“Souvenirs, Souvenirs...” Note from the Editors

The three forthcoming issues of Manifesta Journal will explore the plural and variegated resonances of “The Politics of Time”, with Rasha Salti as guest editor.

Our editorial note begins with a disclosure: We are well aware that “the politics of time” (and chronopolitics) might be borderline-tired, and that we may be engaging it just inches before it is declared passé—a double entendre on how the contemporary art world fiddles with the notion of timeliness. Neither the urgency of the subject, nor its prescience was our inspiration. Rather, the discourse on the production of knowledge and poetics that has been borne of it has yet to be significantly investigated. In the non-Western world, one of the distinctions of the modern period was the clear separation between the production of knowledge and the production of poetics, where artistic practice unambiguously produced a poetics. Since the formal “conclusion” of modernism, the fields vested with the production of knowledge have either been disabled or rendered defunct, and artistic production has come to be regarded as not merely a poetics but as knowledge. That confusion is at once riveting and loathsome, troubling and enraging. Curators, critics, institutions and other practitioners are just as important as artists in this shift.

“Chronopolitics” addresses, among other things, the anxiety that countries outside the periphery of western hegemony bear toward experiencing and doing—progress, genial discoveries, everything—with delay, or time lag; as if in a sort of “second wave”. One of the principles of canonization in the twentieth century history of modern and contemporary art, written in the West, was pinned on a model embedded in the materialist idea that progress and bliss were intrinsically linked to the development of new technologies, and that those go hand in hand in a linear path. In his germinal book *Time and the Other*, anthropologist Johannes Fabian proposes that “Geopolitics has its ideological foundations in chronopolitics”. Hence chronopolitics is as concerned with half-forgotten modernities as it is entrusted with a decolonizing mission.

“Souvenirs, Souvenirs...”, is conceived as a set of disruptions into a linear construction of time. Each contribution enacts a digression that breaks the progress of straight time, exposing divergence and anachronism, peripheral and deviant views. Our title, “Souvenirs, Souvenirs...”, which betrays an indulgence in a sort of irreverent sentimentalism, is intended as a provocative overture for the novel approaches that investigate (or debunk) how histories are constructed, shared, and turned into collective memories through the subjective experience of events. Moreover, as “around curatorial practices” explicitly directs the journal’s investigations towards process, rather
than post-mortem diagnoses and syntheses or critical readings on the practice, digression is an—uncannily—significant “organizing” principle; both a strategy and a poetic gesture.

Commonly viewed as an absence of, or a straying from, focus; a waste of time and energy, the negative connotations of digression have overshadowed its virtues. It is the unguarded, amiable default mode for breaking the ice of a first encounter. It is also the straying from a conversation’s predetermined path, or its logic, that accidentally or coincidentally unlocks unexamined, unsuspected horizons, answers and possibilities. The accidental, coincidental and happenstance are often the most memorable surprises in a curatorial endeavour. Our seemingly ex-centric (rather than eccentric) conceptualization of the diverse contributions hopes to prompt these situations. Be they olfactory or visual, vivid or fading, secret or widely spread out, “Souvenirs”, as memories, produce a discourse on our present more than on our past.

In his interview with Johannes Fabian, Anselm Franke brings forward the similarity between the art historiography of the non-Western world and Fabian’s notion of “coevalness” that the latter applies to the fields of anthropology. It is both a critique on the Western ethnological gaze and the colonizing ideology that created discourses and distributed knowledge around the places, people, production and spirituality outside the West as if they had belonged to the past. Other contributions in the issue interrogate this discourse by imagining other subjectivities that take on the role of storytellers, or by subverting the tactics through which our subjective capacity for recall produces legitimate documents. That Joana Hadjithomas and Khallil Joreige invent new documents based on the historic events around the 1960s Lebanese space program is just one example. Addressing the relationship between an event and its document, or a document and its audience, Philip Auslander introduces a performative type of document that has been affected, recycled, and whose changes are tracked and visible.

In shifting from print to web, we’ve unbound ourselves from the structural linearity of print in a way that has seemed most fitting for staging digressions, tangents and subtexts. The web invites a radical rethinking of how to reconstruct the experience of an exhibition by curatorially organizing text, image, audio and video materials. Thus the web adaptation of Translated By, curated by Shumon Basar and Charles Arsène-Henry, restages how an exhibition of texts and audio recordings that narrates imaginings of places—cities—by literary authors can come to life virtually. Sam Shalabi’s “Mesh”, a music or sound contribution to the journal’s “Etude” rubric, is also an experimental subjective re-constitution of place.

In the same vein, Radiolab’s “Memory and Forgetting” responds to Shalabi’s exploration of faulty memory using a virtuoso montage that takes us on a sound trip through science’s endeavours to dissect the procedures of memory. The podcast also explores the switch from a reader’s position to a listener’s position within the frame of the magazine, expanding the array of sensorial experiences of the journal’s contents, in addition to provoking porous encounters between different moments in time. Such activity constantly brings us to reassert our position in the present. Embodiment and the body are thus key concepts, as are questions on memory’s place in the body.

Sensations and experiences from the artistic and psychosomatic explorations by Lygia Clark in the 1960s and 1970s expose exactly this point, and can be read about in the second part of Suely Rolnik’s contribution. On the other side of the coin, François Aubart writes comments on dislocation and the transportation of a souvenir, in a situation where the absence of the body has been replaced by the presence of a memory, particularly in relation to the cheesy memories that certain generations share. Finally, the body—through the sense of smell—and its relationship to the past are again brought to the center of the debate by the eminent historian Khaled Fahmy’s “The Essence of Alexandria” which unpacks the ideological constructions of memory within the post-colonial nostalgia for cosmopolitanism. In contrast, the filmmaker Oussama Mohammad vivisects the current repression of the Syrian revolution through the citizen’s resistance weapon—the free circulation of images and videos on the web.

Access to and use of archives in the production of art is neither evenly keeled across the world, nor across fields. How states and institutions erect, preserve and police archives is an important feature of the “politics of time” as well as considerations on “archive fever” and the political implications imparted on the works that use archival material. On that note, filmmaker Rania Stephan’s The Three Disappearances of Soad Hosni, artist Maha Maamoun’s Domestic Tourism II and filmmaker and artist Naeem Mohaiemen’s The Young Man Was (Part I: United Red Army) are three captivating (and award-winning) works made entirely from archival material, plumbed from a wide variety of sources and from various geopolitical origins. Issues with access, copyright, poetries and audiences accompany their reflections.

Emma Smith collected personal memories from a group of curators to build the script of her game “On In + An One”, where readers can re-enact fragments of their practices and experiences. Estefania Peña’s project Loaiza dug into the archives of the once-glorious Carlton Hotel in Beirut and revived the mixture of languages and the poetry of minor events to reconstruct a narrative out of their forgotten voices. The title of her contribution to our “Exhibition Room” rubric, “No Vacancy”, not only refers to the buzzing activity of the hotel itself, but it also evokes a space packed with memories—materialized through stories, documents or objects—that is not so distant from the space of a museum.

As an institution, the role of the museum is to collect, conserve and exhibit objects according to certain narratives that are historically, socially, spatially and politically grounded. The displayed organization of these various missions constitutes both a repository and a representation of collective memory at a given moment in time. Bojana Piškur tackles exactly these issues when she investigates the impact of the successive uses of the building of the new Museum of Contemporary Art Metelkova in Ljubljana on the interaction of individual and collective bodies within the public space.

Expanding the normative power of a performance be captured in an archival document? And how might the body be memorialized in highbrow, hegemonic institutions? In her contribution to the rubric “Projection”, Virginie Bobin’s “Guided Tour” of an imagined museum of performance caustically enquires into museographic practices, staging questions

on the historiography, cataloguing, documentation and archiving of performance art. Impishly provocative and genially communicative, the Collection of the Museum of American Art further unveils the almost Orwellian politics of museographic practices and production of knowledge. With regards to the archival fever that constitutes giant bodies of testimonies of all kinds, performance and conceptual artist Lia Perjovschi has for decades been engaging with the place of the archive within the subjective writing of art history.

Likewise, in her short documentary, The Collector, and in her subsequent award-winning feature Ten to Eleven, filmmaker Pelin Esmer delved into the mystifying universe of Mithat Esmer, her elderly uncle who is obsessed with the mercilessly fleeting passage of time, and who has been collecting everything he has been able to get his hands on since the early years of childhood. This issue’s theme also occasioned a fantastic opportunity to engage with the e-flux founders Julieta Aranda and Anton Vidokle on their captivating, ongoing, and globally-franchising Time/Bank project, rooted in a re-enactment of an initiative by a nineteenth century economist who imagined a regime of economic production and exchange entirely outside capitalism. We wish you a time-enchanted reading experience.

The Architecture of the Anthropological Time

Johannes Fabian’s book *Time and the Other* (1983) is a landmark publication of critical anthropology. Part of the critique of the discipline that emerged during the period of decolonization and the Vietnam War, it analyses a central device in the “making” of the object of anthropology—the Other, identified as temporal distancing. While all ethnographic fieldwork is based on communicative exchange and shared time, it is this dimension of “coevalness” that gets systematically denied in the theoretical discourse of anthropologists, who situate their object in a time different from “ours”.

Anselm Franke: You began doing anthropological fieldwork in 1965 in Katanga, the Shaba region of the Congo, where you studied a contemporary Christian religious movement, the Jamaa, who were followers of the Belgian Missionary Placide Tempels, the author of the considerably influential *Bantu Philosophy*. Can you tell us what you learned about the “object” of ethnographic research back then?

Johannes Fabian: One of the discoveries I made was that a movement such as the Jamaa moves. It doesn’t hold still, whereas most of the research habits or methods that I had heard of, learned about, or considered applying presupposed that you had an object that holds still. It threw me into quite a predicament when I discovered that I had a movement that didn’t have membership rules, that didn’t have a written constitution, whose founder denied being the founder, and whose members insisted that the movement wasn’t a movement. That gave me a jump start on reflecting on what we do when we are doing ethnographic research, what we talk about when we talk about the objects of research, and what is possible and what is impossible in our investigations.

AF: In 1971 you published an article where you report about your research on the Jamaa, but you also raise, for the first time, the issue of time.

JF: Yes, that was called “Language, History, and Anthropology”. The central issue in that article was the question of intersubjectivity. I had these two questions and two theses: What is objectivity in anthropology? Objectivity in anthropology is just that: it is intersubjectivity; and, What is the medium—what are the means that assure us of intersubjectivity? That is language. This was part of what was called critical anthropology, and reflexive anthropology. In this essay, my two major influences at the time came together. On the one hand, it was Habermas’s critique of positivism-pragmatism. On the other hand was a person who was very important in American anthropology, Dell Hymes, who talked about the ethnography of communication, or communication as ethnography. That lead for different reasons to a language-centred approach. I will try to reconstruct how I got from there to *Time and the Other*. Within one or two years or so after writing that essay I was invited to contribute to a volume on death in American experience. For a very young man like me at the time, to write in the company of Talcott Parsons and other
luminaries was an important invitation. My first reflex was to say no, and my second reflex was: I am going to do it, but they are going to regret it. The essay is the first time I spoke about the Other. Not that I wasn't aware of that notion, I had reread German phenomenology, but in anthropological discourse I don't think many people discussed the Other. For the first time also I argued that part of the construction of the Other occurs by making the Other a spectacle. And I used the example of the Roman games where exotic people were put to death by exotic animals while the population watched.

AF: I found it fascinating how far you were taking this argument in 'Time and the Other', by suggesting that there is a connection between spatio-temporal distancing (situating the Other in a geographically remote and a distant time, such as an 'archaic past') and the visual regimes that both make the Other into a spectacle and provide the syntax of order for anthropological knowledge. This idea of the role of visualism in modern and colonial knowledge production and in social relations in general is something that interests me particularly from the perspective of an exhibition-maker, where one often finds these two aspects—spectacle and ordered knowledge—overlapping in uncanny ways.

