterly" — presumed the authority of the Western understanding of art. Wölfflin's polarities are more properly understood as a significant (and still inadequately explained) transformation in the deeper and much longer European tradition of representation of forms in virtual space stretching back to Classical Antiquity. Such historical limits can only imply other traditions with other understandings of "art".

The imitation of appearances as the assumed goal of all art was a faithful companion to the broader scheme of universal progressive history. There is still a strong tendency to see all art as failed or approximate attempts at optical naturalism. Modernism did not entirely sidestep progressive history by rejecting naturalism; on the contrary, it often simply replaced one universal goal with another. That is, naturalism became part of the past, and abstraction became the art of the present, the model for the future of the history of art. But if the old habits of Romantic historiography are given up, then there is no such goal, or goals should be acknowledged to be spatio-temporally *local*. There are instead many goals, and to the degree that the history of art continues to worry about the unity and purity of period, including the unity and purity of the contemporary, it is haunted by the nineteenth-century idea of style. We are perhaps still inclined to feel that there *should be* a unified style for a period or people, and that such unity is a sign of authenticity and purity. But there does not have to be a unified style. This makes the job of the art critic harder, of course, since it is easier to say that some art is on the right side of history than it is to justify judgments in terms of objects, intentions, and performances themselves.

*Style* was the workhorse concept of the old art history, and while it is still useful in the taxonomic work of art history, it was also understood to reveal the "temperaments", "aesthetics", and "world views" of whole peoples and periods. This was the crucial error, and even though optical naturalism was a common European tradition — not to mention other commonalities — local variants were diagnosed as symptoms of essential national and regional differences (which is not to mention the diagnoses of the forms of traditions). But it does not take very long to see that the history of art was implicated (with

many other disciplines and practices), in the ideologies of nineteenth- and twentieth-century nationalism and imperialism, and, having acknowledged this, another question must again be asked. Is it possible, rather than simply lamenting old sins and errors, or giving up on the whole enterprise, to formulate a better conceptual basis for the history of art?

My book *Real Spaces, World Art History and the Rise of Western Modernism*, began from what I consider to be the self-evident need to provide students with the means to approach art's many traditions.<sup>2</sup> The project began in the late 1960s. For me, exhibitions of minimal art made me think less about objects and more about the space — the “context” — I shared with them, a phenomenological space, but also inevitably an institutional space. This became a first principle. In the history of art, “context” at first meant socioeconomic context and was more or less explicitly Marxist, and the paradigmatic studies concentrated on the French nineteenth century. 1960s contextualism, however, also had another very important precedent. Erwin Panofsky recognized the dangers inherent in the intuitive (even if professional) diagnosis of entire groups and epochs through the forms of their art, and first proposed his method of *iconography* as a corrective.<sup>3</sup> It is necessary, Panofsky argued, to explain the meaning of works of art through the retrieval of local, “conventional meaning”, basically by placing works in relation to contemporaneous texts. Iconography thus links art to *cultural* context, not socioeconomic context, relative to which it is superstructural and ideological, and so idealist rather than materialist. It is most important, however, in both cases to have located art historical interpretation *outside* as well as inside the work of art. Panofsky also demonstrated that means of representation, such as Greek *skenographia* and Renaissance perspective, or traditions of proportion, are entirely explainable neither in formal terms nor in socioeconomic terms, and the attempt to provide historical explanation either in terms of one or the other is to remain in the grasp of what Gombrich calls Romantic historiography. Both “contexts” explain the conditions within which works of art are made.

The second fundamental problem arose in my mind from the study of Mesoamerican art. In the 1960s, ancient American art was on the farthest fringe of art-historical awareness, and I knew nothing about it before I took my first seminar with George Kubler. One of these seminars included a trip to Mexico, and when I actually saw this art and experienced the spaces of its architecture, I realized with great force that nothing had prepared me to face *this* art. In the 1970s, I began to teach survey courses in ancient American art every other year or so, and I was disappointed again and again by

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David Summers, *Real Spaces, World Art History and the Rise of Western Modernism* (London: Phaidon [etc.], 2003).

3

David Summers, “Meaning in the Visual Arts as a Humanistic Discipline,” in *Meaning in the Visual Arts as a Humanistic Discipline: Views from Outside: A Centennial Commemoration of Erwin Panofsky (1892-1968)*, ed. Irving Lavin (Princeton, New Jersey: Institute for Advanced Study, 1995), 9-24.

the meager theoretical resources my discipline offered. As increasingly isolated work proceeded over the decades, it became clear that my two problems were fundamentally linked. That is, categories able to accommodate the contextualist reinterpretation of European art might also accommodate other cultural traditions. Simply put, this solution is based on the principle that *art itself is context*.

As the title *Real Spaces* states, the categories I have proposed are spatial, not visual. The idea of the “visual arts” must be historicized. Although most art is visible, it is not therefore essentially “visual”, and the psychology that makes it possible to think so is as Western as Romantic historiography itself. Spatial categories offer much more complete access to many kinds of art. In my scheme, architecture is of prime importance. Architecture — broadly understood to include towns, cities, roads, and borders as well as houses, palaces, and temples — is the paradigmatic art of *social space*; architecture encloses groups, excludes other groups, and makes distinctions within the groups it encloses, and is always shaped around culturally specific purposes and practices. Within social spaces, sculpture is the art of *personal space* and makes the most explicit reference to the physical presence of an observer. To take a simple example, it is always significant that a colossus is much larger than we are. Painting is the paradigmatic art of *virtual space*, which is based on our capacity to see three dimensions in two. It is crucially important that the arts of virtual space are always linked to social space by a *format*, and formats are culturally specific. The altarpiece is a familiar format, which is shaped to the social space of church architecture. The *canvas* is another familiar format. Social space offers what I call the *first space of use* for the sculpture, ornament, and painting that shape human activities in so many culturally specific ways, and it is in a more or less reconstructable first space of use that the original appearance of works of art is to be imagined and explained. Of course, works of art may have second and third and fourth spaces of use, the last of which might be a museum, and many later modern works are made expressly for museums and galleries. But it is most important that it is the first space of use that determines original appearance.

I have not only rejected the definition of the arts as “visual”, I also rejected the assumption that art is essentially like a language, a system of conventional signs demanding local competency for comprehension and communication. More properly, art — if it is to be understood historically — demands that we know what was to be done with it. Formal categories, I argued, inevitably abstract from any given work, which spatial categories do not and, while retaining at least the breadth of visual categories, provide more

nearly adequate terms for analysis and comparison. Spatial categories begin from the principle that the common basis for all cultural forms — that is, for all the made world, the vast artifactual and monumental work of humanity taken altogether — is shared human spatiotemporality. Distinctive human corporeal presence and sociality are the deepest common terms uniting all human spaces and artifacts. (The book manuscript I am completing now is entitled *Pathos, Sympathy, Empathy*, and it has two purposes: to review ideas of expression in the Western intellectual and artistic tradition, and to re-examine the idea of empathy, which figured importantly in late nineteenth-century history of art but has since dropped out of art-historical sight.)

If *Real Spaces* is considered in semiotic terms, the most important category is *indexicality*. “Facture”, the title of my book’s first chapter, means that artifacts should be considered as records of their own making. Facture points to stratigraphy, leading on to archaeology, which, although it deals with old things, is a peculiarly modern science. By the end of the eighteenth century, stratigraphic inference had given us a more precise notion of the great age of the earth, and, by the end of nineteenth century, it had begun to provide a very different knowledge and understanding of ancient civilizations. Freud compared the unconscious to the archaeology of Rome — successive layers of urban and personal history, if carefully examined, reveal unique sequences. In the present terms, archaeology greatly expands the possibility for the definition of any number of art and cultural histories.

Stratigraphy entails chronology and takes us back to the question of time. I argued in *Real Spaces* that once artifacts are made in a certain way, they tend to continue to be made in the same way. At the same time, one of the most extraordinary facts about human artifacts is that, by and large, even the simplest from one culture can be distinguished from the simplest from another. But if the initial performance of making must be arbitrary, in reiterations it tends to assume the authority of the way in which things are done. Simple artifacts from Teotihuacan (or anywhere else) resemble one another, and these resemblances imply my deepest principle, *series*. Artifacts are made one after another, but in itself a series of similar artifacts is not a chronology but rather the *potential* for a chronology.

Description of the artifactual world in terms of series is fundamentally important because, just as there have been series in the past, series are being continued (or not) in the present, and they will be begun, continued, or not, in the future. Frank Stella’s protractor paintings, for example, have innumerable echoes and replications in commercial graphics; shaped canvases abound; and for the more

critically minded, the theoretical implications of these paintings will be carried out in other ways. All of these are series.

Series may be architectural, technical, formal, or iconographic. Temples, churches, mosques, and skyscrapers all belong to series. All oil paintings are a technical series, with many subseries. Acanthus ornament and round or pointed arches are formal series. All representations — the Buddha, the Virgin Mary, and Elvis Presley — constitute series. Allegories constitute a series, and the disappearance of allegory is as significant as the concurrent rise of Realism in the nineteenth century. As I have said, iconography was perhaps the first contextual art-historical method and, although Panofsky devised his method for Western art, it is adjustable and transferable, and we now have iconographies, for example, of Benin royal art or the arts of ancient America.

By definition, no series can be global; series also have the great advantage of being open-ended; they may continue, but they may end, and then again they can be reborn, revived. They may be slow or fast. Series may also leave their original culture to take up a new life in another. Series again implies a very much broader idea of art, approaching something like all the things people make, the appearances of some of which demand simple explanations, while others demand more complex explanations. This neutralizes the question of quality, but in a very positive way. Neutralization does not mean that there are no works of quality, but rather that works of quality can only arise from series. This makes it possible to address questions, for example, such as the transformation of popular themes and formats into courtly or “high” art (and vice versa). We cannot understand aesthetically distinguished works *historically* without understanding series of less distinguished works in the same tradition.

A complex work of art is an amalgam of series. The idea of series is adapted from George Kubler’s *Shape of Time*,<sup>4</sup> and E. H. Gombrich recommended what he called “studies in continuity and contiguity.”<sup>5</sup> An example: the church of San Zeno in Verona obviously belongs to the series of Christian churches. The place where Zeno rests was respected through the centuries. The alignment of the church, to the east, or northeast, was also retained, meaning that the building belongs to the long series of Christian churches in which, placing the altar in the east, facing sunrise, Jerusalem, and the Holy Sepulchre, over the founding relics. Similar procedures with different relics and alignments were followed in other traditions. Ritual places in different traditions were established in different but comparable ways, and in all cases we learn very basic things about each culture if these configurations are explained.

4

George Kubler,  
*The Shape of Time: Remarks on the History of Things* (New Haven, Connecticut [etc.]: Yale University Press, 1962).

5

Gombrich, *op. cit.*  
p. 55.

The church of San Zenò could be placed in a great many other series. Its mid-fifteen-century altarpiece is adjusted to the much older ritual space, and Andrea Mantegna depicted the court of heaven as arranged around the central figure of the Virgin and Child on the axis of alignment and ritual. Of course, the format of the altarpiece also belongs to a series, as does the perspective construction and the various elements of its ornamentation. As works of art are more complex — that is, as they incorporate more series — the critical judgment they demand is more complex. Some series are more relevant to one or another task of interpretation. But this simply means that something like the old hermeneutic circle has begun to turn, and it continues to turn for us, and our institutions.

Art history has been deeply shaped, if not directly by Hegel, then by the generalized idea of progress to which Hegel contributed so significantly. This faith in progress seems to validate the new as historically necessary and desirable, but no one series should be totalized to stand for a historical period (including the modern), and any such totalization is illusory. There have been and are multiple series, there will be many more, many of them repaying historical critical attention. Skepticism with regard to both historical method and results is of course vital, but it should not presume to be total and fatal, and it should not serve to leave the tasks of history undone.

# Live Art as “Future History” Performance and the Archive, a Case Study

Amelia Jones<sup>1</sup>

Issues of the future and of history doubly beg the question of time. Live art — art that is performed durationally with a live audience — demands time for its articulation. At once, it is live art; however, that returns us inexorably to the past — because, as durational, it is always already over. In spite of (or perhaps as a consequence of) this fact, in art history and performance studies we have developed many ways of pretending to retrieve the essence of the live art act, of securing its presence in history — including interviews and increasingly extensive archives, exhibitions, and scholarly work such as live art documentation (text, photography, video, and film footage). These efforts point to the tension in the term “future history”: the writing of histories of past time-based art events is itself an act of futurity. When I write such histories, this is a performative enunciation that puts meaning in motion in a way relevant to my present.