JF: There was the first inkling of the Eye... which was also a pun: the "I" and the "eye." That was conscious. Then I submitted the abstract for a paper to be delivered at a meeting of the American Anthropologists called "The Eye and the Ear, Root Metaphors of Knowledge". My response was overwhelming (in a small way) and I knew I was on to something. The abstract was written in 1976, and I started writing 'Time and the Other' almost immediately. The manuscript was finished in 1978, but then it took another five years to get it published. It was an attempt to make theoretical sense of what happens during fieldwork, which later led to a frontal attack on my discipline. However, all too often I find that people overlook something that has been very clearly stated: that what I try to understand (and overcome) is a contradiction, not a crime. It is not about what anthropology does wrong. What I wanted to point out was: you guys are contradicting yourselves. And the contradiction is between the practices of empirical research, which demand recognition of what I called coevalness, and a discourse that systematically places those we study in a time different from ours.

AF: This contradiction is framed in terms of practice and theorising respectively, right? In the sense that the practice basically consists of sharing time dialogically, and that this dialogic aspect is later turned into a monologue of "anthropology" speaking about the Other (its object), or in your words, "coeval research" versus the "allochronic interpretation" that occurred later. I am also thinking of the conclusion of the book, where you bring in Marx’s notion of practice and sensuous knowledge, in what I think is an attempt to reconcile that contradiction. You demand from your discipline, and your colleagues, especially those that deem themselves Marxists, to develop a Marxist concept of the practice of ethnography, one that does justice to the relation between knower and known, sensuous engagement and activity.

JF: My own interest in the field, which comes from a different angle, related to the exhibition as a medium and genre. My interest also comes from the constitutive role that primitivism plays in modernist art. Inasmuch as I see your work as a major contribution to the decolonization of the discipline of anthropology, in the artistic-institutional field we have to account for a necessary decolonization of the imaginary, and thus also of canonical art history, and the institution of the exhibition within this larger complex. I am particularly interested in what has happened since the 1984 Primitivism exhibition at the Museum of Modern Art. The critique of this exhibition was crucial to what has happened in the field of art since in terms of content, discourse and internationalization, particularly with regards to the critique of how modern Western institutions created the image of the superiority of the history they represent, and it was formative both for the way critical discourse in the field would deal with the "making of the Other", and also ‘Other’ objects of art. The discourse of primitivism in modern Western culture at large was crafted on the imaginary of an ‘archaic’ past that modernity had broken with and that history, just as every individual, had to overcome or suppress. To my knowledge it was Claude Lévi-Strauss who ended the primitivist age or imaginary in the The Elementary Structures of Kinship, where he deconstructs what he calls ‘archaic illusion’.

JF: Lévi-Strauss’s work had a tragic side. The unmasking of the archaic illusion was the aim but the approach, his style of thinking did not support the effort. In his heart he was right, but in his head he was wrong, in my opinion. That’s why he is also the target of critique in ‘Time and the Other’. I didn’t want to have a confrontation with Lévi-Strauss. He was too big, and it would have distracted from my project. But he has done a great deal for allochronistic discourse, or "time-distancing".

AF: Can you recount for us where the key of the argument is, when you say that Lévi-Strauss’s project of undoing the archaic illusion failed? Where he re-inscribed himself in an ‘allochronic’ discourse as you call it, or even elevated it to a higher level, which I understand is the argument at one point in the book?

JF: What made me distance myself from him starts with two simple questions: how do we know what we say we know? Second, how do we present what we know? There we parted ways right away. If you put your bets on a semiotic, structural theoretical approach—and that’s what I am trying to show in ‘Time and the Other’—you will inevitably finish up with an allochronic discourse; a discourse that puts those whom you talk about in a time other than yours. The first part of my book is a series of exercises, trying to show how this device works in various schools of anthropology of temporal distancing works.

AF: How did this become a political issue for you? Against Lévi-Strauss, you make your anthropological project into an explicitly political one. You always make it clear that there is an aspect of dominion that sparks reflection on the discipline. It’s not just an epistemological interest in
terms of how we come to know what we know, but also of how this comes into application.

**JF:** Whereby Lévi-Strauss was very political—he played a role in UNESCO; he was a public intellectual in France; he “did” politics I have never done—not in Holland, not in the States, and certainly not in Germany. That is simply because I don’t think it is my role. Epistemology as I understand it must include the willingness to justify, or defend, or critically discuss what you call knowledge also in terms of the actual circumstances (personal as well as historical) under which it was or is being produced. Whenever you evoke that context, you are faced with relations of power, certainly in anthropology where the whole field was allowed to be played by the powers. That is not to say that anthropology has to be dismissed as a colonial enterprise. That is a conclusion that may be taken and acted upon, and that is understandable, but it is misguided. It was certainly not what I said in *Time and the Other*, although some of the early critics who read the manuscript for the publishers said just that: if this guy is right, then anthropology is finished. On the contrary, it was either an attempt to show that anthropology is alive, or an attempt to show that anthropology can be kept alive.

Back to epistemology and politics: I want to insist that for me, there is no epistemology outside of a political and historical context. So that is sort of an affinity to Foucault, who has in some ways influenced me or confirmed me in ways that I wasn’t able to express in the manner he did. It is politics in that sense, not in the sense of daily politics.

When anthropology was hit by the postcolonial crisis of the 1960s, it became obvious that colonial times were over. Having been, or having been perceived as, the handmaiden of colonialism, anthropology was in trouble. The reaction of the majority in the discipline was an attempt to put things right ethically. Colonialism was perceived as a problem of ethics. I thought that was totally wrong. The emphasis on epistemology has to be understood in part as a counter move to taking the crisis as an ethical or moral crisis. That is still an issue in my mind. Sometimes I say to my students: look, this is the heritage of the Enlightenment philosophers who knew that a lot of things were wrong in the world and that the two major causes were evil and ignorance. We can’t do much about evil, so let’s fight ignorance. Never mind what colonialism did to our moral standing: what did it do to our minds?—What made us be “out of our minds”? (He laughs).

**AF:** Out of Our Minds is what I wanted to get to as well. Out of Our Minds has always seemed to me an application answering some of the questions left open by *Time and the Other*, in the sense of what a writing of history would mean in which coevalness is retrospectively inserted or done justice to. You take quite a traditional Enlightenment stance, because you are going against the myth machines—but this time it is the myth-making machines of explorers, Western heroes, missionaries, and their deliria.

**JF:** After *Time and the Other*, I was in the situation where American poker players say “put up or shut up”. I tried to put up. There came the series of books that went into history, and reported on the discovery of performance and of material culture in the form of popular painting in Katanga. In all of these endeavours, this notion of coevalness has been central. I don’t write about it, I just try to show what happens when it’s not denied. How can we communicate this when we reflectively talk about it, or when we present the results of our research as knowledge?

**AF:** Wouldn’t it also be a question of how to write not in a monologic way, but to keep the intersubjective or dialogic constitution of knowledge—which coeval also means—, in which one part normally got bracketed out?

**JF:** That’s true. There was a moment in American anthropology when this realisation came, but it led in my opinion to the wrong conclusions: fieldwork is dialogic, therefore the most appropriate literary form of presenting the results of fieldwork is dialogue. That’s a non sequitur in my view. We may choose to document dialogues, but inasmuch as our writings represent the results of processes of knowledge, it’s for me absolutely inescapable, logical, that the beginnings cannot be mirrored by the results. The process transforms. Knowledge is something that is being produced, and by being produced it is being transformed. What was, above all, wrong with calls for writing ethnography dialogically was the assumption that this would guarantee its validity. That is: if you present what you learnt dialogically as a dialogue, you are going to be objective. And that’s a non sequitur, isn’t it?

**AF:** Let me try to understand this correctly. The denial of coevalness is a denial of a certain kind of dialogue.

**JF:** No. The denial of coevalness is a denial of a condition of the production of knowledge.

**AF:** It brackets out a condition.

**JF:** Yes.

**AF:** So the conditions would be somehow...

**JF:** Shared time, intersubjective time, et cetera. These are (or used to be) acknowledged, sometimes theoretically but mostly practically, while fieldwork occurs. Yet they would not affect the discourse that was then built upon that kind of research. It was a discourse that denied its own conditions of possibility.

**AF:** Let me try to draw one analogy, coming from the introduction to *The History of Madness* by Foucault, that has to do with this dialogic versus monologic knowledge in modern disciplines and institutions. In his case he speaks about psychiatry, and he has a poetic way of putting it. There was a moment when modern man ceased to communicate with the mad man and psychiatry started a monologue that had ever since not stopped speaking about him.

I’m trying to see if we can draw a parallel that would allow for some generalization about modern ways of knowing, to which denial of
putting the conditions at stake and asymmetry in the dialogic relation are constitutive, and how this function is covered up by a mythological machine, such as is objectivism. In Foucault’s case it is the description of the monologue that psychiatry establishes on the mad man, whose own language in this moment becomes some code to be deciphered but is not taken seriously anymore... which seems to me to bear some parallel to the question of what coevalness is.

JF: I have always been insecure about that term. It is a fact that I made it up. The adjective ‘coeval’ exists, but coevalness is a constructed term. And it is a term that I’ve never thought of as a stable concept in a stable theory, as it were. It must always be defined contextually. And it’s a fighting term also.

AF: But it brings together contemporaneity and synchronicity, right?

JF: Sort of. In Time and the Other, I talk about why I didn’t choose to speak of synchronicity. While I think and write in English I also think in German. So inevitably I came to Gleichzeitigkeit, and the inevitable next step could have been to think of the ‘denial of coevalness’ in terms of Ernst Bloch’s Unungleichzeitigkeit but I realized that this was not what I meant. The translation I chose for coevalness is Zeitgenossenschaft. The contemporary and the contemporaneous. Synchronicity is not unrelated to it, but synchronicity in the strict physical sense, of physical time, is irrelevant for my argument, because it is an actual given; there is nothing we can do about it. Synchronicity, in the terms of the sociologist Alfred Schütz, who wrote about it in his essay on making music together, however, is interesting since there we come to practice. And in practice, when you talk about time, you have to talk about timing. I learnt a lot about this when I worked with popular theatre and performance. Coevalness is a condition of possibility, but it is also an achievement. It has to be made. It is not given. The same goes for intersubjectivity. Lévi-Strauss’s solution for the problem of intersubjectivity was a classical one: we all have the same brains, therefore we can communicate. Fine. That may be true, but it doesn’t help me as an ethnographer.

AF: You have been breaking quite obviously, at this moment, with language.

JF: No. I think that language remains a central aspect of all cultural practices. There was a distinction made by de Saussure between langage and parole, but de Saussure only made it because he wanted to get to langage. He had to disregard parole. We moved in the opposite direction, from language as system to language as speaking, which meant moving from semiotics to pragmatics, in philosophical terms. The danger of this was that one became single-minded about it. Furthermore, when you do ethnographic work and you communicate about it, the question of documentation arises. I belong to a generation that did not go around with video cameras. We used tape recorders to document conversations and other speech events and when we talked of those documents as texts we meant this literally. When Clifford Geertz said the anthropologist’s work is like reading a text over the shoulder of its informant, this was a metaphorical text; a cultural text. It was a metaphorical use of the term.

AF: Which is opposed to the literal.

JF: Yes. A recent book of mine, based on text documents stored in a virtual archive in the Internet is called Ethnography as Commentary.

AF: To you, what should a historiographic practice look like that has to account for the denial, in the case of Time and the Other—the denial of coevalness, in the political sense of the denial of full subjecthood, rights, etc.?  

JF: A project of mine where I think these questions are raised, but perhaps not answered, was a book called Remembering the Present.

AF: The book with the paintings of Zaire’s history that you encouraged Tshibumba Kanda Matulu to make.

JF: Yes. The paintings are the work of a popular painter, whose project was to paint and narrate the history of his country and who explicitly defined himself as a historian. He produced a double record: one was the paintings he painted, the other the narrative and explanation, which were part of the conversation we had. In the book you can see that the historiographic work is done through confrontation. His pictures confront texts, academic notes and essays confront Tshibumba’s work, and nowhere do I claim to have had the last word. There’s another example, too: a book called History from Below. In that case, there was a document which was a history of the town of Lubumbashi, Elizabethville... as it used to be called, compiled by someone for an organisation of domestic servants. It was called ‘The Vocabulary of Elizabethville’. That was my first experience in confronting popular historiology and historiography. All I can say to the questions you asked is that this approach is confrontational rather than dialogical. Dialogical is a too-irascible term; too peaceful.

AF: Let me try to stay with this for one more round, because it seems to me that it is also something I encounter repeatedly as a figure, as a trope in Time and the Other; a trope which I would sum up as the instant when critique actually ends up. It’s something that you also allude to in the introduction of Out of Our Minds, when you speak about the difficult task that is the historiography of the colonial project, because of the clouds in which the idioms drapes itself, and you suggest that writing a counter-history alone won’t do.

JF: We overcome, but we don’t finish with our adversaries, or dismiss them. We need to fight to survive, intellectually, and often also physically. This doesn’t mean that the outcome of the fight has to be the annihilation of the Other.

AF: Out of Our Minds takes the radical critique of the seventies and the eighties that revealed the colonial machines within the discourse
and practices of Western epistemologies a step further, in terms of what the image of Western “rationality” is, and how it produces itself as a self-fulfilling prophecy, with a lot of magic and mockery involved.

But it seems to me that overall this critique has become somehow marginalized and diluted. It’s about single projects; single figures which carry on certain projects, but the power of the institutions and the machines still clings very much to positivist proceedings… Am I wrong?

JF: Inasmuch as we conceived our critical projects as subversive they did have a certain effect. Right now, to be a die-hard positivist, you have to be out of your mind, and not in the nice sense of it. (They laugh.) The general climate has changed, but I’m very much convinced that, in a way, one of the senses of positivism is this hope that once and for all you can put science and knowledge on firm foundations. That you are busy positively. We’re not. We are subversives. We’ve got an attitude. Anthropology with an Attitude was the title of a collection of my essays. We are negators of certainties, not creators of certainties. We act as if we had certainties; otherwise we wouldn’t be able to do our work. Marx never gave a foundation for anything; he was a mover and he continues to move us. That is an answer to a question you formulated in your letter: How Marxist are we? I learnt thinking from Marx—among others. And that hasn’t changed. One of the research projects I proposed long ago was on language and labour, first on a theoretical level (language and work), and then looked at empirically in the industrial and crafts context of work in Katanga. I did an enormous amount of work, loads of documents and recordings that will never be used. The aim of this project was not to argue that work is a form of communication, which it is, but that communication is a form of work; a sensuous, material transformation of matter, as it were. And those are Marxian concepts.

AF: Can you tell us how this works; how this translates into the idea of the archive and the documents that you are now working on?

JF: The theoretical discovery that I made after I started this archive had to do with the conception of presence. What does it mean to say that an anthropologist is present in the field? I have been talking and thinking about this question for a long time. But what about the virtual presence of the documents on which I must base what I call knowledge? It is a virtual presence not only for the writer but also for the reader. I don’t have illusions that people who read this little book on Ethnography as Commentary will all look the text up in a search engine, but the text is there. That gives a different quality to ethnographic text, and that calls for commentary as a genre of writing ethnography. Of course, commentary is an ancient genre. There is an interesting little book that I cite, The Talmud and the Internet by Jonathan Rosen, who argues that online virtual presence was prefigured by the Talmud. The Talmud has been a text (or actually two texts) surrounded by commentaries. Although they may date from different centuries, the graphic presentation of text surrounded by commentaries makes the two co-present—coeval, if you wish. That is a vision I have of writing ‘ethnography from the virtual archive’—ethnography in the co-presence of its documents.
In the Western world, concepts and experiences of time changed quickly during the last decade of the nineteenth century. Over the course of a very short period, new social developments including industrialization, urbanization, and the spread of new transportation and communication technologies such as the railroad and telegraph made new time-keeping conventions unavoidable. More and more, daily behavior was governed by clocks and watches. The correct time was no longer established only by local convention. Time zones connected faraway places and governed a global, interconnected system. As measured time penetrated into even more domains of cultural life, so did the graphic frameworks of chronography. The coordination of time frames (through technologies such as the marine chronometer and conventions such as international time zones) brought chronographics into play in many new areas. Much has been made of the cultural impact of the first photographs of the earth taken in the 1960s; of the vision of one continuous and connected world that those pictures provided. But already in the nineteenth century, “synchronous maps” showing data readings from different geographical locations taken at the same moment provided something conceptually similar.

Fig. 1: For twenty-first century readers, it is second nature to think of timeliness as scaling smoothly from large to small, from centuries to decades to years, months, days, minutes, and seconds. But for earlier readers, these translations were not so simple. Prior to national and international standardizations of time in the last decades of the nineteenth century, complex correspondence charts—such as Alvin Jewett Johnson’s 1873 “A diagram exhibiting the difference of time between the places shown and Washington”, from Johnson’s New Illustrated Family Atlas of the World—were necessary to establish exact synchronisms across geographical space.

Fig. 2: Francis Galton did pioneering work both in the study of weather and in its mapping. In Meteorographia, or Methods of Mapping the Weather, from 1863, Galton presented a variety of meteorological diagrams including “synchronous charts” such as the one depicted here, indicating weather conditions, barometric pressure, and wind direction at a single historic moment across the geographic space of Europe.

Fig. 3: A board game published in Paris after 1715, the Tableau chronologique de l’histoire universelle en forme de jeu begins in the Year 1 of the World, with Adam, and ends on September 1, 1715, with the accession of Louis XV. Board games of this type became very popular in Europe and England during the nineteenth century. The general rules are printed on the game, and the specific instructions are inscribed over many of the individual spaces on the game board. Players with the bad luck to land on the penultimate year 1714, for example, were instructed to return to the year 1191.

Fig. 4: “Wallis’s New Game of Universal History and Chronology” from 1840 is a hand-colored game sheet divided in twelve and mounted on linen. It has spaces for such events as the first use of paper in England, the invention of engraving, and the discovery of longitude.
Nineteenth century chronographers experimented with every format they could get their hands on. In addition to reference works, they made games and toys and mechanisms of many different kinds. Chronological amusements, such as simple board games in which players rolled dice to race along a historical path, were already popular by the end of the eighteenth century, and with cheaper printing techniques, developing consumer markets, and a growing awareness of the value of visual education, they continued to proliferate in the following century.

In general, early chronological games were fairly straightforward: the usual layout is a continuous spiral, players begin at the outer edge and, by rolling dice or something similar, advance toward the center; or else they begin at the center and do the reverse. Spaces are marked with either dates or notable events such as coronations, battles and treaties. The basic goal is to get to the end of the board first. Race games such as these, of course, could be organized around any theme at all, but the structure of chronology suited them particularly well: chronological subject matter provided a rationale for the linear structure of games, and it gave them an internal tension, as players had opportunities to jump ahead of one another and to leapfrog, like the time traveler of Louis-Sebastien Mercier's 1769 "The Year 2240: A Dream if Ever There Was One", over dangerous and exciting events.1

[...] The nineteenth century American writer Samuel L. Clemens, better known by his pen name, Mark Twain, was fascinated by new technologies. He famously lost his shirt investing in the Paige Compositor—someone else's concept for an automatic typesetting machine—but he also held three patents of his own, none of which brought him such financial heartache: one for a self-adhesive scrapbook, one for an adjustable garment strap, and one from 1885, for a chronology game.

The concept of Twain's game was straightforward: players would name the dates of significant historical events, earning the right to push pins into a field of numbered spaces.2 In response to queries from the United States Patent Office, Twain carefully distinguished his game from other, already patented games. In its response to Mark Twain's first application for his "Memory-Builder", the United States Patent Office asked Twain to distinguish between his game and other extant chronology games, including Victor Klobassa's "Centenary Game", patented in 1875. Twain replied that his and Klobassa's games were not at all alike: his was a game of knowledge; Klobassa's a game of chance.

In his 1899 article, "How to Make History Dates Stick," Mark Twain offered a series of pictographs to aid in memorizing the chronology of the English monarchs. Most were based on linguistic associations: "hen" for Henry, "whale" for William, "steer" for Stephen, and so on. These could then be laid out on a mnemonic timeline reversing at each change of regime. Twain suggested redrawing each cartoon as many times as there were years in a monarch's reign. That, he said, would ink the image indelibly into one's mind.

Fig. 8: Mark Twain, mnemonic cartoons of Edward I, Edward II, and Edward III, from "How to Make History Dates Stick," 1899. Twain writes, "Edward I. That is an editor. He is trying to think of a word. He props his feet on a chair, which is the editor's way; then he can think better. I do not care much for this one; his ears are not alike; still, editor suggests the sound of Edward, and he will do. I could make him better if I had a model, but I made this one from memory. But it is no particular matter; they all look alike anyway. They are conceited and troublesome, and don't pay enough. Edward was the first really English king that had yet occupied the throne. The editor in the picture probably looks just as Edward looked when it was first borne in upon him that this was so. His whole attitude expressed gratification and pride mixed with stupefaction and astonishment."

Fig. 9: Mark Twain, driveway from "How to Make History Dates Stick," Harpers, 1899. Twain proposed marking off a road or path in equal lengths, calling those lengths years, and then posting stakes at key moments. He had done this very thing with his own daughters. Not only did it succeed in overcoming their distaste for chronology, it stuck the dates permanently for Twain himself. He writes, "When I think of the Commonwealth I see a shady little group of these small saplings which we called the oak parlor, when of think of George II, I see him stretching up the hill, part of him occupied by a flight of stone steps... Victoria's reign reached almost to my study door on the first little summit, there's sixteen feet to be added now, I believe that that would carry it to a big pine tree that was shattered by some lightning one summer when it was trying to hit me."
chrono
games, including Victor Klobassa’s “Centenary Game”, the design of which was singled out by the patent inspector as being suspiciously close to Twain’s. But, as Twain argued successfully, the two really had nothing in common beyond the theme of chronology. Klobassa’s patent was for a game of chance with a circular board that involved little more chronology than the display of dates. Twain called it a ‘gambling apparatus’.

In contrast, Twain’s game presupposed ‘a thorough knowledge of history.’ His board contains no historical information: it is a simple chronological template in which each date is equivalent to every other. In this respect, it is a truly modern chronology game. Like Priestley, Twain was fascinated by synchronisms. As Twain says, “One often knows a lot of odds and ends of facts belonging within a certain period but happening in widely separated regions; and as they have no connections with each other, he is apt to fail to notice that they are contemporaneous; but he will notice it when he comes to group them on this game-board. For instance, it will surprise him to notice how many historical acquaintances were walking about the Earth, widely scattered, while Shakespeare lived.”

Twain believed in memorizing lots of dates, but for him the payoff was not just the accumulation of facts, it was creating a skeleton for real knowledge. Twain saw history as a treasury of memorable stories, and he thought that his game would elicit these by a process of suggestion. “The accidental mention of Waterloo” by one player, he writes, may turn loose a process of suggestion. “The accidental mention of the vision of the adversaries the minor features of any other historical event. Points could also be given for stating miscellaneous facts that were unrelated to chronology but interesting and worthwhile to know. Though Twain gave different values to different kinds of facts, he did not mean to suggest that some facts (accessions, battles) were more fundamentally important than others; only that they represented key markers in the chronological landscape. And he designed his game to be winnable on the basis of knowing minor facts as well as major ones. In the hypothetical game scenario that he provides with his rules, the player with more minor facts manages to eke out a victory. The moral: ‘The minor events of history are valuable, although not always showy and picturesque.’ In Twain’s view, both the biggest and the smallest events in history were all potentially dramatic occasions, and, as in his ‘A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur’s Court’, all available for ironic redeployment and juxtaposition. […] Mark Twain, though his board game already represented a new take on the problem of chronographics, continued to puzzle and invent through the 1880s and 1890s. In 1899, fourteen years after he had first published ‘Mark Twain’s Memory-Builder’, Twain wrote a magazine article entirely devoted to the subject. The article, “How To Make History Dates Stick,” brimmed with Twain’s characteristic humor. In it, he bemoaned his own difficulties remembering things, dates above all. Over the years, he said, he had implemented numerous aids and expedients. At one point, when he was having trouble committing a speech to memory, he came up with the idea of writing notes on the tips of his fingers so that he could easily refer to them while he talked. This plan backfired. He remembered the speech but irritated the audience, who had trouble understanding why the esteemed speaker seemed to be gazing idly at his fingernails.