As this essay will argue — using as a case study live art practices in 1970s Los Angeles — such attempts to write the past into the future are inevitable and important, but will ultimately always fail to capture what we yearn for: an eternally present promise of future significance for events called “art”. What follows are ruminations based on two years of archival and interview research on a range of artistic performance practices from this time and place. This renewed story is narrated with a self-reflexive eye towards the paradoxical tensions put in play by any writing of past time-based acts — a writing that inevitably frames meaning and stops it momentarily.

Given the erasure of Los Angeles performance by and large from mainstream histories of performance art as well as from histories of contemporary art (even those focusing on Los Angeles) and histories of contemporary Los Angeles culture (which tend to focus on the film and music industries to the exclusion of art and performance), this essay takes up what I believe to be the most pressing question of history-writing of this kind — that of whose bodies, whose perfor-

1  
This essay was originally conceived for the Los Angeles Goes Live project contribution to the symposium *This Sentence is Now Being Performed* at the Academy of Fine Arts, Vienna, November 2010, and was revised for the MIT in December 2011, and in January 2012 for the *Facing Forward* lecture series in Amsterdam. The text is drawn from a longer essay that focuses on Los Angeles performance art works from roughly 1970 to 1975 (see Note 2).



mances, and thus whose memories and whose narratives get written into history, and whose do not.

In the longer study on which this current text is based, I discuss a range of performative works by various artists, from Barbara Smith, the artists from the Asco collective (Harry Gamboa Jr., Patssi Valdez, Gronk, and Willie Herrón), and Senga Nengudi and her colleagues in the Black arts movement in LA (Maren Hassinger, David Hammons) to the artists involved in the Feminist Art Program and Woman's Building (Nancy Buchanan, Suzanne Lacy, Cheri Gaulke, Faith Wilding, and Terry Wolverton). This larger project is also based on attending to those who have been doubly excluded from these histories because they have been marginalized even from the already-marginal histories of Los Angeles art and performance: usually, bluntly put, because they are black, queer, Latino, and/or women. Hence, it is both a study of several key examples of performance in Los Angeles from this period that have not been acknowledged fully in other histories *and* — more importantly for our purposes here — an interrogation of how live events get written into history.<sup>2</sup>

### HISTORY, A PERFORMANCE?

History writing itself is a performative act with endless potential outcomes, and it is worth taking apart briefly some of the philosophical and political issues at play in this act — which thus entails a great deal of responsibility. This is perhaps the most important point of my essay in relation to the question of a “Future History”. As such, a brief theorization of how I view the tension between the performativity of history (writing) and the immense responsibility involved in attempting to write past works into present histories that will be read in the future is called for.

Historians and critics of performance art have tended to assume that the archive is a distinct, always secondary and inadequate, echo of live performance. This extends from the tendency to privilege live art as unmediated and therefore in some way an authentic conveyance of “presence”.<sup>3</sup> As I refuse this tendency to privilege the moment of liveness over the archive as “secondary”, I would like to refer to what Jacques Derrida identifies, in his influential mid-1990s book *Archive Fever*, as the desire for “anamnesis without hypomnesis”, or for forms of meaning experienced and conveyed directly, without recourse to writing (the traces of human activity left behind): we seek the live “without mediation, and without delay. Without even the memory of a translation”.<sup>4</sup> And yet, the paradox (as Derrida points out) is that our desire for the live without mediation precisely leads to the accumulation of archives (including interviews and their tran-

2

See my article “Lost Bodies: Los Angeles Performance Art in Art History,” in *Live Art in LA: Performance in Southern California, 1970-1983*, ed. Peggy Phelan (New York and London: Routledge, 2012) and the volume I edited together with Adrian Heathfield, *Perform, Repeat, Record: Live Art in History* (Bristol: Intellect, 2012).

3

For example, film and art history scholar Catherine Elwes noted in 1985, “[p]erformance art offers women a unique vehicle for making that direct unmediated access [to the audience]. Performance is about the ‘real-life’ presence of the artist.... Nothing stands between spectator and performer.” Catherine Elwes, “Floating Femininity: A Look at Performance Art by Women,” in *Women's Images of Men*, eds. Sarah Kent and Jacqueline Moreau (London: Writers and Readers Publishing, 1985), 165. Art historian Carrie Lambert[-Beatty] has commented on this tendency recently: “[h]istories and theories of ‘live art’ have... been written around the *ing* [of performance], locating the meaning of performance solely in the vivid moment of its presence; [sic] assuming that the radical ephemerality of performance is its very point.” Lambert,

scripts). In this matrix of things, concepts, bodies, subjects and histories, the body becomes archival and the archive becomes, as suggested, embodied.

The paradox of the archive is particularly fraught and complex in relation to live art — a cultural form that is often claimed, as noted, to have a special status because of its resistance to “hypomnesis” or representational “mediation.” Engaging with specific live art practices from a particular place and time (with its own complex social, political, and cultural histories) is thus a key way of opening up and questioning these beliefs. Ultimately, I argue via one example of performative practices against this binary so often posed between the “authentic” live body and the “secondary” archive; I will use these particular practices to claim that the body (via remembered movements, conversations, interviews) is an archive of past works, and the archive (filled with bits of things touched, manipulated, or otherwise used by performance artists) is a kind of material embodiment, especially as it is mobilized in historical narratives and exhibitions. Neither *body* nor *archive* are mutually exclusive; neither transparently renders the truth of the present, the past, or the future.

The body, it could be said, archives time and mediates relationships. There is no “pure” self or relationship between self (performer) and other (audience); there are only bodies, which are mortal and exist over time, engaging each other in particular places and at particular times in ways that others might or might not be curious about later. Retrieving “what happened” or what a body in action *meant* at any past moment is always an impossible enterprise — but always worth a try. In fact, thinking about past events, performance or otherwise, is one of the most important gestures politically in a world driven by futurity and forgetting, where all that seems to matter is momentary extremes of belief that force bodies, materials, and events into conformity with their world view (Obama is a Muslim; Obama is not American...).

Studying performance, as Diana Taylor has argued in her 2003 book *The Archive and the Repertoire*, is a key way of accessing historical knowledge through attention to embodied practices or “repertoires”. Performance, she argues, is “a way of knowing, not simply an object of analysis”.<sup>5</sup> If we have an interest, then, in cultural histories of Los Angeles and, more broadly, the United States in the 1970s; if we want to understand something of the anti-war movement, the rise of identity politics, and broader shifts in conceptions of what constituted being American (or even a man; a woman; a raced, classed, sexed, and otherwise identified person) during this period; if we are curious about tracing the rise of new modes of artistic production in

“Documentary Dialectics: Performance Lost and Found,” *Visual Resources* XVI (2000), 275. See also my essay “‘Presence’ in *absentia*: Experiencing Performance as Documentation,” *Art Journal* 56:4 (1997): 11-18, in which I critique this belief system in relation to the power of documentation.

4

Jacques Derrida, *Archive Fever: A Freudian Impression* (Chicago, Illinois [etc.]: University of Chicago Press), 93.

5

Diana Taylor, *The Archive and the Repertoire: Performing Cultural Memory in the Americas* (Durham, North Carolina [etc.]: Duke University Press, 2003), xvi.

the post-WWII period and the explosion of body-oriented practices in the late 1960s and 1970s — a study of performance practices, as Taylor suggests, can provide a crucial opening to a range of knowledge relating to these areas of historical understanding.

Judith Butler has gone even further, claiming that performance — or, more broadly speaking, a performative model of critical interpretation (and, I would add, history writing) — offers a “possibility of resignification” of cultural history and politics.<sup>6</sup> Put together, Taylor’s and Butler’s models offer a way to think about how a critical interpretation of the performance practices in question here can potentially “resignify” in two ways: both positing alternative, and thus politically sharp, readings of cultural, performance, and art histories from this period, thus opening out existing (exclusionary) models of cultural, performance, and art history; and offering new ways of understanding the role of performance (as archivally accessed and understood) in political activism in the early 1970s.

As both Taylor and Butler understand, it is not self-evident how one goes about studying events (in our case, performance events) that took place in the past — it is precisely the dilemma of how what things mean historically that occupies Butler. Butler’s interest in the performative is deeply political and linked to how we understand past utterances. The key questions in writing any history, then, relate to how we access the past and how we make sense of it — the theory of performativity is a theory of how meaning is produced from iterations, which even in the instance of utterance repeat previous locutions, and which themselves are inevitably always already past.

Currently, in the art world and in the performance studies and art history disciplines and beyond, there is a huge interest in the question of how live art comes to mean historically. What is the live event after it is over? Is it to be fully comprehended through the traces (photographs, memories, films, relics, interviews) left behind? Is the “archival” a valid replacement for the ephemeral performance art event? Can it be viewed as “the work”?

Taylor’s query in *The Archive and the Repertoire* is based on the colonial situation from the sixteenth through the eighteenth century, and thus on a model of examining histories of performative acts in which there is a distinct, often oppositional, relationship between the archive (defined by Taylor as documents, texts, films, or even, in an anthropological context, bones and other human remains) and what she calls the *repertoire*, performances of live bodies that “enact... embodied memory” through gesture and movement; the repertoire, she argues, “requires presence.”<sup>7</sup> Taylor thus claims that performance is “that which persists, transmitted through a nonarchival system of transfer that I came to call the *repertoire*...”<sup>8</sup>

6

Judith Butler,  
*Excitable Speech*  
(New York: Routledge,  
1997), 69.

7

Taylor, *The Archive*,  
20.

8

*Ibid.*, xvii.

Taylor asks a key culturally specific question (linked to the history of colonization) that haunts the historicization of live art from a performance studies point of view, typically for that discipline invested in the live event (the “repertoire”) as having a special status in terms of knowledge transfer: “Whose memories ‘disappear’ if only archival knowledge is valorized and granted permanence?”<sup>9</sup> In Taylor’s key context of colonial conquest, this attempt to revalorize the performative makes perfect sense; in the contemporary context of debates about the historical meaning of past performance art events, however, it dovetails to some extent with rather problematic attempts to claim the live performance as having a special status (while at the same time commodifying it via gallery exhibitions and art history texts). Still, if we keep in mind the historical specificity of Taylor’s arguments, her key point, then, is productive: performances — reiterated cultural rituals, for example — can convey knowledge across time, and it is a different kind of knowledge from that of performance remains in archives. In this vein, one could argue that interviews with living artists who performed works in the past constitute a kind of repertoire in Taylor’s sense — remembered embodied knowledge, while not “the truth” of the performance event, has an ontologically different valence from the information conveyed through scraps, documents, and photographic materials in archives.

Taylor’s optimism can be tempered somewhat by borrowing again from Butler’s and Derrida’s more skeptical and philosophically engaged position vis-à-vis the yearning for *presence* that haunts such claims for performance, in order to refuse the opposition that Taylor often courts. I would argue, then, that the repertoire is in a sense already a bodily “archiving” (as becomes evident in performing interviews), and that the archive was produced and can be engaged with in “bodily” ways. And retrieving past “repertoires” through archival remains, in the context of recent cultural phenomena such as performance art, might be just the way to revivify lost bodies from the past. In order to explore how this continuum between body or repertoire and archive works, I need first to situate myself in relation to the Los Angeles-based bodies/archives I analyze in the larger project.

#### THE BODY AND THE ARCHIVE: THINKING THE PAST THROUGH THE PRESENT

I lived in Los Angeles for 16 years, from 1987 to 2003 (and I have recently moved back, in 2014). During my initial 16 years in LA, I developed an interest in performance and body art, driven partly by the fact that these art forms had been eradicated from histories of

9  
Ibid., 36.

10  
The CalArts Archives included posters and other materials relating to the 1998 *F Word* event in which I participated; see Box B1/F14 “Feminist Art Workshop,” 1998.

contemporary Euro-American art and partly by my increasing engagement with the LA performance community.

Initially, my access to histories of Los Angeles performance was largely through radical feminist work. While I was acutely aware of debates about race, ethnicity, class, and sexuality within this earlier moment of feminist performance practice, I was not fully addressing the need to excavate *other* “lost bodies” in histories of Los Angeles culture and contemporary art and performance. The work of Asco, for example, emerged in my consciousness only partway through the 1990s, as I began trying to teach more Californian art in my classes at University of California, Riverside. In order to develop the interplay between bodies and archives, for the remainder of the essay, I will sketch a brief picture of the work of Asco, functioning as its main case study.

ASCO:  
EMBODYING THE ARCHIVE

Asco was a radical Chicano protest arts movement formed in the early 1970s. Asco’s rage was originally galvanized by the 1968 Chicano blowouts — a series of walkouts wherein Chicano/a students, including the four key figures who would later found Asco, refused to go to high school in protest against the low quality of the schools in Chicano neighborhoods and against the unfairly high proportion of Chicanos fighting in Vietnam. In its formative period of 1971-1975, Asco’s key members — Harry Gamboa Jr., Gronk, Patssi Valdez, and Willie Herrón — produced myriad public events, including walking murals and elaborate carnivalesque plays, publications, and photographs presented as “No Movies” (film “stills” documenting movies never made, images “in between” filmmaking, street theater, photography, and performance art).