The solution, Twain discovered—or rediscovered, since it is essentially the standard method of classical mnemonics—was to lay down a strong system of visual association and commit that to memory. He began doing this for his speeches—drawing little pictures to help call up a subject, and sometimes in twisted and humorous ways, as for example, when he used a picture of lightning to remind him to talk about San Francisco, since according to Twain, there

2 Samuel L. Clemens to United States Patent Office, 9 October 1884, United States National Archives.
3 Ibid.
4 Mark Twain, Mark Twain’s Memory-Builder, reverse.
5 Ibid.
6 Ibid.
is no lightning in San Francisco—and then applied the method to the tougher subject of chronology. The key to it all, Twain argued, was doing it yourself. It was not enough to use another's system. That could help, no doubt, but to really commit something to memory you had to figure it out for yourself. Twain writes,

Dates are difficult things to acquire; and after they are acquired it is difficult to keep them in the head. But to hold them, you form no pictures, and so they gives the eye no chance to help. Pictures are the thing.8

In his article, Twain gives numerous examples of his own mnemonics; funny combinations of verbal and visual play. For the chronology of English kings, he created pictographs based on alliterations: the Henrys are here, the Stephens are streets, the Williams are whales and the Edwards—feet tipped up on their chairs, pens in hand, and malice in their eyes—are editors.

Twain’s images were crude, but this didn’t matter to him.9 10, 11 The point, he said, was just to be able to remember. Thus, Twain gives us his somewhat mangled impression of Edward III, a literary critic who has pulled out his carving-knife and his tomahawk and is starting after a book which he is going to have for breakfast.12

None of this decoration should be taken to suggest that Twain had thrown out this idea of a pictorial and a cultural approach, a picturing for times to come simply be marked off by ribbons indicating conquests, accessions or other great events.

None of Twain’s inventions were intended as art, and Twain joked heartily about his poor drafting skills.13 If he could do it, anyone could, he said. His idea was to make history visible, touchable, even readable: to make the children in his household see what they might only have otherwise read. Yet, in Twain, as in Jazwinski, Bern, and Peabody, there is a surprising incitement to artistic practice. Not to high art, not to considered aesthetics, but to a kind of tinkerer’s art; doodles in the margins of history.

The following paragraphs have been reproduced from ‘A Tinkerer’s Art’, the sixth chapter of Cartographies of Time, A History of the Timeline, by Daniel Rosenberg and Anthony Grafton (Princeton Architectural Press, 2010) 180–209 Manifesta Journal would like to thank Princeton Architectural Press for their kind permission to publish this excerpt.

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-RFUnvf0mDw Viewable on YouTube, a user-generated website for video sharing, is a recording in which a sampled voice confirms ‘There’s nobody here’. This video does a particularly good job of pointing out the specificities of YouTube as a mode of diffusion. The comments that follow the video, produced by Daniel Lopatin, are also fitting: they note that it, a clip of ‘Lady in Red’ by Chris de Burgh that has simply been slowed down, would make a perfect automated telephone message.

Both here, and there, human presence and expression have been taken care of electronically. There isn’t a body; just a voice, in a continuous loop: the magic of the recording itself, which enables the identical repetition of an absence.

The contrast between the disappeared body and its conserved traces often emerges when one examines the techniques of recording. In a famous passage in Camera Lucida, Roland Barthes explains that just a few days after his mother’s death, he found himself browsing through several photographs of her.1 Though he tells us that he had no hope of “finding” her in the photographs (his quotation marks), he does not take long to admit that a resurrection (again, his term) is possible, even if he recognizes that he cannot hold it onto it for long. Such conflict is bound to confront between a memory and a recording. In fact, none of the photographs provides him with the being that he seeks. The only things that remain are a gesture here, or an arm movement there. This cruel observation leads him to affirm that: “To say, confronted with a certain photograph, ‘that’s almost the way she was’ was more distressing than to say, confronted with another, ‘that’s not the way she was at all’. The almost: love’s dreadful regime, but also the dream’s disappointing status—which is why I hate dreams.”14 The impossibility of a ‘complete’ resurrection is what is most atrocious here; the inescapable disappearance of one’s mother, the memory of whom never manages to fit with the preserved recording. Just a bit further down, after he finally ‘discovers’ his mother in a photograph that had been taken of her inside a conservatory at the age of five, he notes that: ‘For once, photography gave me a sentiment as certain as remembrance’.15 A rare moment it is, when a memory coincides with a recording—painful though the process of its retrieval may be. This is because confrontation with the traces captured by a recording device in comparison with those we have remembered on our own is a frustrating process that only leaves us with a sense of incompleteness. What Barthes deplores is the impossibility of being able to hold on to the instant, and, by extension, the unavoidable passage of time that brings only death, a ceaseless march that neither the photograph nor any other technique can prevent.

It is indeed this struggle against disappearance that guides Barthes in his writing on photography. However, photography’s meetings and resonances are not always incomplete, because “the person represented, the mother or the condemned person, is nonetheless already dead.”16 The recording that halts the passage of time introduces itself as the space of a confrontation between the past and the captured instant, the present of its consultation and

8 Twain, “How to Make History Dates Stick”, 3.
9 Ibid., 11.
10 Ibid., 7.
11 Ibid., 6.
12 Ibid., 66.
13 Ibid., 70.


2 Ibid., 64.
the future that announces its disappearance. Such is the condition of the recording—the terrible happiness of a materialized memory. “For the photograph’s immobility is somehow the result of a perverse confusion between two concepts: the Real and the Live: by attributing that the object has been real, the photograph surreptitiously induces belief that it is alive, because of that delusion which makes us attribute to Reality an absolutely superior, somehow eternal value; but by shifting this reality to the past (“this-has-been”), the photograph suggests that it is already dead. Hence it would be better to say that photography’s inimitable feature (its noeme) is that someone has seen the referent (even if it is a matter of objects) in flesh and blood, or again in person. Photography, moreover, began, historically, as an art of the Person: of identity, of civil status, of what we might call, in all senses of the term, the body’s formality.”

The split between a living body, subjected to the passage of time, and its recorded traces, captured for eternity: here lies the morbid sense of incompleteness from whose fettered ruins melancholia is born. The cause for unrest is the submission of the past to the regime of recording itself; the dictatorship of the machines of reproduction. Seth Price expressed similar considerations in his analysis of sampling, the machines of reproduction. Seth Price expressed similar considerations in his analysis of sampling, the term, the body’s formality”.

According to the author, are the cultural sure points that accompany the practice: “These concerns are often understood to be copyright related, which is to say money motivated, but it is likely that they stem just as much from misgivings about the implications of instrumentalizing human expression.”

If Roland Barthes has remarked, albeit within parentheses, upon the melancholy that photography produces (“I experience this same emotion when I listen to the recorded voices of dead singers”), then Seth Price’s comment on the subject of voices that have been manipulate through sampling is an equally apt one: “The voice becomes a structural element under total control; it is made useful, as opposed to evocative or expressive.” Each of the authors in turn leads us to remark upon changes in, or rather, the evolution of recording techniques. The traces of disappeared and potentially re-suscitated bodies that Barthes identifies are further manipulable by the tools analyzed by Seth Price. Photographs, like compact discs, were previously only able to be consulted, but are now able to be electronically read and used in any way that their viewers see fit.

Yet that is not the least of it—because if as Barthes struggles to find his mother amongst photos that did not resemble his memory of her, and in so doing only managed to see the inevitability of death in the recording, then machines really do not have a soul. For them, traces are just materials. Here, the captured body only evaporates that much more, and the recordings gain independence from their human referents. In the environment for which they were created, they live their own lives in captivity. Such is the post-mortem status within which the body can literally say no more.

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=n3TB_Tx32Q8
Strange enough, in a certain way, the clip of Chris de Burgh’s “Lady in Red” seems to crystallize the transformation of its singer into a recording. Not a new fact of course, as the entire history of pop music was borne of exactly this paradox. That is, the paradox of music as a living, staged event; the shared moment between a performer and his or her audience. Yet, to assure the former of a significant profit, albums are released, allowing fans to relive the eternal instant of the music’s creation: to revel in its each and every unique and identical split second.

Chris de Burgh is onstage in the video clip of “Lady in Red”, but because it was actually filmed in the studio, the constructed, non spontaneous feel of his performance is what stands out most.

Accentuating this transformation of the shared moment into a generic representation that completely lacks peculiarity is the fact that the singing is accompanied by the fleeting, faded images of a woman whom Chris de Burgh is trying to remember. Lacking in personality, the woman’s image is an ideal advertisement. In de Burgh’s efforts to hold such a creature close, it becomes apparent that both the instant and the memory cease to exist outside of their presence as archetypes; signs construct in order to speak to everyone, able to be replayed infinitely. The memories that become engrained there are the exact inverse of what Barthes was looking for in his photos. They are intended to speak to everyone; no one is able to “find” their own history inside them; yet each person is left to project his or her own memories onto the images, similar in fact to the dreams so detested by the semiologist.

Watched on YouTube today, the clip of “Lady in Red” seems to indicate that its author is conscious of the fact that he will never again enjoy a stage presence. His recording signals his death and he is hereafter condemned to haunt the circuits of musical diffusion in a static form. Daniel Lopatin takes advantage of exactly this stasis in “Nobody Here”. The slowed down, near eternity of the loop gives us the impression of dealing not with the resurrection of a Barthesian memory, but with the memory of a recording. This shift is significant. As Simon Reynolds remarked, “Part of the appeal of ‘Nobody Here’ is that listeners accustomed to thinking of Chris de Burgh’s late 1980s chart-topper as putridly sentimental find themselves moved by the desolate yearning in the tiny excerpt that Lopatin zooms in on.” The desolate yearning is likely the noise made by a voice that no longer has a body. Even more, it is the yelp of a sample that has been ripped from its recording.

Chris de Burgh’s voice “under total control”, and having become “useful”, is hereby exploitable by anyone who commands it. Having imposed such a slow speed on the song destroys its nature as a product, and de Burgh is now made to sing for a particular person—the creator of the looped work. In addition to those who remember the original song, now exposed to the referent in its newly released format. First composed of generalities, it is here that recordings take on a personal aspect. If they become memories, they are not the same kind of memories that Barthes speaks of, because they are built upon the use of shared generalities whose modification reinforces the impression of intimacy. We thus witness another manner of conceiving history through YouTube and other media sharing websites. In this version of history, the placement and manipulation of documents is done in such a way that the goal is not to know

8 Ibid. 1
whether or not we recognize something we have lived in them, but rather the opposite—how we will live with these recordings. The body is not even a memory anymore, because no one is looking for its truth or its referent. Instead, the goal is to breathe life into its traces; to breathe meaning into its forms in order to make them our own. We read into them to decide what we might be able to do with them, but not to see what they originally contained. It is by the copy that the recording is both created and circulated.

In that vein, the story that separates Barthes from his mother is no longer applicable. On YouTube, everything is instantaneous; all epochs and periods are flattened onto the surface of a computer to whose screen they can be summoned regardless of their context or perspective. Their relationship to time is free and simultaneous. Trying to go back in history or to rediscover it through its recordings is thus a futile endeavor. The finality of such an environment is not time, signaled by death, which has in any case already happened, but the survival of the recording itself. Resuscitation happens through the consultation, re-use, and recycling that enables (re)existence by other means, by other manners of reading; new forms of power that have been taken up by users.

Recordings, in contrast with bodies, are only “rediscovered” if they are manipulated. Only one risk remains in all of this, however: that the recordings themselves could fall to the wayside and disappear entirely from the habitats in which they have evolved.

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Nc5693ibGd0&feature=watch_response

Rasha Salti

Rasha: Your three projects use existing footage from films (both fiction and non-fiction). Can you describe how you each tried to resolve the question of negotiating for the rights to use these films? How is the notion of “public domain” articulated in the situations you have had to work with?