These radically innovative hybrid practices worked across media and produced queer and in-between bodies, functioning against the common binary thinking of c. 1970 identity politics by taking place in such “borderlands” as described by Chicana feminist theorist Gloria Anzaldúa as the *in-between* spaces that Chicanos occupy in the US both materially and politically.<sup>11</sup> Not only activating in between spaces, literally performing in abandoned intersections, on the streets, or in other spaces that were neither here nor there in terms of either official art world cultures or the Chicano mural movement, Asco members put their bodies in motion to put into play diachronic anti-narratives (often facetiously frozen in the fake movie stills) that function as temporally in between past references, present actions, and future possibilities for social change.

11

Gloria Anzaldúa,  
*Borderlands/  
La Frontera: The New  
Mestiza*  
(San Francisco,  
California: Spinners/  
Aunt Lute, 1987), 3.

Asco played on the feared phantasm of Chicano gang members, graffiting the “high” cultural spaces of Los Angeles’s major art museum — they crossed borders by graffiting the external wall of the Los Angeles County Museum of Art (LACMA) after Gamboa was told the museum could not include Chicano art because there “were no Chicano artists”.<sup>12</sup> But they also explicitly parodied and undermined the idea of Chicano murals as the only proper mode of cultural production for members of their community, performing “instant murals” and “walking murals” as a way of bringing a clichéd culture to life, engaging their communities with live and opening interactive bodies. With the *Walking Mural*, 1972, for example, they paraded the streets of East LA (the Chicano area of LA) just after Christmas wearing elaborate costumes mimicking the Virgèn de Guadalupe (Valdez) and a (quite queer) cross-dressed chiffon Christmas tree (Gronk). Activating their bodies in a *walking mural*, Asco refused the static character of the murals considered to be the proper output of artists active in the Chicano Movement. Chicano artists were “supposed” to make celebratory murals about Chicano experience — not flounce through the streets in flamboyantly camp renditions of Chicano icons such as the Virgen de Guadalupe.

But while Asco members are hardly fully enfranchised members of the glamorous international art market, Asco is no longer invisible. Published scholarship and exhibitions on or related to Asco have begun to appear in the past few years. Recent accounts of histories of Los Angeles and/or Chicano/a art often *do* include Asco — for example, the 2008 *Phantom Sightings: Art After the Chicano Movement* show at LACMA.<sup>13</sup> And, in 2011, as part of the *Pacific Standard Time* events, a major retrospective of Asco’s practice opened, also at LACMA (the very museum which had insulted Gamboa and refused to consider the members of Asco artists in 1972).<sup>14</sup> As covered in major international art magazines such as *Artforum*, within *Pacific Standard Time* the Asco exhibition was positioned in this case as a key moment in the history of contemporary art in LA — a moment among many otherwise lost since that time in the New York/London-centered histories of contemporary Euro-American art. As these exhibitions<sup>15</sup> and a surge of research published by Chicano studies scholars such as Chon Noriega and Ondine Chavoya make clear, the context for Asco has so far been almost entirely within Chicano studies and Chicano art. Asco, when addressed, has been explicitly historicized as a “Chicano art movement”. This is its historical presence in art and cultural histories of the 1970s, and to some degree the artists have participated in this construction of the movement in their “embodied” engagements with scholars.

12  
Harry Gamboa,  
“In the City of  
Angels, Chameleons  
and Phantoms:  
Asco, A Case Study  
of Chicano Art in  
Urban Tones (Or Asco  
Was a Four-Member  
Word),” in *Chicano  
Art: Resistance and  
Affirmation, 1965-  
1985*, ed. Richard del  
Castillo (Los Angeles,  
California: Wight  
Gallery, UCLA, 1991),  
125.

13  
LACMA is an  
institution that has  
worked hard to  
redress its 1970s  
exclusion of Chicano  
art by also mounting  
a one-person show  
by Gronk since the  
early 1990s and the  
historically  
ground-breaking  
*Chicano Art:  
Resistance and  
Affirmation 1965-  
1985*. For a very  
interesting critical  
account of the  
CARA show and its  
reception, see Alicia  
Gaspar de Alba,  
Chicano Art Inside/  
Outside the Master’s  
House: *Cultural  
Politics and the CARA  
Exhibition* (Austin,  
Texas: University  
of Texas Press, 1997).  
Gaspar de Alba was  
and still is the César  
E. Chávez Center for  
Chicana and Chicano  
Studies at UCLA,  
one of the most  
important sites for  
research on Chicano/a  
art. They hold key  
archives such as the  
Gronk and Cyclona  
papers.

14  
Gamboa was the  
instigator of the  
radical Chicano



My investment in Asco, as a lover of Los Angeles and as a white, middle-class feminist, politically driven to redress the exclusion in histories of contemporary art and performance, has driven me to construct a slightly different Asco for history, beyond its situation solely within the Chicano Movement. Of course, my historical account is deeply embedded to the historians of the latter, but I come at this history with a slightly different framework. My particular concerns and politics (queer feminist and anti-racist, with a strong interest in the histories of the rights movements and their huge impact on the visual arts) have conditioned my relationship not only to the material from the past I have found in archives, but to the artists themselves in our interviews and discussions.<sup>16</sup> For instance, my inevitable bias in interviewing Gronk and looking at his papers at UCLA — my particular reading of the archive — has a strong parallel in the charged and specific way in which in a bodily sense I engaged with Gronk in his studio during our interview. The archive was embodied for me, and Gronk's body an *archive* of information. None of it to be fully "trusted", of course — not because I feel Gronk is a dishonest person, but because his self-performance and my self-performance are two dances that inflect each other with different versions of historical and contemporary "truth". And of course he was "dancing" with me, in the moment of our interview. This kind of "information" is profoundly interrelational and fluid in its expressions, as I (for example) re-articulate it here.

Just after meeting and interviewing Gronk in the fall of 2009, I was thus amazed to discover in his archive at UCLA these (and other) images in albums and folders indicating an active and public career from the 1960s and 1970s of cross-dressing, vamping, and otherwise confusing codes of sexual, gendered, racial, ethnic, and class identification that would have been quite strictly in place in Los Angeles at the time. Imagine my surprise at finding sketches sent by a male lover/friend who had moved from LA to the midwest, Jerry Dreva; touching and amusing erotic images, such as a penis print sent by Dreva to Gronk in the 1970s; as well, I found scrapbooks and a series of polaroid photographs documenting the queer play *Caca Roaches have no Friends*, which Gronk developed with Robert Legorreta (or "Cyclona") in 1969, just before the founding of Asco.

Suddenly, my earlier framing of the *Walking Mural* in my 2008 book *Self/Image* as queering Chicano/a identity didn't seem so far-fetched. Suddenly, the *queer* in-betweenness of Asco seemed less a minor side point and more a closeted but powerful and even defining subtext to what made their "Chicano" expressions themselves "in-between", even within their own Chicano community in East LA. Eureka! I felt I had discovered (or had substantiated in material form)

arts magazine  
*Regeneración*  
and the primary  
documentarian  
(photographer).  
of the group

15  
Relating,  
and sometimes  
contributing,  
to these exhibitions,  
scholars such as  
David James,  
Chon Noriega,  
Jennifer Sternad  
Flores, and  
Ondine Chavoya have  
produced important  
essays and books  
addressing Asco's  
history and practice.  
Perhaps most  
importantly,  
the key historian  
and documentarian  
of Asco, key member  
Harry Gamboa, Jr.,  
has published his own  
collection of writings  
(edited by Noriega),  
which gives one side  
of the story, and the  
UCLA César  
E. Chávez Center for  
Chicana and Chicano  
Studies (which holds  
the archives of  
Gronk, among other  
key materials) has  
published a book  
on the Gronk archives  
they hold.

16  
See my book  
*Seeing Differently:  
A History and Theory  
of Identification and  
the Visual Arts*  
(New York and  
London: Routledge,  
2012).



Robert Legorreta as "Cyclona" in performance

*Caca Roaches Have No Friends, The Fire of Life: The Robert Legorreta - Cyclona Collection 1962 — 2002*, Coll. 500, courtesy of the UCLA Chicano Studies Research Center

a key hidden element of Asco (only to find these "unknown" intimate works publicly displayed by 2011 in the LACMA retrospective).

Drawing on these images and Gronk's early, pre-Asco, and Asco practice allows me to put in direct view and highlight these charged relations that condition any historical practice dealing with archives and bodies, focusing on a particular set of archival and embodied relations that specifically foreground the idea of Asco as working *in between*. The fascinating paradox here is that it took recourse to the materiality of the archive and the person-to-person contact of the interview format to suggest the in-betweenness (the productive interrelation between the *queer* and the *ephemeral*) of Asco to me as

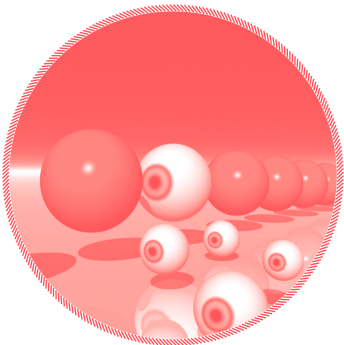


the key to my research project. If anything, research like this, rather than proving the value of such material contact in substantiating “facts”, at its best reminds us of the ephemerality of the “truth” of what happened — the in-betweenness of history itself (narratives that will, in my telling, always hover between my reading of Gronk’s outdated and invested memories, which clash with those of Gamboa and Valdez, and my emotional and intellectual investments).

It is this in-betweenness, gathered through the bits and pieces of the archive and the complex vicissitudes of intersubjectivity in the interview setting, that offered me a way to think about how Asco mattered in the 1970s and thus how they continue to matter today as a historical movement. For me, the in-betweenness is about a queer relation to embodiment and to the normative formations of subjectivity within both mainstream white middle-class American culture and the Chicano communities of East LA.

### CONCLUSION

I hope that, via this spinning out of my own relationship to the archives, bodies, and embodied memories of Asco, I have pointed not only to the importance of looking at “in-between” practices such as Asco’s in order to challenge the tendencies in art and performance history to rest on *either* live bodies *or* on archival materials as “final”. Asco’s practices, and this is a key point, *call forth* an open and receptive interpretive method that explores and allows for the friction, contradictions, and undecidabilities their in-between strategies put in play, both at the time and as we can access them historically. This project also points to the crucial *political* importance of understanding both the *materiality* of archives and bodies — their obdurate persistence through time — and the *open-endedness* of what they come to mean historically: here, perhaps more than anywhere else, lies the potential for developing a model for a “Future History” of live art. This openness to future history, finally, points to the huge responsibility of the historian to engage as deeply as possible with the information at hand (embodied, archived, and otherwise), but also to acknowledge her own investments and point of view in narrating these materials into “history”.



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# # thenewspacerace

Juha van 't Zelfde

“It looks like we’ve got us a Dragon by the tail.”

On Friday May 25, 2012, at 9:56 a.m. Eastern time, NASA astronaut Donald R. Pettit uttered the words that would mark the resurrection of the memory of the Cold War rivalry known as “the Space Race”. I say “the memory” on purpose, because there is no Cold War at hand, nor is there a clear ongoing rivalry, as there previously was between the US and USSR.

Nevertheless, something is up. Very high up, in space. And a lot of people want in on it. The dragon in question was the Dragon capsule designed, built, and delivered to the International Space Station (ISS) by SpaceX, an American private space transportation company based in Hawthorne, California. For the first time in history, a private space corporation made a successful delivery to the ISS, 400 km from Earth in orbit. This remarkable achievement earned SpaceX a \$1.6 billion contract from NASA, for another twelve supply missions to the ISS. By outsourcing these missions to this “extraterrestrial FedEx”, NASA has saved the American taxpayer \$10.4 billion dollars and simultaneously promoted private space enterprises in the New Space Race. Unlike the Old Space Race, the new one is not between countries. It is instead between private businesses. Companies like SpaceX, Virgin Galactic, and Planetary Resources, founded by Tony Stark-like billionaires such as Elon

Musk, Richard Branson, and Larry Page, are competing for contracts and for asteroids laden with gold and platinum worth billions of dollars.

Like many other science enthusiasts, I have always been a huge fan of anything space-related. Space is the ultimate unknown and the ‘beyond of all beyonds’. To even think about the possibility of going there makes the brain tingle. Space is the place of our imagination. The realization that man can leave his own planet and go beyond its borders to explore the vastness of that endless darkness is simply mind-boggling. Then there is the appreciation of the actual work that goes into making space travel happen: the gritty physics, the raw engineering, the bold design, and the daunting test flights. These women and men are rock stars who build rockets to visit the stars.

What then follows is a burst of optimism and hope about the possible futures and the unforeseen discoveries astronauts might make. The whole time, a sense of dread of failure lurks in the background, enhanced by previous catastrophes like the explosions of the Space Shuttles Challenger and Columbia — a failure that is very real and lethal, despite the optimism and buzz that surrounds the space industry. “For a successful technology, reality must take precedence over public relations, for nature cannot be fooled,” were the words of theoretical physicist Richard Feynman after the Challenger disaster.

Space exploration and scientific experimentation inside the space shuttles and stations have resulted in a number of groundbreaking discoveries: velcro, the microchip, cordless tools, the joystick, GPS, and insulation — to name just a few. Something no less significant is the birth of the environmental movement. By seeing the

Earth from afar for the first time, we finally started understanding the fragility of our planet. The book *Earthrise* (2008) by Robert Poole testifies to the beginning of this planetary awareness.

Artists have always reveled in the great unknown of space. In popular culture, filmmakers and musicians have dedicated numerous works to the landing on the moon, the perils of space travel, and the extension of man's habitat. Rumor has it that in 1969, Andy Warhol, Robert Rauschenberg, and Claes Oldenburg created the first Moon Museum, a micro exhibition that was left on a leg of the Apollo 12 lander. The existence has never officially been confirmed or even debated, but the New York Times printed an image taken by the astronaut in its November 22, 1969 edition.

Unfortunately for Warhol, Rauschenberg, and Oldenburg, they are no longer the only artists in space. With the arrival of a New Space Race come new opportunities for artists to revisit the black space for artistic purposes. American artist Trevor Paglen just launched his project *The Last Pictures*, a capsule on board of a spacecraft that carries a visual record of images that define human history. This spacecraft, like other satellites, is destined to become the longest-lasting artifact of human civilization, quietly floating through space long after every trace of humanity has disappeared from the planet.

In 2010, Spanish artist Alicia Framis opened her Moon Life Concept Store, a collaboration with the European Space Agency. In the store, she sold objects made by designers, architects, and artists that imagined the terraforming and habitation of the moon. One of the projects was a 3D printer for moon dust, created by artist John Lonsdale to make buildings with.

This idea was recently picked up by architecture firm Foster & Partners, and it looks like it will be turned into a prototype.

A new generation of designers and architects is being trained for the new normal of zero G design, microenvironments, and orbital architecture. The first civilians are already experiencing weightlessness, and space tourism is expected to be a \$1 billion industry over the next 10 years. It is only a matter of years before we will all be able to afford a ride into space or take a one-way ticket to the moon to retire. But just please be careful with the UNESCO Lunar Heritage Sites of the Apollo missions.

Space is the place again. Nobody knows exactly what this journey will bring us this time. The cynics will see a hyper-capitalist colonization of our galaxy, the romantics a going where nobody has gone before. I will follow these developments with heightened curiosity and critical enthusiasm, always remembering the words of Richard Feynman: "For a successful technology, reality must take precedence over public relations, for nature cannot be fooled."

## Facing Backward: Images from the Future

Patricia Pisters

The television series *Flash Forward* (ABC, 2009) is based on Robert Sawyer's science fiction novel with the same title.<sup>1</sup> The main

character is a scientist who works at CERN in Switzerland, where the Large Hadron Collider accelerator is performing a run to search for the Higgs boson. While the discovery of this mysterious particle was on the front pages of the newspapers in 2012, the experiment in the fictional versions has the side effect of a global blackout during which everybody on earth has a flash forward, being confronted with an image from their future. In a popular and narrative way, the show examines the question of what it entails to live and act from a vision of the future. Some fear their vision will come true, others fear it won't. But everybody acts on the uncertainty of the speculative image they have seen on their brain-screen.

Everywhere in culture, we have noticed a shift to this future perspective. From telomere testing to determining at what age we will die to preemptive wars, from highly speculative stock markets to profiling to detecting potential criminal behavior, our culture speaks from an image or idea of the future. *Flash Forward* is both a symptom and a popular form of critique of this obsession with the future. But this future is not so much a "facing forward" from the present to the future, but a "facing backward" from the future to the present (and past). This has everything to do with digital screen culture at large but is possible to understand philosophically with the help of Gilles Deleuze's philosophy of time that he develops in *Difference and Repetition* (the French original appeared in 1968).<sup>2</sup> Put very concisely, Deleuze conceives time as various contractions of differences and repetitions on our brain-screens. In the first contraction, or the first synthesis of time that forms the basis of our temporal experience, we experience time from the perspective of the present. On the basis of

repeated actions in the present, we recall and anticipate, and hence develop sensory-motor and habitual behavior. The first synthesis of time is a stretch of the living present, in which the future is based on habits we have learned to embody automatically. Making a big leap to image culture, it is possible to argue (which I do more elaborately elsewhere) that this first synthesis of time is also the type of future that is characteristic of pre-war classical (Hollywood) cinema, in which the living present is the dominant temporal mode, and the future depends on habitual expectations of anticipated behavior, often related to genre expectations. Or the future is just relegated to what happens after the film ends: "happily ever after".

The second version of the future in *Difference and Repetition* is a future based on the past, which is the second type of temporal contraction. In the second synthesis of time, memory, as the virtual coexistence of all the layers and sheets of the past, gains more importance. This is the grounding of time in the past, which starts to speak for itself, sometimes at unexpected moments. Post-war European cinema expresses this new temporal form, in which the past provides the basis for the present and the future. The narrative logic of Alain Resnais and Marguerite Duras' *Hiroshima Mon Amour* (1959), for instance, is based on this second temporal synthesis. Images of the famous love affair of a French woman and a Japanese man in Hiroshima soon starts to mingle with images of her past traumatic love affair with a German soldier as well as the collective traumas of the war and the atrocities of the atomic bomb attack. All levels of the past co-exist, as they begin to speak for themselves in the film. The present is no longer (or not only) a stretch of the living present,

but a culmination point of all pasts: “I saw everything,” the French woman claims in the film, which nevertheless is impossible: “You saw nothing,” the Japanese man argues. When the second synthesis is the dominant contraction of time, we also get a different conception of the future, which is now conceived from the past as well; based on the cycle of remembering and forgetting, on the model of the past, things will happen again. Both on a collective scale, when in voice-over we hear “it will happen again — 20,000 deaths — the asphalt will burn again”, and on an individual scale, when the man says: “In a few years, when I have forgotten you, I will remember you as the symbol of love’s forgetfulness, I’ll think of this story as the horror of forgetting.” The second version of the future takes the past as its cyclical model. It grounds the future with cyclic certainty.

Let me now conclude with a glimpse from the third form of temporal synthesis, in which the future becomes the grounding of time — or better the *ungrounding* of time. Because when we speak from the future, there is no longer cyclic certainty but always a speculative element. The future will happen, of course. However, *how* it will happen becomes an open and speculative question in multiple variations. In films such as *Minority Report* (Steven Spielberg, 2002), *Mr. Nobody* (Jaco van Dormael, 2009), *Inception* (Christopher Nolan, 2010), and *Source Code* (Duncan Jones, 2011), we can see what happens in contemporary digital screen culture when this third option becomes the dominant temporal color.<sup>3</sup> In its speculative dimension the future unfolds in parallel options, multiple remixes, and recombinations that are presented as possible variations of this time to come: a phenomenon connected to the context of a digital remixable database culture, which acts

not as a cause but certainly as a co-constituent of this type of storytelling that departs from this third temporal form.

In the field of the visual arts, the future can become the speculative mode of “narration” as well. In *After Hiroshima Mon Amour*, a video installation by Silvia Kolbowski (2008), the artist testifies in a different mode to such a perspective from the future. While the subtitles in the video work recall *Hiroshima Mon Amour*, the images themselves speak about future war traumas and disasters (Iraq and Katrina specifically, but more traumas are implied). And so these images, many taken from the Internet, recall from a future perspective the past of *Hiroshima Mon Amour*. The French-Japanese couple is multiplied and played by many different actors of various ethnicities, race, and gender. The original soundtrack is remixed and relayed. All this adds a speculative dimension to the images and sounds, which start to mingle, mix, and eternally circulate as possible images from the future. They are unsettling images that, depending on the flash forwards on our brain-screens, ask for our action in the present, “facing backward from the future”.

1  
Robert J. Sawyer, *Flashforward* (New York: Tom Doherty Associates, 1999).

2  
Gilles Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition*, trans. Paul Patton (London: Continuum, 2004).

3  
For a more detailed analysis of such examples, see Patricia Pisters, *The Neuro-Image: A Deleuzian Film-Philosophy of Digital Screen Culture* (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 2012).





Alain Resnais, still from *Hiroshima Mon Amour*, 1959, film, 90"



Silvia Kolbowski, still from *After Hiroshima Mon Amour*, 2008, video/16mm b+w film, 22"14',  
courtesy of the artist



# The YBAs Are Dead. Long Live the YBAs!

Timotheus Vermeulen

As the public says its goodbyes to a group of aging British artists formerly known as the Young British Artists (YBAs), the art world welcomes another bunch of youthful artists who live in another place that begins with the letter B: the Young Berlin Artists. While Hirst's retrospective at the Tate is being compared to a "heist" (Hari Kunzru in *The Guardian*) and a "con" (Julian Spalding in *The Independent*), the shows of young, Berlin-based artists such as Sejla Kamerić, Cyprien Gaillard, Nina Canell, Ragnar Kjartansson, and Mariechen Danz [fig. 1. Mariechen Danz, *Book 1 (Unlearning)*.] mixed media 2012. © the artist, courtesy Galerie Tanja Wagner, Berlin] have attracted much more sympathetic terms. So how did the B in YBA come to stand not for Britain but for Berlin?

When the Young British Artists emerged onto the scene in the early 1990s, the world was a different place. Francis Fukuyama had just convinced everyone that with the fall of the Berlin Wall, History had come to an end. It heralded an era, or so it seemed from a Western perspective, of global peace, liberal democracy, and political compromise, of market capitalism, the middle class, and New Labour — a time where economic incentives were high and political stakes low.

In the process, art seemed to have lost its transformative power. After all, if His-

tory had ended, if humankind had fulfilled its potential, what was there to transform? The YBAs no longer sought to show us what we could be but rather what had become of us: frivolous players in a hedonist game in which we had everything to win and nothing to lose. Except, perhaps, our morality. But who cared, right?

Yet, in today's world, playing these games no longer seems fun. It seems decadent. Fiddling with diamonds when hundreds of thousands are unemployed and struggling to make ends meet is nothing less than the postmodernist's take on pulling a Marie-Antoinette (that thing with the cake, remember!). "Sarcasm, parody, absurdism and irony are great ways to strip off stuff's mask and show the unpleasant reality behind it", the novelist David Foster Wallace wrote. "The problem is that once the rules of art are debunked, and once the unpleasant realities the irony diagnoses are revealed and diagnosed, 'then' what do we do?"<sup>1</sup> History has restarted (which Robin van den Akker and I have elsewhere described as the transition from a postmodern to a metamodern culture)<sup>2</sup> — the arts, too, have to make a new beginning.