Rania: My film is entirely made out of VHS extracts from Soad Hosni feature films. When the idea to work with her archive as an actress came, VHS was the only material available to do this research (V.H.S. stands for Video Home System). It’s accessible, malleable, and cheap. Still, I needed to organize for suitcases full of tapes to be sent from Cairo to Paris, where I was residing at the time, in order to gather her filmography to its fullest extent. I finally got seventy-six available films out of the eighty-two that she’d made.

As at first, I was logging the material in writing, I sometimes flirted with the idea of coming back to a “better quality image” (35 mm or even Beta) for my extractions. But what started as documentation material quickly turned into a passion. The use of the VHS seduced me and I fell in love with the images. In addition, they were the reminder of how I had discovered Soad Hosni films in the first place. Not only did they become the sole material of my film, but they became an integral part of the aesthetics: the VHS “matter” was made part of the narrative of the film itself.

I had always felt that these images belonged to my memory. So how does one estimate them? Or put a price on them? To whom do they belong? Where does the borrowing start and my imagination end? Where’s the border between the private and the public spheres? As the work progressed, there was always this edginess, this unsettled matter pending over them. When the film finalized, it turned out to be a strange object, quite like I had imagined it would be. It couldn’t have been otherwise. I thought that as long as the film remained in an underground or art-type circuit, I would not deal with the issue of rights. But when the film finally did get exposure, I had to consult someone.

There is no official body or institution that handles this kind of information in Egypt. So I found an Egyptian rights lawyer who told me that it would be inextricable, endless and infinitely costly to pay rights for VHS extracts in Egypt. I discovered then that the law does not settle this uneasiness since law itself is based on a matter of interpretation. The law just frames it. In an art context, the fine line between borrowing, using and pirating remains blurred, suspended, and unsettled, and I have to live with this suspense.

The film is very much a homemade, low budget film. “Moïra” or Fate, let’s say, gave it a surprising exposure. Morally, I don’t mind collapsing the meanings between being a “passeur” (a guide) of images and a pirate of
these images. Maybe that's because Egyptian cinema as an artistic object is so underrated in the Arab world and practically unknown in the rest of the world. The film gives it a kind of exposure and value.

But the thing that I love the most is to imagine that Soad Hosni would be very pleased to know that she is now playing at MoMA PS1, and that by a strange twist of destiny, she has made it, post mortem, from the Nile to New York. Something tells me that she would have loved it! So just for that, I'd brave all the risks.

Maha: My film entirely uses scenes from Egyptian Cinema from the 1950s to the 2000s. I got the films from VCDs, VHSs, DVDs, and the internet. When I first started to inquire about how to get permission to use these scenes, I was advised by a friend in the industry not to start this quest for permissions as it would open up an overly complicated chase with no clear standards or procedures. This advice may have been affected by the knowledge of the context I work in, as a visual artist, and the field and venues my work will end up being shown in, which have so far been fairly “under the radar”. I imagine the advice would have been different if I had worked in cinema or television. I did not know which films I wanted to use or the durations of the scenes I would use until the work was complete, which did not make for a timely investigation of the question of rights. I comforted myself with the “quotations” alibi. Three years later, I am still trying to figure how to resolve this question of rights. Copyright laws and definitions of what falls in the “public domain”, which I am sure are more or less clear if one undertakes this research, were not so apparent to me. Or at least they were not the issue for me at the time of doing this project. In a second video that I’ve just recently made using clips from videos posted on YouTube, I was able to directly contact the people doing the uploading, who mostly happened to be the owners of that material, and they readily and simply allowed me to use it.

Naeem: Well, a large portion of United Red Army is audio, with text on screen as a subtitle/echo. The tapes came from the lead negotiator—somehow they ended up with him in the post-event chaos. With the video interludes, where the film goes from pitch black to bright light (with the introduction of archival footage), a lot of that material came from NHK Television in Japan. The footage appropriated from VHS is the opening credits for Zoo Gang and the Carole Wells outtake from Funny Lady. I would like to go back and secure a full-resolution version of the Zoo Gang footage, but I also prefer the blown-out feel of that segment as it currently exists.

The hijack was a pivotal event for Japan, so a lot of television newscast material emerged around it. Because it was filmed for nightly news, these are mostly short shots, sometimes without sound, with just enough footage to cover the newscasters reading. So, you have a sequence where the relatives are waiting at the Tokyo airport, and the camera will pan and cut in all of five or ten seconds. There is no lingering shot to pick up accidental moments. I was not able to use a lot of NHK footage for that reason. Some of the sequences, when they are slowed down, contain a barely perceptible fade (which I had to cut out if I wasn’t using adjacent sequences). Clearly there were longer shots, which
were edited and merged for the newscast. But NHK didn’t have that original footage anymore; the only things left were the edited versions.

When I first contacted them, I think they considered it a routine footage request for a traditional documentary. There was already a Japanese television documentary on the hijack, in the standard talking head format that uses archival footage for a minute or so. But once I went through the shot list and sent back my request, they realized that I had requested almost everything. So then they went back through the footage very carefully, and returned with a list of sequences that they were not able to license. It turned out that they did not have clearance forms for several interviews that they had filmed at the airport. At one point in the film, the narration talks about what the brother of the Mitsubishi bombing victim had said—I had to do that because they were unable to give me the rights to that interview. Of course, in the context of the incident and the prevailing rules around news interview clearance in 1977, it makes sense that they had never obtained written permission from anyone for interviews. I suspect that is the case with a great deal of non-studio interviews that are conducted after any incident. Later, when they digitized their archives, their lawyers probably went through the footage and listed all the items that they would not be able to share without consent forms—and of course it would be very difficult to track down these hostages now and get their consent. It can be done with a lot of time and money, but I doubt they would be able to do it just to accommodate my one small project.

So then we went back to NHK with a significantly reduced request list, with all the interviews taken out (except the press conferences, for which they had obtained consent—probably under some type of blanket rule). This time they came back with another glitch (what we call in Bangla slang ‘arek fyakra’). Now they stated that all the runway and control tower footage (in black and white) had been captured from Bangladesh Television. This was done either by filming it from a television screen, or capturing it from the satellite transmission to Japan (I found a news item in the press talking about this as the first live television transmission Bangladesh had done with Japanese technical assistance). So they could not grant the rights to that either. This was a much bigger setback, because it meant withholding over half of all the available footage.

A long process then started, where I tried to get copies from BTV, and definitively established that they did not have copies of the material (there had been no preservation mechanism). So finally, we had to make a long appeal, over multiple letters, saying that since BTV did not have copies, we wanted them to lend us theirs. This labyrinthine process with NHK, which lasted over several months, had to be conducted in Japanese. Every letter I wrote and sent as a signed document was then translated into Japanese. My collaborator and partner on this project was the Japanese artist Michikazu Matsune (we collaborated before on Le Saigon Café) and he did a fantastic job of managing the entire process. The project would have been impossible without him. At one time, Michikazu lived in Austria, NHK was on Tokyo time, I was editing in New York, and working with Hana Shams Ahmed in Dhaka—we had to work across four time zones to catch the end-of-day deadlines, which mattered mainly for NHK, as they are on a strict office schedule.

Rasha: The existing footage, as a “raw material” for the fabrication of the work, is in many ways part of a repository of collective memory, even though it is not yet fully recognized as such in the contexts in which you have produced your work. Can you elaborate on this—what you see as the poetic versus the political motivation in using it as the raw material for the work’s manufacture?

Rania: Poetics are not outside the political. What is at stake in the use of archival images, is not only the relation to memory, to the past, but the remembrance of oneself and the world as humans and as viewers. The cinematic image carries with it its history and thus its own unconscious. The narrative of the film is constructed to draw the spectator inside a story despite the disparate and heterogeneous elements that constitute it—images and sounds ranging from 1959 to 1991, undone and then redone. The image unfolds, resonates and discloses the archive in order to tell another story. This diffused and floating impression which feels like a rêve éveillé, a waking dream, puts the spectator in a sensual place, a sensitive space where there is room to roam and space to dream, to feel, to play and to reflect. This in itself is political.

Maha: The footage that I have used in my film was drawn from a wide range of Egyptian cinematic scenes that used the Pyramids as their backdrop. The Pyramids themselves were the “raw material” used for the “fabrication” of those original scenes, and their assigned role was very often to stand as the “repository of collective memory” against which the transient and extraneous are deliberately or accidentally identified, poetized, belittled, glorified, bathed, and/or ignored… The actual Pyramids, as well as the footage of them, as raw material or repository of memory, were the device to drive statements, to re-calibrate social relations and political positions, to highlight or subdue the individual, the present, and/or the exception. I was interested in foregrounding these dynamics.

Naem: I thought for a long time about the idea of making the entire film in darkness, with only text. That would have been an endurance test for the audience. With the final structure, I was curious about the effect of being in darkness for extended periods of time; the effect of the surprise of opening your eyes and finding yourself in the middle of the archive. When I first listened to the audio tapes (twenty-two hours, repeatedly on many days) I started getting a little delirious—I was inside that story and straining to hear every word. There are patches of tape where it is impossible to make out what is being said, and I kept playing them in the hope that, just this once, it would be clear. I wanted a structure that would induce people into that obsessive habituation of the story, without having to be immersed in the tapes for twenty-two hours.

In Bangladesh, some people who have seen the film asked if I had shifted to the late 1970s (my earlier work on 1968 and 1975, before the first coup) as an attempt to demystify the military regimes. Well, that is part of the research path: for a country with a history of military interventions into democracy (in both the Pakistan and Bangladesh periods), it is impossible to consider where politics might
lead next without understanding those events. On another level, the film is bracketed within the larger *The Young Man Was* project, which is, among other things, an inquiry into the compulsions that make people join messianic movements that, from our temporality, seem doomed, but from within their contexts, must have appeared to hold some potential.

**Rasha.** Each of you has had to learn and negotiate the difference between the work being regarded as a film, or as a (single channel) video installation, and to reflect in terms of how that bears an impact on the use of existing footage. Would you elaborate on this for us?

**Rania.** I conceived the film as a story to be watched from beginning to end, with a narrative becoming more complex, more ample, more eerie, and subterranean as the film unfolds. Each act builds upon the last, and the third act rests on the viewer’s knowledge of the first two. The film has a very strong underlying structure.

However, as I was editing, I didn’t know how long the film was going to be. The story kept unfolding and the film developed; until one day there was nothing more to say, or to show. The story ended and I realized that the film was finished. I stopped editing. Up until then, I had only watched the film at home on my computer. I hadn’t seen it projected.

At the Sharjah Biennial, the film was displayed as an installation. All of a sudden I saw it differently. I realized that the spectator could come in and out, take just bits of images and ideas and leave, then come back and revisit them. The people who got caught in the narrative would stay on, lie on the floor and see it in their own time loop. They constructed their own order of sequences. This gave it an interesting point of access; another dimension.

Seeing it as a feature film in a big theatre with a huge screen offers yet another level of viewing, related to the physical history of the image and to that of the cinema. One sees not only the layers of grain which were built along with the transformation of the image from 35 mm to Beta to VHS then digital, but feels the dimension of the cinematic image behind every excerpt: its light, its texture, its quality, and its testimony of lived experience lingers on despite all the transformation that the images have gone through.

When I saw it for the first time on the big screen at La Criée Theatre in Marseille, it opened me a reflection on the perseverance of the cinematic image despite all the transformations in time and texture. The impregnation of real light onto chemical film remains a magical alchemy. I was stunned to discover how much I loved this prevalence.

So the film encapsulates many different experiences. At MoMA PS1, it’s a combination of the two. The installation is set in a very comfortable and isolated space with good sound, so one can have this “cinematic” layer playing in the narrative, but can still come in and out of the room and take whatever image or sequence they want back home with them, like a flâneur.

**Maha.** I first conceived and showed this work as a video installation, with a small screen/projection. One of the reasons for this was my not knowing how far I would be able to take the quality of the footage. I also wanted to stay away from the big, projected cinema image. And though I did construct an emotional and temporal progression through the film, I felt at the time that one could also walk in and out of it. I have come to prefer it being seen from beginning to end however, and have agreed to show it as a film screening. The two presentations, and the relation of the images to the viewer, are different of course. One imposes a distance; the other shortens it. I think I prefer not to fix this work to one form or the other.