Reviewing the fairs and shows in the 2000s, it appears that art's answer to the question of Foster Wallace is to create new rules and imagine alternative realities. An artist like David Thorpe (one of the new YBAs' predecessors) recycles what is left of the former vestiges of high art, pop culture, folklore, and mythology after years of postmodern deconstruction to reconstruct alternative communities [(fig. 2. David Thorpe, *The Colonist*. Mixed Media Collage 2004. © the artist, courtesy Maureen Paley, London).] Kjartansson repeats the disillusioned sentence "sorrow conquers happiness" for such a long time that it almost becomes a mantra inspiring hope

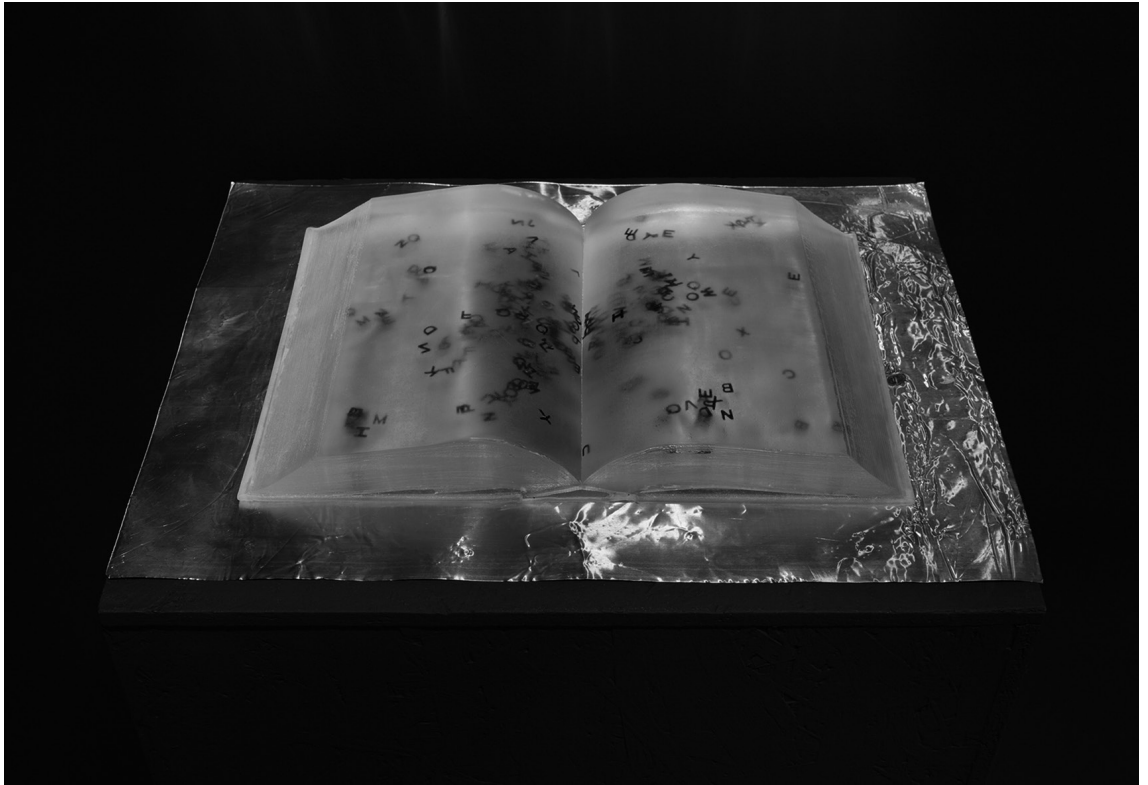


Fig. 1. Mariechen Danz, *Book 1 (Unlearning)*, 2012, mixed media, courtesy of the artist and Gallery Tanja Wagner

that, one day, things will be different. In times of crisis, what the world needs are not simply analyses of what went wrong, but also solutions for how to make it better (if these “solutions” will in fact improve anything at all is, of course, another question altogether).

What is important to understand about the projects of the new YBAs is that they are not without irony — on the contrary. These artists have been raised on irony. Skepticism is their natural diet. Distrust is what their stomach is accustomed to. Indeed, there will still be few artists today who can oppress a smile when speaking about love and peace. And it seems unlikely that there is anyone under forty who can say with a straight face that something is

absolutely and unequivocally true. So when Thorpe says that he believes in a utopic community, he knows very well that utopias are exactly what their name suggests they are: places (topia) that do not exist (u). His worlds are cut and pasted from precisely those styles and materials that have proven disastrous in the past: new ageism, religious sectarianism, orientalism, German Romanticism, and the imagery of the American frontier. Similarly, Kjartansson realizes that there is no hope in tragedy. However often he repeats the line “sorrow conquers happiness”, its meaning won’t change.

The thing that differentiates these artists from their British predecessors is that they *try in spite of*, constructing new rules and alternative realities against all odds. To

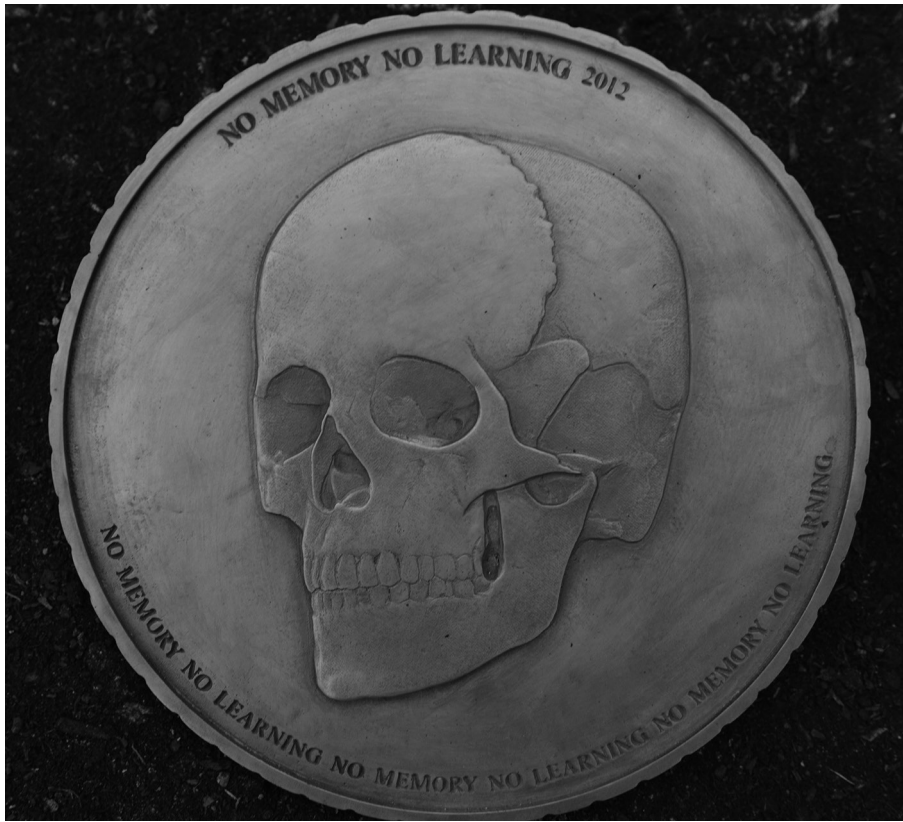


Fig. 3. Mariechen Danz, *Coin (Skull)*, 2013, bronze coin with stamping, courtesy of the artist and Gallery Tanja Wagner

be hopeful and sincere for them is not a natural quality but a choice, a performance you know might be impossible to put on forever, but you try and maintain as long as you can. After a generation often described as indifferent, the new YBAs engage themselves anew with the events, people, things around them; and after a generation described as consumerist, they anew begin to produce. As the world changes, so do the artists.

I began my argument by asking how the B in YBA came to stand for Berlin of all places, so it seems pertinent to finish it by attempting to give an answer. To some extent, Berlin is simply the toponym for a

much larger sensibility. Not all of the new YBAs live in Berlin, after all. Many do, however, attracted by cheap rents, massive spaces, and a high quality of life. But certainly not all. Andy Holden, for instance, lives in London, while the Libanese-American artist Annabel Daou lives in New York. Dutch artist Guido van der Werve apparently lives in a small town in Finland. The YBAs further live in Bombay and Beirut and Sao Paulo. Indeed, like the "British" in the old YBAs, the "Berlin" in the new YBAs should perhaps be understood as a genius more than a locus, a spirit more than a place. Berlin, passing between west and east, bankrupt but belligerent, hyped and

increasingly unpopular, laid back and driven, sprawling, chaotic even, and still coherent, represents more than any other place right now the sensibility of *trying in spite of*, of being one thing but always already being many others. It is a city that is always on the verge of something it will never become. As are the projects its artists are engaged in. To *try in spite of*: that, to me, appears to be the present of the future.

1

David Foster Wallace, in an interview with Larry McCaffery, in "A Conversation with David Foster Wallace," *The Review of Contemporary Fiction*, vol. 13 (Summer 1993): 147.

2

See Timotheus Vermeulen and Robin van den Akker, "Notes on Metamodernism", *Journal of Aesthetics and Culture*, vol. 2 (2010): 1-14.



Fig. 2. David Thorpe, *The Colonist*, 2004, mixed media collage, courtesy of Maureen Paley Gallery



# Democratization and the Internet

Hassnae Bouazza

When the first demonstrations began in Tunisia, people were surprised. When the popular protest continued and spread out to neighboring countries, people here in the West simply couldn't believe their eyes. Was this actually happening? Were those people who we, here in the West, only associate with radicalism, oppression, and violence actually protesting for reforms, democracy, and freedom?

People were baffled. They never would have guessed. I must admit, I never expected Tunisia to be the first country to topple its dictator, but I knew there was unrest. I knew there were very exciting developments going on in the Arab region. Not because I'm a clairvoyant or because I saw it in my crystal ball, but simply because I had been following the developments in that region. Small developments. Little newsworthy happenings that didn't make it to the news, discussions between people, programs on television, and much more. You see, I believe that if you want to understand the present and anticipate the future, you have to zoom in. Leave the bigger picture aside for a moment and focus on the details, on the smaller movements and sentiments that can be found near the ground, among the people, and also focus on technological developments.

In Holland, people still have the tendency to dismiss sentiments and views expressed on the Internet: they don't take it seriously and think that the radical right-wing

ideas that can be found on the Internet are a marginal phenomenon. Recent Dutch history proves them wrong: the right-wing party PVV entered Parliament with a staggering 24 seats out of 150. And that's not all: the ideas, theories, and typical expressions that are vented on particular right-wing websites were echoed by that same PVV in Parliament. The crazy proposals and ideas launched by the party's leader Geert Wilders were first put forward on peripheral websites no one took seriously. The influence of so-called marginal websites is much bigger than many people would like to believe.

I don't think the Dutch example is an exception. I think this holds true for other countries as well. Social media and the Internet have brought about a democratization of the media, and they have become a means for people to communicate directly with politicians and prominent people, and to express their views honestly and relatively safely. Very often a bit too honest and vulgar, which is quite depressing, but honest nonetheless. If you observe people, you see that those who operate anonymously really let themselves go. This is one reason why people tend to not take them seriously — the views are so absurd at times, like caricatures.

But beware! They are real, or at the very least a reflection of real sentiments, and they are often the start of radicalization, which can spread. And thanks to the new media, these sentiments are shared instantly and on a massive scale. I firmly believe that this is a global development: the power of citizens will grow and the power of governments will no longer be self-evident. There will be political and social fragmentation and the role of the new media will be increasingly influential.

Take for instance Egypt, where the outcome of democratic pre-elections an-

gered one group in society, which went out and expressed its anger in a violent way by burning the headquarters of a presidential candidate. Everybody wants matters to go his way. Consensus at times seems almost a taboo. International coalitions will be forged (they already are), albeit online, and the new world order may not be as unambiguous. Interesting and restless times lie ahead that will challenge powers, truths, and prejudices. If you want to stay ahead of the game, focus, zoom in, and be prepared for unsettling observations.

## Text Me This Picture

Melissa Gronlund

My thinking about the future centers on the use of images and, thinking outwards from that, on the changes that such a theorization of the image implies. Does twentieth-century thinking about the photograph still hold?

Throughout the last century, theories of the images were roughly predicated on three things, which were all interwoven with each other: the indexicality of the image, its truth quotient as a privileged window into the past, and its direct relation to memory. The indexicality of the image derives from C. S. Peirce's typology of images as the symbol, icon, and index. A symbol is an image linked arbitrarily to what it signifies (a horizontal bar to signify no entry); an icon visually represents what is signified (a drawing of a tree); while the index is formed by physical connection to its refer-

ent (a footprint, the veil of Veronica). Because the photograph is formed by light rays hitting celluloid film stock, the photograph is indexical: what stood before it must have been there for the image to be produced. In Roland Barthes's famous formulation, it is ultimate proof that *ça a été*.<sup>1</sup>

The materiality of the image is intimately related to the ways that it has been thought about and used, both in an everyday context and in an art context. The conflation between what is represented in the image and the image itself, for example, means that we store images carefully — in boxes or albums; labelled; fingered only at the corners — and that we uphold the taboo against burning or tearing images. Photojournalism relies on the truth quotient of indexicality. The fact that this truth quotient is perpetually challenged shows also how durable this perception is. In an art context, works using the archive format, such as Gerhard Richter's *Atlas* (1962-present) or Hanne Darboven's *Kulturgeschichte 1880-1983* (1983), posited the photograph as a privileged — though untrustworthy — steward of memory to create their phenomenological installations or compendiums of found imagery that promise a route to the past, but always threaten to overwhelm the viewer's ability to make sense of it, by sheer dint of the amount of images around us. The viewer, recalling Kracauer's formulation that photographs 'sweep away the dams of memory',<sup>2</sup> is lost among these signifiers of the past.

What happens, though, when images lose their material support? What percentage of images taken today are printed out? Images are now uploaded to social networking sites or aggregating sites like Flickr. They are texted or emailed from friend to friend. They are stored on smartphones and flipped through. Where will all these

images end up? Will we have stacks of hard drives in closets and basements? And how must our thinking change about photographs, if they no longer have the material support that was so key to thinking about the image over the past 100 odd years?<sup>3</sup>

I imagine that, in the future, images will be used less as fetishized memory objects but more as a means of communication. In an interview with Trevor Paglen, Julian Stallabrass mentions how, when on holiday, one photographs the Arc de Triomphe not to have an image of it but as a performance of holiday-making: that is, a ritual, a means of connecting to the social.<sup>4</sup> When people participate in memes — like that of food on top of pets' heads, to take one egregious example — they take images only to take part in this eccentric, of-the-moment fad, to participate in a wider collectivity. When one thinks of the jealousy with which Barthes guarded the image of his mother in the Winter Garden in *Camera Lucida*, and the privacy of the moments of looking through photograph albums — what Barthes elsewhere discussed as the private scansion related to photography<sup>5</sup> — this outward orientation suggests a further shift in our relation to the image. But if our Western use of the image has already changed, what is lacking are ways of thinking through this communicative, social aspect that makes images into phenomena, seen above all relationally.

But does the future agree with me? I teach at the Ruskin, the school of art at Oxford University, and workshopped these ideas with the students. Instead of being interested in the image as communication, however, all they wanted to talk about was 3D printers — so we were back with the object after all.

1

Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida* trans. Richard Howard (London: Vintage, 2000), p.76 et passim.

2

Siegfried Kracauer, 'Photography', in *The Mass Ornament* ed. and trans. Thomas Y. Levin (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1995).

3

Hito Steyerl has critiqued the idea that the digital image is immaterial: she underlines the weight of a jpg file, for example, or the fact that infinitely reproducible digital films and images still exist within a reality — crackdowns on pirated DVDs, she notes, cause riots in Malaysia, where they are a major export of the economy. See, for example, her film *In Free Fall* (2010).

4

Julian Stallabrass, 'Negative Dialectics in the Google Era: A Conversation with Trevor Paglan', October, vol. 138 (Fall 2011): 3.

5

Roland Barthes, 'The Third Meaning,' in *Image — Music — Text* trans. Stephen Heath (London: Fontana Press, 1977), 66-67.

## For Whom Are We Working?

Matthijs de Bruijne<sup>1</sup>

During the 2012 *Marches of Respect* by Dutch cleaners, the people at the front of the marches were often the same. Leyni, Laura, Hassan, Thijs — these are a few of their names. These cleaners walked through the cold to demand respect. As in 2010, they were on strike, because they had become aware that social dialogue in the current conditions of Dutch society does not earn you better working conditions.



Taken from the website “Look at my fucking red trousers”, <http://lookatmyfuckingredtrousers.blogspot.co.uk/>

The strike action began on January 2, 2012, and lasted for 105 days, eventually resulting in an improved contrast. More importantly, it resulted in a broader awareness about the possibility of collective action, a movement to collectively improve our reality. The images make it clear: what we see here is not the Netherlands of the so-called elite but in fact a new, transformed working class — mostly migrants, working under the oddest of labor con-

tracts, and of course for a minimum wage. And I, as an artist, I am working for them.

Is it possible to find worse conditions of labor in the Netherlands than those of the cleaners? Yes it is. One example: Dutch art institutes these days more often than not decide to use interns for assistant jobs — interns who often end up doing the work of a dismissed paid employee. The only difference is in the income: the intern will be mostly unpaid. So the awful labor con-



ditions that Dutch cleaners deal with are not singular and unique. Since their introduction in the 1990s, our entire society has been transformed through neoliberal ideas of management. In the cleaning sector, we saw the emergence of outsourced cleaning companies competing on the free market to obtain cleaning contracts for this or that “object”. The rates for cleaning work started to decline, and for the individual cleaner, this meant more work in less time. An increased workload results in the things we see: dirty trains, filthy toilets in offices.

In the arts, the neoliberal rules implied that we had to start worrying about our career, to make that the final object of our activity. We had to get our names known. We became our own brands and had to look out for our own interests. We were artistic individuals, entrepreneurs. Art as a space for reflection and thought-that-acts were removed from the center stage. The idea that art could contribute to change disappeared completely. Of course, there were still people interested in socially engaged art — thinkers such as Rancière could expect our applause — but their critical thoughts ended up being neutralized, reduced to being nothing more than the themes and topics of art institutions. Socially engaged art became socially isolated art. Leftist formalism, as the Russians have a way of expressing it.

The process of individualization has had a great impact on our lives. We have got the “must try harder and harder” ethos. More than ever, we have become each other’s rivals; competition has become a normal form of contact. And the more we focus on our own individual career, the more we isolate ourselves from society. We are shooting for the international art world, whose standards and units of measurement were clearly not anchored in our own environ-

ments. The public can no longer read the language we produce.

The last couple of years, it has become fairly clear that we artists have more in common with these cleaners than we would like to admit. We work in a low-paid sector. We are filling up the gaps left by a government in retreat. We are working for city marketeers and project managers, and realize the investments of advertising agents. We are creating cultural legitimacy for collectors, social legitimacy for authoritarian public officials, or a social profile for the daughter of an Argentinian criminal. These things offer us status, but we are working for nothing. And in the competitive economy, the individual has only himself to blame if something goes wrong. At present, we artists and cultural workers do not sufficiently analyze our own working conditions.

In 2011, the conservative liberals in the Dutch government, enabled by their right-wing populist support, decided that the special social status of the artist should come to an end. They determined that the system of benefits for these “parasites” would have to change and that from now on, it would be the market that would decide which art was good and which was bad. On the cover of the national newspaper *NRC Next* (often associated with a liberal ideology), one could read: “Finally, less art” (*NRC Next*, 22-06-2011). We had been betrayed by our liberal friends who, for such a long time, had allowed us to work autonomously. We artists went out onto the streets to protest. And very quickly we found out how hard it was for us to organize ourselves, to form a counterpower. And we discovered we were so internationally oriented that we no longer knew how to communicate with the people who lived next door. How then explain to them what our goals were, or why we think people need art?



Matthijs de Bruijne, *Mars van Respect (Maastricht)*, 2012, photograph, courtesy of the author

Leyni, Laura, Hassan, Thijs — these cleaners need art. They want to hear stories, they want to think. Their work is dull and the conditions numbing, and recovery only comes through new experiences and perspectives. While they are expected to be rather conservative in political terms, they have asked me to work for them, to join their fight and to invent a new imagery, a new language to talk about their reality in order to change it. And they will pay for that. This was a simple choice: do you want to continue to do low-paid work for a group of people that is betraying you time after time ?

I am not saying that in the future we will only be working outside of the art world. I only mean to suggest that we have to think about who we want to work for. We have to reconnect the critical with the practical, to reconnect our practice with the people around us, in and outside the

institutes. The time has come to collectively start moving outside of our same circles. And for those whose career dream has not yet evaporated, there is this slogan coined by the Precarious Workers Brigade: “The carrot you were promised has gone off.”

1  
Translation: Thijs Vissia.

2  
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The Precarious Workers Brigade  
<http://precariousworkersbrigade.tumblr.com/texts>

# Guide to a Better Internet

Conversation between Smári McCarthy  
and Metahaven's Vinca Krukand  
Daniel van der Velden<sup>1</sup>

## I

Does the 'internet / online life / network technology' offer us everything we might have hoped for at the point of its conception? (words in '...' are fully interchangeable with the term you'd most like to use).

Smári: At the point of its conception, any idea, any technology always has two sides: untapped potential and unharnessable hype. What the inventors of the various technologies that make up the Internet as we now know and love it were thinking is anyone's guess — ranging, probably, from techno-utopianism down to analytical pragmatism. The reason we keep being fascinated and empowered by the Internet almost forty years after the invention of the Internet Protocol is that, regardless of the hype, we still keep coming up with new and exciting ways of using the Internet to do stuff that was either impossible or at least very complicated to do before. Almost every aspect of human life is now mediated in some way through digital technologies. They've become ubiquitous to the point of vanishing. Even things that were previously not Internet are now Internet: televisions, radios,

phones, and even books. Coffee machines are starting to brew when they receive text messages. People are converting Roombas into telepresence robots. Soon, glasses, clothing, and pretty much everything else will be points in space where the Internet bleeds through into reality.

What more might we have hoped for?

Daniel & Vinca: So there is a close to infinite number of human or non-human, obedient or rebellious nodes.

Smári: I'm trying to be positive before I become negative.

Daniel & Vinca: If the internet bleeds into all areas of reality, this omnipresence exceeds its mere technical definition as an endless set of nodal points. So even if all objects around you — the buttons on your coat, your cat's food, the light switches in your apartment — become "smart", that poses in an ever bigger way the question "who governs"? Who is to oversee all this smartness and interconnectedness — and how? Who benefits?

Smári: I sometimes like to think of the Internet not so much as a "space" — the term "cyberspace" is really terrible (and only really makes sense to people whose native language is English) — but rather as a surface, where every place on the surface touches our reality in some way. There is no "inside the network" and "outside the network".

Daniel & Vinca: Do you mean it is like a flat earth? Then you might be able to fall off of it rather than be inside or outside of it.

## II

Are we in danger of losing the rights and liberties of using the internet that emerged quite naturally during the early years of its life?

Smári: Yes. Most of those rights and liberties didn't exactly emerge naturally, though; they were simply presupposed by early users of the net. The Mentor put it nicely: "We exist without skin color, without nationality, without religious bias...". Human rights weren't so much emergent as they were simply unavoidable to begin with. This stopped being true at the point in time when governments started to try to inflict moral and legal values onto our communications, such as with the US Communications Decency Act in 1996 (which was thankfully mostly killed by the US Supreme Court). We netizens keep trying to say: "Look, the rule of law is good, but we think it's a fundamentally bad idea to tell people what they can and cannot communicate with each other." Regulation should happen in reality, not on the network.

Daniel & Vinca: Many of the early Internet's dreams and hopes have been re-rendered as threats to the State. The State in turn is in an all-out conflict against shapeless, abstract dangers, some of which are imaginary. An enemy nowadays is dangerous because it has no contour and is asymmetrical to institutions. The internet has no contour — so it is a potential enemy to all powers in need of conflict.

## III

What can we learn as users of the internet from hacker culture? What are the benefits of a completely free exchange of information?

Smári: Hacker culture is all about being able to learn and experience and interact. It takes an "anything goes" approach to altering reality. A hacker is somebody who has read-write-execute permissions on the universe. Within this mindset, there is no right and wrong — such moral judgements are separate from hacker culture, and although hackers might argue heatedly about what is right and wrong, they will all agree that tinkering is a good idea.

A side effect of this is an incredibly liberal attitude towards almost everything. Once you recognize moral relativism for what it is, then we can move forward to do more interesting things than opining at each other, such as working together to build better communities. The free exchange of information is a necessary precondition for this.

## IV

How should human dissent be best encouraged to manifest in an online culture?

Smári: If it's encouraged, it's hardly dissent, is it?

## V

If a new internet could be broadcast across Britain from Sealand, how might it differ? (This might be a trite question.)

Daniel & Vinca: Sealand has been influential in so far as it was a symbol or logo for a certain internet ethic (or a lack thereof). Even a wholly immaterialized information universe can't do without physical and visual manifestations of its presence. To link the Internet to a rusty war platform has instigated a powerful myth — but it is eventually nothing more than that.

Smári: The Internet does not exist in Britain or Sealand or anywhere else. Also, the Internet is not a broadcast medium like radio is.

Daniel & Vinca: Sealand once was a pirate radio station. Then it became a symbol — a ruin — of the future. And post-post, it became a souvenir of itself. There is no way back for it to retrieve its anarchic past.

## VI

Is anonymity a surprisingly human weapon?

Daniel & Vinca: Anonymity and pseudonymity are human rights. The “nom de guerre” and the “nom de plume” are classic weapons of the imagination. Thus they are part of the way humans fight against the inevitable. Masks are necessary and they will always be there. We don't believe in “real name accountability”. People already cheat and lie all the time, and they get away with it. You can be Dick Cheney, operate under your “real name”, and no one holds you to account. The notion of real name accountability pretends to be inspired by people taking better care of their reputation, but it actually fulfills all the needs of an administrative bureaucracy.

Smári: There's nothing surprising about wanting privacy. It is very human to want to be able to do certain things without scrutiny from moral superiors. This is why the young people left the farms to go to the cities — it's impossible to become an adult under adult supervision.

## VII

What are the most urgent struggles we must face up to?

Smári: We have almost no control over our societies, the governance of almost every aspect of our lives has been relegated to centralized authorities that have entirely disjointed value systems from the general public. We need to take the hacker mindset and apply it to our governance. Each person shall be free to tinker, none shall limit the actions of another on the basis of moral superiority.

Daniel & Vinca: Power today is designed to exclude as many people as possible from its operating system, its code. This is not about politicians tweeting. It's about the nature and structure of collective decision-making and self-governance.

## VIII

Is it worth speculating about what a larger, articulate resistance to oppressive online culture might look like, feel like, how it might work?