**Naem.** That it was installed in a very large, black room at Sharjah worked well. People would walk in and be disoriented by the darkness. They would see the text on screen and expect, from past experience, that it would pass. Then the minutes would go by and I am sure some people would start thinking, “Wait, is the whole film like this?” I would stay in the back of the room and observe them. They would stand for a long time and then, when the archival footage appeared, they would finally see by that reflected light that there was a bench, and then they would (maybe) sit down. This whole process of disorientation was, for me, helpful to a certain reading of the film. I have talked with you, Rasha, about screening it in a theater with a set start time, because one thing that changes with the black box installation is that, depending on when people walk in, the entire buildup that leads to the collapse in the talks can be obscured. I have also discussed this with Michikazu, and he said: “I personally imagine that the film comes across more strongly if it is seen from the beginning and that the audience follows the whole dramaturgy of suspension developed throughout the film.”

On the other hand, something is gained from giving the audience a path to walk in and out of the story—the register changes so much within the negotiation, the moment when they walk in defines which story they catch (especially if they do not stay for all of it). I am still thinking this through. I may have a different feeling about this (if and) when it has been screened in a theater.

**Rasha.** Would you ever consider disseminating the work, or perhaps versions of it, using cheap, disposable, widely available distribution media? This is a candid question, as I understand that it runs against the logic of the political economy of the contemporary art world and that such a maneuver is potentially destructive, especially for non-western artists. (You know, we can’t all be Jean-Luc Godard…)

**Naem.** After the Sharjah Biennial, I was approached by a collector who was interested in the film. I did not continue the conversation, because I wanted to think through these issues. What I want most of all is for as many people as possible to see it. However, if a museum were to acquire the film and then screen it, and were willing to loan it out to others, then that also fits with a mass audience intention. We also have to continue the conversation about the museum installation of videos. What it means to “install” video and then all the variations of black box projections, wall monitors with headphones and theater screenings (e.g., the loop, the scheduled screenings)....

The video pieces that I find to be very specific to the museum or gallery are the ones where there is a discursive mode generated by
the installation that cannot be realized in a theater. Whether it is directly responding to physical aspects of the environment (Spiteful of Dreams, the mirrored video installation by Jane & Louise Wilson at Sharjah Biennial 9), building an archival environment around the work (Mariam Châni’s interpreter/translator video The Trespassers at Sharjah Biennial 10), playing with the possibilities of alternate projection surfaces (Paul Châni’s 1st Light) and double-sided viewing (Omer Fast’s The Casting), splintering video into simultaneous chapters (Amar Kanwar’s Tom First Pages), working as one of many spokes within a curiosity shop of structures (Mika Rottenberg’s Dough in New York and Goshka Macuga’s weirdly spectacular Sleep of Ulro at the 2006 Liverpool Biennial), or digitally generated random sequences (Eve Sussman’s white on white).

So, with a short piece such as Der Weisse Engel, there were specific things I was trying out with regards to darkness and an absence of image: what would happen if after the first snippets from Marathon Man there was never any further visual relief? That piece exists as a black box projection, and there are specific things that happen when people walk in and out, especially when they catch it in the middle and are disoriented. That work functions within the gallery. But United Red Army could be screened in a theater—it is something I am working out, still.

We are having this conversation in what feels like a context of continuous flux. Last summer, when Black Power Mix Tapes came out, it was a film I had wanted to see in theaters, with my community (especially left organizers). Somehow time ran away, and it was gone from theaters (documentaries always struggle to stay there for any meaningful duration). But before I could even get disappointed, the film showed up on Netflix. Of course something is lost because each of us will see it at a different time, and we will not have the impact of that intense conversation we would have had if we had all seen it together. (Instead, I saw Rise of the Planet of the Apes with friends and then, over dinner, we parsed it as an analogy for the Russian revolution). That is why 3D has become so commercially important; it is one of the few mediums left where people are made to see it in the theater. Besides the obvious commercial examples, a notable recent project is Wim Wenders’s Pina in 3D. It is difficult to imagine that any given video screening style within the visual arts will continue to exist as is. It will inevitably be fractured and remade.

Rania: Last July, the Serpentine Gallery screening was held at the Notting Hill Gate Theater, a beautiful old cinema with red velvet seats, heavy curtains and golden fittings. I was sitting at the back, attentive to the response of my first English audience. Suddenly I noticed a small square light coming from a center row. A man sitting in the middle of the cinema was re-filming my film with his mobile phone. I watched, waited. Was he just a fetishistic viewer who wanted a few shots of Soad Hosni on a big screen; an image we haven’t seen in decades, since these films are not screened in theaters anymore? He kept filming. How many images will he take? I was troubled. He didn’t stop. My film took so much work, energy, and determination, and this guy was picking off the fruits of my labor just like that—his hand up in the air, his finger on a button. The film unfolded and his miniature screen kept flickering, recording.
My head was storming with questions. Should I cross the floor, manage my way to the middle of the seats, disturb half the viewers and ask him to stop? Should I just shout something at him, stop the screening altogether, catch him at the end of the film and ask him to restitution the ‘stolen’ images? Do these images belong to me or to the audience? I took them from VHS tapes myself, he took them from the screen. Moreover he could never reclaim my film. It was a personal (private) obsession, the work of my imagination; a unique task impossible to imitate. Time was ticking and Soad Hosni’s story continued its fatal unwinding. He had recorded the near-entirety of the film on his tiny device. As the lights came out, I leapt from my seat to catch him and ask him about his purpose. But as I was walking down the aisle with determination, the curator diverted me to the front of the stage for the question and answer session. The discussion lasted for a while, the man vanished, and all of my troubling questions remained whole and unanswered.

Maha: Yours is a tough question. In general, I find this condition imposed on artists to edition their work, in smaller and smaller numbers, absurd. When possible, I believe that artists should push to increase the number of editions of their work; in that sense, to reclaim its ownership. On the other hand, in regards to my film here, in principle I wouldn’t mind sharing it through cheap and widely available media of distribution, since this is exactly where I got the film material in the first place. What would prevent me from doing that, however, is the unresolved problem of copyrights. I worry that wider dissemination would expose me to potential lawsuits. But I intend to post on YouTube the video that I worked on, which is made from YouTube clips whose owners have permitted me to use them. For some reason I feel that spreading the work cheaply and widely should not prevent me from considering it and selling it as a “limited edition”, though of course that might deter potential buyers. I believe these, the high-quality DigiBeta, and the internet file, are all different forms and qualities of the work, each form having an edition suitable to its form and circuit. Whether this is, or can be made legal—I don’t know.

Rasha: How has the audience reception of your work been so far? Furthermore, to what extent has your subjective play with ‘elements’ of collective memory inspired discussions on the subjective rewriting of history and of the present? Has the audience and critical reception inspired you to delve further using this “raw material”?

Naeem: A few people have expressed interest in the list of names at the end. It was deliberately minimal, and if you blink, you miss it. During audience discussions, I have talked about the symmetry between the Red Army members, who found themselves revolutionary orphans without a home in the Middle East (once tagged by Interpol, they were of no “use” to the movement), and the fate of the hostages. For example, Carole Wells—she was in Barbra Streisand’s Funny Girl—her career seemed to go into limbo after JAL 372. I found some audience members wanting me to do further work on the aftermath. At the end of the film,
a snatch of spoken dialogue gestures against legibility, but people want to unpack further and find answers that help to make sense of... events, both past and present.

Bengali audiences have a different relationship to this material. Not everyone takes lightly certain distancing strategies within the narration. A Bangladeshi writer told me after watching it: “You create an emotional schema here which might even work against you in ‘desh.’ That’s a more complicated response, one worth parsing further.

**Rania.** I’ve been thoroughly surprised, intrigued and thrilled by the audience’s response. I had never imagined that a personal passion could be shared with so many different people.

The restituation and circulation of these images generated an amazing range of responses, from strong emotions, to a sense of having taken a trip “down memory lane”, to having been caught in a dream or to having gone on a strange and addictive trip. It triggered reflections about the cinema, film, Egypt and its society, about women, violence and representation. Some claimed the necessity of fighting censorship; others confirmed their interest in being exposed to unknown worlds and unsuspected images.

Soad Hosni as an actress and a woman moved them beyond her representations, and her luminous talent and tragic destiny spoke to them regardless of cultural differences. Quite intriguing is the issue that keeps resurfacing in the questions with the public. Having restored omitted sexual scenes and kisses that are no longer shown on Arabic television, some people criticized the film as having verged on soft porn; while others argued that the reuse of classical narrative images of women constructed to please men’s gazes was problematic for them. Both groups consider the images as somewhat taboo material to be tampered with, putting themselves outside of a new viewing experience or field of reflection. How is it to them to watch these images now: the told and the retold? What does pushing boundaries and blurring borders do to their memory and senses? They preferred to hang on to their certainties. The reuse of existing images and raw material is a constant in my work, as well as the desire to further the reflection on mirrored images.

**Maha.** The audience reaction varies greatly according to people’s familiarity with the films and with Egyptian cinema in general. Those unfamiliar with Egyptian cinema often discover that actually is an Egyptian cinema industry. There is also an increased familiarity with images and people who seem less archaic than what transpires of them through mass media. As a side effect, there is their seeing of the Pyramids, maybe for the first time, out of context (the touristic context), but actually in their real context; national political rhetoric, inferiority/superiority complexes, local gender politics, local politics of space and time…

For an Egyptian audience, I have encountered the excitement of seeing scenes that are so familiar being inserted into a different context, entertained curiosity about how many films I have seen and used, been given suggestions of films that I have missed, and sometimes even encountered the unspoken suspicion: “But is it Art?”

In the early 1960s, in Lebanon, a group of students of Haigazian, an Armenian University, led by a professor of mathematics, Manoug Manougian, designed and launched many “rockets for exploration and space study.” Later, this program expanded, with other researchers joining them and with the Lebanese Army supervising the project. The Lebanese Rocket Society was born.

The project had no military character and was aimed at promoting both science and research.

This experience stopped suddenly in 1967 and has since been completely forgotten.

**The Golden Record**

**Sounds of Earth and of Lebanon**

As of 1962, the group of the Lebanese Rocket Society had installed, at the tip of the rockets, a transmitter which broadcasted the message, “Long Live Lebanon!” on the waves of the Lebanese national radios throughout the launching and the flight of the rocket. This information published by the press at the time echoes, in our imagination, the U.S. space probes such as Phoenix and, above all, Voyager 1 and 2 which, in 1977, also launched messages, engraved on golden records, intended for would-be extra-terrestrials; they consisted in a selection of sounds meant to ‘establish a portrait of the diversity of life, of history and of culture on Earth’, a kind of message of peace and friendship.

The first probes will only arrive close to a star in 40 000 years.

The Golden Record from the Lebanese Rocket Society is a golden record on which was engraved a soundtrack created on the basis of sound archives dating back to the 1960s, and inspired by the memories of the various Lebanese scientists who shared in the adventure. The sounds chosen reflect a given time in the history of the 1960s, when the world was politically divided in two blocs; when it seemed there was a progressive and revolutionary alternative; and when the revolutionary movements seemed to be interconnected. Space research was one of the great symbols of that period. It was also the epoch of Pan-Arabism, the epoch of the great Arab dream.

“This is a present from a small, distant world, a token of our sounds, our science, our images, our music, our thoughts and our feelings. We are attempting to survive our time so we may live into yours.”

Extract from the official communiqué of President Jimmy Carter, installed in the Voyager probes on June 16, 1977.

Accurate graphic reading of all the sound editing and mixing used to create the Golden Record of the Lebanese Rocket Society.
Fig. 1 and 4
The Golden Record
"Sounds of earth, a tribute to the Voyager Golden Record"
A project by Jaina Heedthommes and Khalil Joreige
From « The Lebanese Rocket Society: elements for a monument ».

Sound and Mix: Nadim Mesleouli, Studio 08
Design: Kerine Wahi
Mesh uses faulty memory to reconstruct a timeline, as a way to activate or rekindle the living memory or passion of a willful but impossible chronological meshing. In this case, the musical piece attempts to reconstruct love and revolution. Sonically, it has been inspired by two concepts, the first borrowed from the composer Earle Brown’s “time notation”, or subjective meter, and the second from Egyptian Shaabi music.