Smári: Perhaps, but I'm sure we're going to see what that's going to look like sooner rather than later. We're already seeing

a lot of undercurrent, a lot of people becoming increasingly annoyed at the level of manipulation they are subjected to. Eventually there'll be a tsunami of anger over violations of privacy and the right to free speech. Historically, these have happened every century or two, from peasant revolts to the French and American revolutions. Each time, certain important improvements are made to society, but then things go pretty much back to where they were. The Arab Spring looked like it was going to be the harbinger of that transition, but it turns out that organizing a global uprising has become more complex since the days when traversing the world took years, when now anybody on the planet can communicate in milliseconds.

Daniel & Vinca: We are not out to merely change things "online". Politically, the network is not a separate sphere but, indeed, a surface touching and influencing and interacting with all other realities. More centralized control over the Internet limits the collective agency of people who use the network. That is a complicated way to say that the ultimate point of the networked collective is to make changes in reality, and that a more controlled network renders it less capable of doing so. Reforming the OS of power — "taking the hacker mindset and applying it to governance" as Smāri says — is important to do, but we should be mindful that the centralized power that we feel is being exercised over us doesn't in reality have a proper center—it is itself a network, a *Game of Thrones*.

## The Elegance of an Empty Room

Ding Ren

In 1968, Robert Barry said: "*Nothing* seems to be the most potent thing in the world." Seeing the queue being herded to have a peak at Damien Hirst's diamond encrusted skull in the Tate Modern, I could not help but think that this spectacle must be the complete antithesis of Barry's sentiment. Barry was the 1960s, one can wave off, and this is now. Now is a 60-ton British tank turned upside down with former Olympians running atop; now is a giant inflatable Stonehenge inviting an experience of bouncy delight; now is standing in an amusement-park-like queue to see a cow drowned in formaldehyde. Now is the mentality that *bigger is better*, a mentality insinuating that true agency must involve something large and dazzling. This trajectory is unsustainable. Art cannot continue down this path. Life cannot continue down this path.

We are used to over-documentation, categories, histories, and objects. We want to make *things* — big and grand things. There is no room for pause because the push for production is so extreme. As a result, this approach has made silences, nothings, and refusals uncomfortable. Silences are too awkward, nothings are too simple, and refusals are too un-commercial. It is difficult to slow down, take a step back, and realize that it is alright to give it up — to refuse labels, documents, shiny objects, and standing in queues.

As we face the future, we face a confrontation with these silences, nothings,

<sup>1</sup>  
Originally published with *Dazed Digital* / David Dawkins in 2013



and refusals that we are so afraid of. These silences are what John Cage said “we need not fear, but learn to love.” They are what Lee Lozano and Barry both confronted in 1969, Lozano dropping out of the “art world” in the *General Strike Piece* and Barry leaving a gallery empty and shut in the *Closed Gallery Piece*. They are what Dutch counter-culturists Provo proclaimed when they walked the streets of Amsterdam in 1966 with empty banners, since protest slogans were outlawed by the city’s mayor. [Fig. 1]

These past gestures show that a momentary pause from all the fuzzy noise can be collectively accepted. They reveal that a search for quiet simplicity can potentially outweigh a search for sound and fury — that the principle for political and artistic action can be a cohesive denial — a negation that begins by saying ‘no’.

As a confrontation with over-production is looming, more attention should be placed on the potential that lies within silences, refusals, and nothings. True agency cannot exist until we are comfortable with letting things drift towards an ephemeral and undocumented dematerialization. This is because when something is loud, it is giving itself away. The future cannot be viewed in this way; it cannot be shouted, it cannot be forced.

The photograph of myself holding a blank sign in front of the art space W139 in Amsterdam in December 2010 represents a small proclamation of silence, but a proclamation nonetheless. [Fig. 2] As an independent artist, unattached to any institution, I had just moved to Amsterdam from Washington, D.C. I was viewing the protests against the Dutch government’s cuts in expenditure on culture as an outside observer. The act of protesting with empty signs parallels Provo’s march through Am-

sterdam in 1966. Provo’s arrest for their actions implies that it is not what is on the banner that matters, it is not what one can see, not what one can make. Rather, it is the gesture, no matter how small, no matter how silent, that will hold the greatest, elegantly compelling, unfettered potential.

1

Lucy Lippard, *Six Years: The Dematerialization of the Art Object from 1966 to 1972* (Berkeley, California: University of California Press, 1997), 40.

2

Referring to the Damien Hirst retrospective at Tate Modern, London, on view from April 4 to September 9, 2012.

3

*Track and Field*, by Jennifer Allora and Guillermo Calzadilla, American Pavilion, Venice Biennale, 2011.

4

Jeremy Deller’s *Sacrilege at Glasgow Green*, part of the Glasgow International Festival of Visual Arts, April 2012.

5

Damien Hirst, *Mother and Child, Divided*, 1993. Referring to the re-installation view at Tate Modern, London, 2012.

6

John Cage, *Silence: Lectures and Writings* (Middleton, Connecticut: Wesleyan University Press, 1961), 109.

7

An example of silence: on June 18, 2013, performance artist Erdem Gunduz, who became known as the “standing man,” stood silently in Istanbul’s Taksim Square as a reaction to the ban on anti-government demonstrations. Through the course of eight hours, over 300 people joined him in the square, standing silently. A gesture that follows the decision by Turkish Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan to use riot police armed with tear gas and water cannons to end the occupation of nearby Gezi Park. (Karim Talbi, Huffington Post, June 18, 2013)



Fig. 1 Ding Ren, Protest at W139, 2010, photograph, courtesy of the author

Fig. 2 Cor Jaring, *Provo*, 1968, photograph, courtesy of the estate and Stadsarchief Amsterdam



# On News Desks and the Need to Get Lost

Maria Barnas

There is a future of technology, a future of history, a future of catastrophes, of cities and the countryside. But what is the future to me? There is the immediate future: the future of preparing dinner, of deciding what shoes to wear. There is the future of writing this article, which has been on my mind as a pressing destiny — as the worst of deadlines, which seems to claim not only time but also a lot of space in the mind.

I am trying to write this in one go, as on a typewriter, allowing no cut and paste. Following a real-time train of thoughts will hopefully force me to stay in the here and now. Whatever awkwardness arises, it will have to help me get a grip on the passing of seconds, of more seconds, flowing into minutes, the passing time that we can count away. That we can count along to. That we can almost grasp when the next second is about to be counted. I believe this awareness of passing time — one, two, three — is the closest we can get to understanding what the future might be. The future starts after one, two, —

I came across two subjects that seemed relevant: the nature of news desks and the ability to get lost. The latter, reverberating with another kind of future as opposed to the immediate one: the wide and expansive future that is — so we generally choose to believe — awaiting us.

I must confess I have always been a bit wary of imagined futures and those claiming that science fiction might offer a keyhole view to the unknown. To me, science fiction seems more than anything to show the limits of our imagination. Klingon aliens from *Star Trek* wear their brains on the surface, as if our imagination stretched itself to the utmost, in a brave but rather literal attempt at turning what we know inside out.

The boundaries of human fantasy are embodied by baroque aliens — new combinations of existing amphibian species, speaking languages that sound strikingly familiar. The collaged creatures I came across in TV series like *Doctor Who* and *Star Trek* made me sternly focus on the present, which bewildered me enough as it was.

I only came to realize the possibilities of evaluating a wider future than the immediate one when reading *A Field Guide to Getting Lost* (2006), in which author Rebecca Solnit reflects on the human ability and need to lose one's way. The author remembers a time when she, as a child, was allowed to wander off, explore, and at some point find that she was completely lost. She states that children need to experience disorientation in order to learn that they will somehow find their way back: a basic kind of confidence building. Considering the fact that parents follow their children wherever they are made to go, what will become of this generation? Surely, a security-obsessed society will create a fearful, inert type of human being. A type of human that is — disappointingly — a lot like myself, who thinks that the only place we can still properly get lost in is a place and time yet untouched, and enchantingly untouchable: the wide, wild future.

Society's increasing obsession for over-

view, control, and security, has led to a strong craze for the latest news. Looking at the television news, a few characteristics attract my attention. Why are there always people telling me the news? Do news architects really believe we need to see a familiar face to keep our attention? This primitive method must stem from the Middle Ages when the village traveller would get up on his cart and sing and speak of what events he had witnessed. So Sacha de Boer and Moira Stuart appear in our homes day in day out, telling us what happened in the world today. They look us straight in the eye.

News presenters want to get the message across that they are the first to know anything and everything. They are at the top of the ladder in a society in which everything has to be up-to-date, up to the second, in order to be relevant. So much so that media representatives appear to be speaking to us from a time yet to come. They are ahead of us; they have crossed the border of the here and now, right into the future.

Images of unmanned news desks are not easy to come by. Apparently, news networks only want to spread images with speaking torsos in them. Without them, news desk offices are too easily seen for what they are. Sets and decors of a theater piece that refuses to let down its curtains. The architecture that news broadcasters surround themselves with is accommodated to a presence in the future. Their desks are taken straight from futuristic spaceships and *futuresque* rockets. Swishing and swirling desks, as seen on the German ZDF news, underline the fact that these highly evolved species move in a time and place that is well ahead of us mortals eyeing our monitors at home from solid couches.

In these wildly dynamic sets, the screen has a particular role. The screen, generally mostly placed left of the news reader, can be anything from a window to galaxies, planets, the world, worlds, and even connect straight into the latest presence by creating a live connection to anywhere in the world. Its fickle nature varies from a projection screen to a time travelling window and door to another place in the present.

The most ambitious news programs show a window directly overseeing the universe, or something resembling the galaxies, as in Afghanistan. The more modest presenters have a window on the world, as can be seen in Hong Kong and Bangladesh. Sometimes these windows focus on fragments of this world, as in the Netherlands. Some news readers, like Eileen Dunn of RTE news in Dublin, have to make do with a split screen window, or with an amalgamation of sorts, as in Korea.

Costa Rica stays closest to home, presenting a landscape painting as a window to all that is possible, consciously or not putting art in the center of action, as a stage on which the future can take place. The news desk in Costa Rica reminds me of my home, with a sagging plant and a bag of trash that needs to be thrown out. I wouldn't believe a word of the news presented from this place.

Looking at my surroundings, only guessing at what the future might bring and forever dependent on messengers from the future, I have to conclude that I am rambling in the past.



# Future Tech

## AMBER CASE

Amber Case uses the the lens of Cyborg Anthropology to examine the interaction between humans and technology. She is interested in studying the evolution of privacy, security, identity, time and space in the digital age. She is the author of *An Illustrated Dictionary of Cyborg Anthropology* and is currently working on a book on designing *Calm Technology*. Case co-founded Geoloqi, a location-based software company acquired by global mapping company Esri in 2012. That year she was named one of *National Geographic's* Emerging Explorers and *made Inc Magazine's* 30 under 30 with Geoloqi co-founder Aaron Parecki. She spoke at TED on technology and humans and regularly speaks at conferences around the world. Case lives and works in Portland, Oregon. You can follow her on Twitter @caseorganic or at caseorganic.com.

## ANDREW WARNER

Andrew Warner works at The Long Now Foundation in San Francisco, where he produces events & works on public programming. Before joining the non-profit world, he was Senior Content Manager at Ustream.tv. He still moonlights as a Cyborg Anthropologist.

## MANUEL DELANDA

Manuel DeLanda is an artist and philosopher. He is on the faculty and a Professor of Graduate Architecture and Urban Design, GAUD, Pratt Institute. He is the author of seven philosophy books, *War in the Age of Intelligent Machines* (1991), *A Thousand Years of Nonlinear History* (1997), *Intensive Science and Virtual Philosophy* (2002), *A New Philosophy of Society* (2006), *Deleuze: History and Science* (2010), *Philosophy and Simulation* (2011), and *Philosophical Chemistry* (2015).

# Future City

## CHINA MIÉVILLE

China Miéville is the author of several books of fiction, including *The City & the City* (2009), *Embassytown* (2011), and *Three Moments of an Explosion: Stories* (2015), and of non-fiction, including *London's Overthrow* (2012). He lives and works in London.

## REM KOOLHAAS

Rem Koolhaas is a Dutch architect, architectural theorist, urbanist and Professor in Practice of Architecture and Urban Design at the Graduate School of Design at Harvard University. Koolhaas studied at the Architectural Association School of Architecture in London and at Cornell University in Ithaca, New York. Koolhaas is the founding partner of OMA, and of its research-oriented counterpart AMO based in Rotterdam, the Netherlands. In 2005, he co-founded *Volume Magazine* together with Mark Wigley and Ole Bouman. In 2000, Rem Koolhaas won the Pritzker Prize. In 2008, *Time* put him in their top 100 of The World's Most Influential People.

# Future Image

JAMES ELKINS

James Elkins's writing focuses on the history and theory of images in art, science, and nature. Some of his books are exclusively on fine art (*What Painting Is, Why Are Our Pictures Puzzles?*). Others include scientific and non-art images, writing systems, and archaeology (*The Domain of Images, On Pictures and the Words That Fail Them*), and some are about natural history (*How to Use Your Eyes*). His most recent books are *What Photography Is*, written against Roland Barthes's *Camera Lucida*, and *Art Critiques: A Guide*.

JALAL TOUFIC

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. His books, many of which were published by Forthcoming Books, are available for download as PDF files at his website: <http://www.jalaltoufic.com>. He was most recently a participant in the Sharjah Biennial 11, the 9th Shanghai Biennale, *Documenta 13*, *Six Lines of Flight* (San Francisco Museum of Modern Art), and *A History: Art, Architecture, and Design, from the 1980s Until Today* (Centre Pompidou). In 2011, he was a guest of the Artists-in-Berlin Program of the DAAD; and in 2013-2014, he and Anton Vidokle, led Ashkal Alwan's third edition of Home Workspace Program, based in Beirut.

# Future Museum

IWONA BLAZWICK

Iwona Blazwick is Director of the Whitechapel Art Gallery. Most recently Head of Exhibitions and Displays at Tate Modern, she was previously Director of Exhibitions at London's ICA and has worked as an independent curator in Europe and Japan. A critic, art historian, lecturer and broadcaster, she also commissioned contemporary and modern art books for Phaidon Press. She has been on numerous juries including the Turner Prize and the Bagnolet Choreography Award.

HANS BELTING

Hans Belting was co-founder of the School for New Media (Hochschule für Gestaltung) at Karlsruhe, Germany (1992) and professor of art history and media theory (until 2002). He previously held chairs of art history at the Universities of Heidelberg and Munich. He acted as visiting professor at Harvard (1984), Columbia University (1989) and North Western (2004). In 2003, he lectured at the Collège de France at Paris and received an honorary degree from the Courtauld Institute, London. From 2004 to 2007, he became Director of the International Center for Cultural Science (IFK) at Vienna. At present, he is advisor of the project GAM (Global Art and the Museum) at the Center for Art and Media (ZKM), Karlsruhe. He is member of the American Philosophical Society, the American Academy of Arts and Sciences, the Medieval Academy of America and the Academia Europea. He has published numerous seminal books on visual culture.

# Future Freedom

HITO STEYERL

Born in 1966 in Munich, Germany, Berlin-based artist and writer Hito Steyerl is one of the most critically acclaimed artists working in the field of video today. Her work straddles the borders between cinema and fine arts, and between theory and practice, exploring issues of militarization, the role of the media in globalization, and the mass proliferation and dissemination of images and knowledge brought on by digital technologies. The Van Abbe Museum in Eindhoven recently presented her first large-scale mid-career survey show. In 2014, she has had solo exhibitions at both the Art Institute of Chicago and the Institute of Contemporary Art (ICA), London. Her work has been included in the 2013 Venice Biennale and Istanbul Biennial, the 2010 Gwangju and Taipei biennials, the 2008 Shanghai Biennale, *Documenta 12*, Kassel, in 2007 and *Manifesta 5* in 2004. Her book *The Wretched of the Screen*, published by e-flux and the Sternberg Press (2012), has garnered critical attention. Steyerl is a professor of Art and Multimedia at the Berlin University of the Arts.

PAUL CHAN

Paul Chan was born in 1973 and currently lives and works in New York. In April of 2014 the Schaulager in Basel presented *Paul Chan: Selected Works*, a survey exhibition covering works from 2000 to the present. Past institutional solo exhibitions include *My Laws Are My Whores*, The Renaissance Society at the University of Chicago, 2009; *The 7 Lights*, New Museum, New York, 2008 and Serpentine Gallery, London, 2007; *Lights and Drawings*, Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam, 2007; Portikus, Frankfurt, 2006; and Institute of Contemporary Art, Boston, 2005. In 2010 Chan founded Badlands Unlimited, a press that publishes e-books, limited edition paper books, and artist works in digital and print form. Recent publications include *Think Like Clouds*, a collection of the diagrams, notes, and drawings of curator Hans Ulrich Obrist, and *Marcel Duchamp: The Afternoon Interviews*, a 1964 series of interviews between Calvin Tompkins and Duchamp.

# Future History

AMELIA JONES

Amelia Jones, Robert A. Day Professor of Art and Design and Vice Dean of Critical Studies at the University of Southern California, is known as a feminist art historian, a scholar of performance studies, and a curator. Her recent publications include major essays on Marina Abramović (in TDR), books and essays on feminist art and curating [including the edited volume *Feminism and Visual Culture Reader* (new edition 2010)], and on performance art histories. Her book, *Self Image: Technology, Representation, and the Contemporary Subject* (2006) was followed in 2012 by *Seeing Differently: A History and Theory of Identification and the Visual Arts* and her major volume, *Perform Repeat Record: Live Art in History*, co-edited with Adrian Heathfield. Her edited volume *Sexuality was released in 2014 in the Whitechapel "Documents" series. Her new projects address the confluence of "queer," "feminist," and "performance" in relation to the visual arts.*

DAVID SUMMERS

David Summers is Wm. R. Kenan, Jr. Professor of the History of Art in the McIntire Department of Art at the University of Virginia in Charlottesville Virginia. He received his Ph. D. from Yale University in 1969, and is the author of *Michelangelo and the Language of Art* (Princeton University Press, 1981); *The Judgment of Sense. Renaissance Naturalism and the Rise of Aesthetics* (Cambridge University Press, 1987); *Real Spaces. World Art History and the Rise of Western Modernism*, (Phaidon Press, 2003); and *Vision, Reflection, and Desire in Western Painting*, (University of North Carolina Press, 2007). He is currently completing a book manuscript entitled *Pathos, Sympathy, Empathy. Studies in the History of Art and Ideas*. This book will be an examination of the idea of empathy, which occupied an important place in the early theory of the discipline of the history of art; its conclusions will serve to clarify the conceptual foundations of *Real Spaces*, and provide a new basis for the position of the history of art among the humanities.

# Future Future

## JUHA VAN 'T ZELFDE

Juha van 't Zelfde is Artistic Director of Lighthouse in Brighton. He is a DJ, promoter and exhibition maker interested in connecting people through emerging forms of art, music and moving image. He has written articles about the cultural impact of new technologies for *VICE*, *Volume* and *De Volkskrant*. His book *Dread - The Dizziness of Freedom* was published by Valiz in 2013.

## PATRICIA PISTERS

Patricia Pisters is Professor of Film Studies at the Department of Media Studies of the University of Amsterdam and Director of the Amsterdam School of Cultural Analysis (ASCA). She is one of the founding editors of *Necsus: European Journal of Media Studies*. She is program director of the research group Neuroaesthetics and Neurocultures and co-director (with Josef Fruchtl) of the research group Film and Philosophy. Publications include *The Matrix of Visual Culture: Working with Deleuze in Film Theory* (Stanford University Press, 2003) and *Mind the Screen* (ed. with Jaap Kooijman and Wanda Strauven, Amsterdam University Press, 2008). Her latest book is *The Neuro-Image: A Deleuzian Film-Philosophy of Digital Screen Culture* (Stanford University Press, 2012). See for articles, her blog and other information also [www.patriciapisters.com](http://www.patriciapisters.com).

## TIMOTHEUS VERMEULEN

Timotheus Vermeulen is Assistant Professor in Cultural Theory at Radboud University Nijmegen, where he also heads the Centre for New Aesthetics. He is co-founding editor of the academic arts and culture webzine *Notes on Metamodernism*. He is currently completing two books on metamodernism, and writes for a variety of journals and magazines, such as *frieze*.

## HASSNAE BOUAZZA

Hassnae Bouazza is a journalist, translator and television producer. She studied English Language and Culture and the University of Utrecht, and one year of French Literature at the same university. She is widely known in the Netherlands for her insightful and other very witty comments on current events and topics. She writes for *Vrij Nederland*, *Elle*, *NRC Handelsblad* and *De Volkskrant*, and has made guest appearances on numerous radio and television shows. In 2013, her latest book *Arabs Watching: The Daily Revolution* was published.

## MELISSA GRONLUND

Melissa Gronlund is one of the editors of *Afterall journal* and a critic based in London and Abu Dhabi. She has lectured since 2007 at the Ruskin School, Oxford University, and since 2011 on the MRes: Moving Image course at Central Saint Martins. Her writing has appeared in numerous catalogues, journals and magazines such as *e-flux*, *Afterall*, *Artforum*, *Cabinet*, *frieze*, *Sight & Sound* and others. In 2010 and 2011 she helped program the *Experimenta* section of the London Film Festival, with Mark Webber.

## MATTHIJS DE BRUIJNE

Matthijs de Bruijne studied at the Gerrit Rietveld Academie and the Rijksakademie in Amsterdam, and has worked for many years as an artist. In the early 2000s he lived in Argentina and witnessed the economic crisis that also disrupted the country completely on a cultural level. Ever since, a direct relationship between the artist and his environment has become essential for his practice. De Bruijne's multimedia installations are a reflection of research on political realities in Argentina, the Netherlands, China, and elsewhere. De Bruijne's works have been shown in several European and Latin American art institutions as well in independent spaces such as the Culture and Arts Museum of Migrant Workers in Beijing. He lives in Amsterdam and has worked as an artist within the Dutch Cleaners Union for the last four years.

## VINCA KRUK (METAHAVEN)

Daniel van der Velden and Vinca Kruk are the founders of Metahaven, a strategic design studio involved with forward-thinking approaches to branding and identity, operating on the cutting blade between communication, aesthetics, and politics.

## SMÁRI MCCARTHY

Smári McCarthy is software developer, writer, hacker, freedom fighter. He is a board member of IMMI the International Modern Media Institute and co-founder of the Icelandic Pirate Party. Smári works on everything from information security and free software development to infrastructure assessments, general technical consulting, information policy planning, political consulting.

# Editors

## DING REN

Ding Ren was born in China and is based between Washington, DC (US) and Amsterdam (NL). With a field-driven approach, her practice examines cross-cultural patterns at the junction between the foreign and the familiar. Her work has been exhibited at Amsterdams Centrum voor Fotografie (Amsterdam, NL), He Xiangning Art Museum (Shenzhen, CN), Künstlerhaus Dortmund (Dortmund, DE), MICA (Baltimore, MD), Yuchengco Museum (Manila, PH), Transformer (Washington, DC), Upominki (Rotterdam, NL) and the Smithsonian Archives of American Art (Washington, DC), amongst others. Ren has been a Provisions Library Research Fellow (Washington, DC), resident at The Guesthouse (Cork, IE), a shortlist finalist for the Frieze Foundation's Emdash Award and a shortlist finalist for the Sondheim Award (Baltimore, US). She currently teaches photography for the University of Maryland.

## HENDRIK FOLKERTS

Hendrik Folkerts is co-curator of *documenta 14*. He studied Art History at the University of Amsterdam, specializing in contemporary art and theory, feminist practices and performance. From 2010 until 2015, he was Curator of Performance, Film & Discursive Programs at the Stedelijk Museum in Amsterdam. Prior to his position at the Stedelijk Museum, Folkerts was co-ordinator of the Curatorial Program at De Appel arts centre in Amsterdam from 2009 until 2011. He has published in journals and on platforms such as *The Exhibitionist*, *Artforum*, *Metropolis M*, *The Journal for Art and Public Space*, *Afterral Online*, and for the Stedelijk Museum (Bureau) Amsterdam. Folkerts is (co-)editor of *Shadowfiles: Curatorial Education* (Amsterdam: de Appel arts centre, 2013) and *Facing Forward: Art & Theory from a Future Perspective* (Amsterdam: AUP, 2015).

## CHRISTOPH LINDNER

Christoph Lindner is Professor of Media Studies at the University of Amsterdam, where he writes about cities, globalization, visual culture, and creative practices. He is also the founding Director of the Netherlands Institute for Cultural Analysis. His recent books include *Imagining New York City: Literature, Urbanism and the Visual Arts* (Oxford University Press, 2015) and the edited volumes *Inert Cities* (I.B. Tauris, 2014) and *Paris-Amsterdam Underground* (Amsterdam University Press, 2013).

## MARGRIET SCHAVEMAKER

Margriet Schavemaker studied Art History and Philosophy at the University of Amsterdam and defended her Ph.D thesis 'Lonely Images: Language in the Visual Arts of the 1960s' at this university in 2007. After an academic career as lecturer, program coordinator and assistant professor in Art History and Media Studies, she is currently working as curator and head of research & publications at the Stedelijk Museum Amsterdam. Schavemaker writes about contemporary art and theory, organizes discursive events (such as the acclaimed lecture series 'Right about Now: Art and Theory since the 1990s' (2006-2007), 'Now is the Time: Art and Theory in the 21st Century' (2008-2009) and 'Facing Forward. Art and Theory from a Future Perspective' (2011-2102)), curates exhibitions and is invested in exploring the significance of media technology for the cultural field.