You’ve entered the room. It looks empty. It looks silent. There is vinyl dust on the wall. Someone in their early twenties has handed you this black android and a pair of ghetto-styled headphones attached to a small electronic device. You look more closely at the vinyl dust. On the left, an album tracklisting, exact track numbers, writers’ names instead of bands. On the right, a set of instructions. The last might read: “You’ll see numbered images on the wall. They go with the audio. You want to know what the relationship is between the sound and the image. Kid says, Translatate.”

You strap on the headphones. You pick a random number and press play. You look for the same number on the wall. You find it. Next to it, an image. Below it, a seat. Three have chosen them. You sit on a beat up office chair dragged from the street. A voice rises in your ears. You arrive at Atlantic Avenue, between Nevins and Third, Brooklyn.


Until West Vancouver, Where the world is ending.
Someone handed you a black pamphlet and a pair of heavy headphones.

You pick a random number

A voice arises in your ears. Cracks. Hiss

An album track-listing except there are writers' names instead of bands.

Like any place in Reality, the Street is subject to development.
You go for another track, another chair, another place

Until West Vancouver where the world is ending

On the last day, words go back to print. A book is published
You're lost in an 80's Sheraton Hotel

An aztec space-ship in the Doha desert

There are things that really good fiction can do that other forms of art can't do as well. And the big thing seems to be sort of leaping over that wall of self and portraying inner experience and setting up a kind of intimate conversation between two consciousnesses.

I mean one of the reasons why the book is structured strangely, is it's at least an attempt to be mimetic, structurally, to a kind of inner experience.

My first inclination would be to say that most of that would be — to create stuff that mirrors sort of neurologically the way the world feels.

D. Foster Wallace. Although of course you end up becoming yourself.

It is about fiction.
AN AUTHOR'S FONDEST DREAM IS TO TURN THE READER INTO A SPECTATOR: IS THIS EVER ATTAINED? THE PALE ORGANISMS OF LITERARY HEROES FEEDING UNDER THE AUTHOR'S SUPERVISION SWELL GRADUALLY WITH THE READER'S LIFELOOD: SO THAT THE GENIUS OF A WRITER CONSISTS IN GIVING THEM THE FACULTY TO ADAPT THEMSELVES TO THAT FOOD AND THRIVE ON IT. SOMETIMES FOR CENTURIES, BUT AT THE PRESENT MOMENT IT IS NOT LITERARY METHODS I NEED, BUT THE plain, CRUDE OBVIOUSNESS OF THE PAINTER'S ART.

VLADIMIR NABOKOV DESPAIR

CHARLES ARENS-HENRY

One to One

There is a photograph by Bruce Conner entitled Negative Trend: Audience of One. You see a hand on stage, the female lead-singer shouting, her body deformed like a lungi, scratching: the fabric of everyday life. Punk. And the violence you feel, it's addressed to only one person. The audience consists of just one other girl.

When I first saw the picture, and the woman's uncontrolled and unrestrained giving, I thought of something else. I thought of a book. Of the violent silence of reading.

Along with films, books have always been my best allies. They at first felt like an immaterial yet real architecture I could use as a ship, a refuge, a reservoir, a night train. They were a zone where daily life would not hurt or deceive. They were an alternate and deeper reality.

But one day the frontier melted. Books became sensory equipment. I would carry in the physical world. They were now the architect that would modify the structure and abilities of my ears, my eyes, my thoughts.

And they started pointing at their own exit doors. They were meant to be dissolved in the air. Reality and fiction shared the same central ocean. They whispered to each other. One to one.

TRANSLATED BY

Arthur Riesboul once described the poet as someone who goes deep and steels some fire, and brings it back. The printing of his discovery makes it available to all, but the very nature of reading—the time it takes to decipher the often black characters on white pages, the participation and concentration it requires from you—makes it seem like he's placing the flame in your palms. What you do with it is up to you: torch, weapon, collective signal. Still, it has always been addressed to you.

Responding to the calling, you enter the fear of a conscious approaching an unknown atmosphere, the exhaustion of a lover winding all nights around the bright white core of jealousy, the psychic odyssey of a plant with delusions of grandeur, the wanderings of something imrecognizable. An unheard of entity. But one that you're inside. And you start feeling.

In Strange Days, a young woman tells the man she loves, 'I love your eyes. I love the way they see.' Translated by simply comes from the joy, power, vision, intelligence that its contributing writers have given us—and it attempts to pass this on, through the intimacy of a voice hissing in your ears, trying to translate, in a collective room, the communication between and within two latitudes that is the act of reading. One to one.

It is about mindscreens.
Shimon Basar

Your Head is the Whole World

You enter a notable national museum. You have queued for hours to see a large touring exhibition of a Famous Dead Painter. When you were 16 years old you discovered this Painter in a book at school, and you told yourself then, "I want to be him." Not like him. You wanted to be him. This included his barefooted machismo. His recklessness. However, now, you no longer want to die penniless, like The Painter. You've grown up. You instinctively appreciate the differences between art history, duplicity, and complicity. Don't you?

You finally buy an ticket. You've given a stapled guide with The Painter's name embossed in a font. The Painter would detest. You're privy to such information because, aged 18, you nearly became The Painter. He spoke to you through supernatural channels and more recently he spoke to you through Ushowski. He offered an audio-guide.

1. Ushowski is a large web-based educational resource for art guide material available on the internet, founded in 1997 by your Kenworth Goldsmith.
http://ush.ack.ac.uk

Translated by

9 'When we speak (or listen, for that matter), we never merely interact with others; our speech activity is grounded on our accepting and relying on a complex network of rules and other kinds of presuppositions.'

10 'What is your interior voice? Who is it? You're thinking this as you jump to Painting 4, then 6, back to 2; all the while the big Other Voice ambles into your head. It seems to take over from your own interior voice. You are many, you are one.'

11 Where does reading take place? You know for sure that listening takes place in your head—the Voice evidences this fact. When you write, are you reading what you're writing, or writing what you're reading—in your head? My head hurts, you say, it hurts from these kinds of nebulous questions. Maybe the pain is proof that all this stuff takes place wherever your interior voice is? Is your interior voice a kind of place? You need some Nurofen.


Now in Kitakyushu you press the intercom.
The track-list has been mirrored, like a book you open.

One became Two

It feels like night.

The ghost of a forest runs through the darkened air.

Senju or Adachi?

Adachi or Senju?
In 1977 Lawrence Durrell revisited Alexandria to participate in a BBC film about the city. Titled Spirit of Place, the film, we are told, shows “palatial villas overgrown with bougainvillea... abandoned, confiscated or left to rot by their impoverished owners, their rusting gates opening into wild and unkempt gardens where marble fountains and crumbling statuary testified to a glory since departed.” Attempting to guide the crew through the city he is supposed to have known well, Durrell found himself filled with anxiety, and “feared that Nasser’s puritanical socialist revolution had destroyed the city”.

The city seemed to him listless and spiritless, its harbor a mere cemetery. Its famous cafés, Pastroudis and Boudrot, no longer twinkled with music and lights... All about him lay Tekiondarya, the uncomprehended Arabic of its inhabitants translating only into emptiness.1

These feelings of bewilderment, anxiety and sadness at the fate of “the Alexandria we have lost”2 that Durrell felt during this visit are common tropes characteristic of much of the literature about modern Alexandria.

Idealizing the cosmopolitanism that is seen to have infused life in the city in its modern golden age (c. 1860–1960), novelists, poets, literary critics, travel writers and others typically turn with disgust and repugnance to the natives who are implicitly (and at times, explicitly) blamed for the city’s fall, and who are referred to in what is supposed to be a pejorative term: “Arabs”.3

Ancient Alexandria: A Fallen City

In the Western imagination Alexandria has always been associated with loss. In Plutarch’s Life of Antony, the great Roman soldier is seen in the city awaiting the final confrontation with Augustus and ordering his soldiers to pour wine and to feast him generously when he realizes that his luck has run out and that defeat is inevitable. It was during that night of clear insight that strange and harmonious music was heard coming forth from Alexandria, music which “those who sought [its] meaning... were of the opinion that the god to whom Antony always most likened and attached himself was now deserting him.”4 In the great poet Constantine Cavafy’s imagination, the tragedy of Antony is transformed into a universal human tragedy, and in process Alexandria becomes both the goddess that inspires this only too-human self-realization and at the same time the object of the ensuing inevitable loss of divine life.

Two other famous literary figures constitute what has been called the “Alexandria Archive,” namely, E.M. Forster and Lawrence Durrell, who have also dwelt on this link between Alexandria and loss. Unlike Cavafy, however, they do not consider Alexandria’s loss to be evocative of a general human tragedy; rather, this loss refers to a decline from the previous splendor that the city used to enjoy in its classical golden age, and it is a decline for which the “Arabs” are mostly to blame. Durrell saw the Arab invasion of the seventh century CE only as a signal of the city’s doom. In the introduction of the 1986 edition of Forster’s Alexandria: A History and a Guide, he wrote that “[w]ith the arrival of Amr and his Arab cavalry the famous resplendent city took a nosedive into oblivion; the sand dunes encroached and covered it.”5 Likewise, Forster comments that the invading Arab armies in 642 CE could not comprehend the significance of the city they had captured and that their onslaught could only lead to its ruin. Forster adds that the Arab leader, Amr ibn al-Ās, wrote to his superiors in Arabia, remarking with indifference that he had “taken a city of which I can say that it contains 4000 palaces, 4000 baths, 400 theaters, 1200 greengrocers and 4000 Jews.”6 Forster comments that in spite of having “no intention of destroying her”, the Arabs failed to comprehend that “there was no other [city] like it in the world,” and ended up destroying it “as a child might a watch.”7

Typical of the western understanding of Alexandrian history, Forster’s Guide devotes only five pages to the thousand-year-long “Arab Period”, a period he designates as “a thousand years of silence”.8

Modern Rebirth and Loss Again

These “thousand years of silence” are said to have finally ended at the beginning of the nineteenth century with the auspicious appearance of the reform-minded governor Mehmed Ali Pasha (a.k.a. Mohamed Ali Bāshā), and modern Alexandria is seen to be the “errant child of [his] hopes.”9 Stressing the fact that he was born in “Cavalla on the Macedonian

---

3 As opposed to the “ancient” golden age under the Ptolemies.
5 Plutarch, The Life of Antony, par. 75.
coast"\textsuperscript{12} and highlighting how he was tolerant to Jews, and to Greeks, Italians and other Europeans.\textsuperscript{13} Mehmeh Ali is usually seen as the founder not only of modern Egypt,\textsuperscript{14} but also, like his Macedonian "predecessor", as having contributed in a unique manner to Alexandria's history. The "rebirth" of modern Alexandria and its growth from a town that numbered around 8,000 dwellers at the beginning of the century to a large city of some 100,000 inhabitants at the time of Mehmeh Ali's death in 1849 is commonly described as the result of a number of factors, chief among them was the government policy of tolerance to Europeans, a policy that the European community acknowledged in 1860 when they unveiled an equestrian statue of Mohamed Ali in a square named after him.

An economy geared to European markets, a "founder" famous for his tolerance to Europeans and who is anecdotally, but significantly, described to be of Macedonian origin, and a plethora of European communities who were vibrant, entrepreneurial and mutually accepting of each other and of the open world: these are the factors commonly stressed to explain what is seen as the remarkable, if brief, case of Alexandria.

The first grand appearance of "Arabs" in modern Alexandria is usually taken to be that of Nasser when on a fateful hot July evening in 1956 he stood in Mīdān al-Marshīyya (formerly Place Muhammad Ali) announcing the nationalization of the International Maritime Company of the Suez Canal to the cheerful masses of Egyptians in front of him and to a stunned audience abroad. This famous coup de théâtre triggered what is known commonly as the "Suez Crisis" and in Egypt as the "Tripartite Attack" when Britain, France and Israel conspiratorially attacked Egypt in October of that year. In retaliation, orders were issued to Jews and to British and French nationals to be expelled from Egypt, their property either confiscated or put under sequestration. While it is acknowledged that Nasser, by this and other gestures and policies that "gave Egypt back to Egyptians"\textsuperscript{15} was indirectly reacting to a colonial situation represented by, among other things, the Alexandrian "modern palaces—homes for the established members of the foreign colony that brought much exploitation and snaobbery, some progress, and a strong cosmopolitan flavor to Alexandria,"\textsuperscript{16} many of those who wrote about the end of cosmopolitan Alexandria blame Nasser and the "puny nationalist social revolution" for destroy[ing] the city... the uncomprehended Arabic of its inhabitants translating only into emptiness.\textsuperscript{17} While the fame of Alexandrian cosmopolitanism owes a lot to the three literary 'Alexandrian' figures of Cavafy, Forster and Durrell, the themes of the fallen city, of loss and of ensuing exile, as demonstrated by the responsibility of the city's final demise falls squarely on their shoulders, and theirs alone.

The Essence of Alexandria

Describing the essence of the city that he was losing, Durrell curiously takes this essence literally. When he anticipates the impending loss he alludes to the smell of the city: "I began to walk slowly, deeply bemused, and to describe to myself in words this whole quarter of Alexandria for I knew that soon it would be forgotten and revisited by those whose memories had been appropriated by the fevered city, clinging to the minds of old men like traces of perfume upon a sleeve; Alexandria: the Capital of Memory."\textsuperscript{18} Forster, too, made a similar remark connecting memory with an odor clinging to a piece of garment. In a letter to a friend of his in England soon after his arrival in Egypt and after his initial disappointment for not finding the landscape "oriental" enough he wrote that "[t]o one who has been to India, it is almost irritating— the 'real East' seems always vanishing 'round the corner, fluttering the hem of a garment lost city."

Robert Mabro, have been perpetuated by numerous semi-autobiographical novels which "have been coming out of the press at an alarming rate." These "memoirs" written by people who were forced to leave the city in the late 1950s and early 1960s, reflect an urge by "those former Alexandrians... to take advantage of the mystique created by Durrell and Cavafy... Alexandria sells. The Exodus sells", Mabro adds cynically. In spite of the questionable nature of some of them (as shown below), these "memoirs" about lost childhood and adolescence have nevertheless been instrumental in perpetuating the Western image of Alexandria as the city of loss.

Alexandria, the Capital of Memory

Given this association between Alexandria and loss, it is no wonder that much of the discourse of the city deals with history, memory and nostalgia. Forster, who found himself trapped in Alexandria during a world war, drew upon Alexandria's ancient history in writing his major Alexandrian work, Alexandria: A History and a Guide, and as he admits the city's present and its topography gain significance only if read against its glorious past: "The 'sights' of Alexandria are in themselves not interesting, but they fascinate when we approach them through the past, and this is what I have tried to do by the double arrangement of History and Guide."\textsuperscript{19} Likewise, Cavafy, the 'old poet of the city', used the city's history as part of his creative effort to cast a 'detailed and coherent image of the human predicament that would be less idiosyncratic and nationalistic [...] an image more universal than those his Alexandrian preoccupations occasioned.'\textsuperscript{20} Cavafy's ability to sift through the city's ancient history for moments that could speak to the modern sensibilities of loss and exile, in addition to testifying to the poet's creativity, has further entrenched the image of Alexandria as a lost city.

\textsuperscript{13} See, for example, Jacques Hassoun, 'The Jews, a Community of Contrasts,' in, Alexandria 1860–1960, 38.
\textsuperscript{16} Keeley, Cavafy’s Alexandria, 4–5.
\textsuperscript{17} Haag, Alexandria: City of Memory, 2.
\textsuperscript{19} Keeley, Cavafy’s Alexandria, 135.
\textsuperscript{20} Durrell, Justine, Alexandria Quartet, 152.
\textsuperscript{21} E.M. Forster archive, library of King's College, Cambridge; quoted in Haag, Alexandria: City of Memory, 11.
Commenting on this association between smell and memories of the lost Alexandria, Haag remarks: Cavafy, Forster and Durrell all knew that perfume, [writes Durrell, he adds], I smelled the warm summer perfume of her dress and skin—a perfume which was called, I don’t know why, *Jamas de la vie*—the phrase means ‘never’. Haunted by failure and haunted by glory, for a while there was a resonance between the modern cosmopolitan city and the one Alexander founded long ago on this African shore.24

**“Une Odeur d’Arabe”**

Proust, Alexandria, smell and memory come together in the works of André Aciman, a Proust scholar and author of one of those memoirs about Alexandria that have appeared in recent years, and one which received much critical praise. In an article that appeared in the New Yorker Aciman describes his first encounter with Proust, an encounter which took place in Paris, but which was connected to his memories of Alexandria. Referring to the edition of Swann’s Way, he describes how he had bought it with his father, when he was fifteen, one summer evening in Paris.

We were taking a long walk, and as we passed a small restaurant I told him that the overpowering smell of refried food reminded me of the tanneries along the coast road outside Alexandria, where we had lived. He said he hadn’t thought of that way, but, yes, I was right, the restaurant did smell like tanneries. And as we began working our way back through strands of shared memories—the tanneries, the beaches, the ruined Roman temple west of Alexandria, our summer beach house—all this suddenly made him think of Proust. Had I read Proust? He asked. No, I hadn’t. Well, perhaps I should.25

In a true Proustian moment, the smell of refried food drifting from a Parisian restaurant takes Aciman back to his early childhood years in Alexandria, where memories of the family’s summer house, ruined Roman temples, beaches, and tanneries immediately flow through his mind. This particular set of memories is very characteristic of the Western discourse on Alexandria, a discourse that is replete with references to the supposedly open Alexandrian society of artists, intellectuals, flâneurs and dilettantes (represented, as will be elaborated on below, by “the family house”), to the lost glory that was Alexandria (“Roman temples”); to the manner in which Alexandria had always been thought to be not in Egypt, but ad *Aegyptum*, (“the beaches”); and to the squalor and squall that had come to dominate modern Alexandria (“the tanneries”). In his much acclaimed book, *Out of Egypt*, Aciman eloquently recreates this lost Alexandrian society,26 but according to an interview he gave to the CNN, he does so by “pretend[ing] to remember” it.27 His large and joyal family occupies center stage in his depiction of Alexandrian society in its “Golden Age”, and the book, described by the publisher’s blurb as a “richly colored memoir” that “chronicles the exploits of a flamboyant Jewish family”, has been praised on the back cover as “an extraordinary memoir of an eccentric family.” At the center of everyone is the author’s great uncle, Uncle Aaron, nicknamed VII, who we are told, was “an octogenarian Turco-Italian-Anglophone—afflicted fascist Jew who started his professional life peddling Turkish fezzes in Vienna and Berlin and was to end it as sole auctioneer of deposed King Farouk’s property.”28 However, according to meticulous research in contemporary phone and business directories as well as in *Le Mondain Egyptien* (Egypt’s Who’s Who), Robert Malbo corroborated the findings of S. Raafat, author of *Maadi 1904–1962: History and Society in a Cairo Suburb*, in concluding that Uncle VII’s character looks suspiciously similar to that of a certain Moise G. Levi who was indeed involved with the sale of King Farouk’s property, but who most certainly lived in Maadi and therefore was a Cairene and not an Alexandrian. More to the point, Malbo argues that Levi “was related to the Acimans but it is doubtful that he was as close as being Andre’s great uncle.” Mabo convincingly argues that, disguised as an “extraordinary” memoir when it could be more correctly described as a first novel, but which nevertheless won a literary prize under the category of “memoirs”, *Aciman’s Out of Egypt* could be described as “only in part a memoir”. The point, however, is not one of an author’s supposed plagiarism or a publisher’s clever marketing tactics; rather, it is about the need, both literary and political, for a character like that of Uncle VII’s to be inserted in the “memoir” of a Jewish family in cosmopolitan Alexandria. For the cosmopolitanism of cosmopolitan Alexandria that is much celebrated by Western novelists, poets, literary critics and travel and memoir writers depends for its very existence on the presence of such figures of dilettantes, flâneurs, bohemian artists and polyglot intellectuals such as Uncle VII. What is characteristic of Alexandrian cosmopolitanism is the need to stress the flâneurly of such figures in order to highlight the concomitant themes of exile, loss and exodus that are so central to the myth of modern Alexandria. The exodus theme is pivotal in Aciman’s work, expressed by his title, *Out of Egypt*.

That “exodus” is never really contextualized, and we are not given an explanation for it. For example, in that same CNN interview, the host argues that the author’s exodus from Alexandria is crucial for understanding his subsequent work: “Aciman’s loss of Alexandria—the capital of memory” as he calls it—“is ground zero for the feelings of nostalgia and loss that pervade his stories. Aciman and his family left Egypt in 1965 when he was fourteen. They were among the last Jews in Alexandria, the remnants of a 2 000 year-old community forced out by Gamal Abdel Nasser’s nationalist regime.”29 Besides the fact that Aciman’s family arrived in Egypt at the end of the nineteenth century—his maternal side from Constantinople—and was not part of a 2 000 year-old community, the expulsion

---

22 Haag, Alexandria: City of Memory, 10.
of Egyptian Jews and of British and French nationals, as unjustified as it is, cannot be explained simply as the result of “ungrateful Egyptian nationalism.” One has to wonder, alongside Mabro, “What about the seventy years of British occupation, Dinshaway, or the creation of Israel—causing the displacement of hundreds of thousands of Palestinians to wretched refugee camps, not to the ‘hard’ life of Rome, Paris, Geneva, Montréal, Rio, New York, or Tel Aviv? And what about the simple fact that Egypt was invaded by France, Britain, and Israel in 1956?”

The silence about these important political aspects is characteristic of the discourse of cosmopolitanism, and Aciman feels no need at all to dwell on such “trivial” matters as imperialism, colonial wars and racism when reconstructing the idyllic life his family had in Alexandria. Nor do we see in that discourse a credible account of how Arabic-speaking Alexandrians, those who are disparagingly referred to as ‘Arab’, actually interacted with members of the polyglot, ditelliant, cosmopolitan elite. In *Out of Egypt*, however, they do, and what a scene they make! Noteworthy, first, is that the only Arabs to appear in the book, and to whom Aciman graciously grants a name, are the servants who worked for his family; furthermore, it is telling that they are all described as being physically deformed. There is Om Ramadan, the washerwoman, who, besides being one-eyed, had lost the pigmentation on her skin as a result of the powerful bleach that she used. 29 Aciman, *Out of Egypt*, 105–06. And there is the one-armed waiter, Hisham, who, incredibly, had to set the table and serve food at the large and festive family gatherings. 30 Then we are introduced to the cooks, both called Abdou, one of whom was an alcoholic, and the other, his much older cousin, had a “terribly ulcerated leg, which my grandmother suspected was leprous”. 31 Young Abdou, the one with the healthy leg, we are told, and his nephew, Mohammed, were in the habit of stealing Aciman’s grandfather’s clothes and shoes, which, one is asked to believe, they were incapable of wearing properly: “The servants did not appreciate shoelaces, so they would pull them out, walking with the instep wide open, their shoe tongues sticking out insolently.” 32 Next, there is Fatma, who limped, and Aziza, who was deaf. Finally, we are introduced to Latifa, the maid, who, was in the habit of fainting apparently for no good reason, and would complain in an inarticulate manner of bodily pain that she could not even locate. It had to fall to the European doctor, Alcabès, to explain Latifa’s mystery: Latifa had a cancerous tumor blocking her liver, and when it eventually grew to touch the spinal cord, the pain became unbearable. Soon thereafter Latifa died after only two weeks’ illness. 33 However, what is wrong with the ‘Arabs’, Aciman asserts, is not how they appear, not their physical deformities, as grotesque as they may be. Rather, it is their very essence; their smell that makes them repugnant. For Egyptians, we are told, all drank hilba, “an auburn-colored substance” that is believed to have “curative properties”, but which “made their bodies exude what Europeans considered a repellent, dirty odor. My father called it une odeur d’arabe (an Arab smell), and he hated to find it trapped in his shirts, his linens, his food.” Aciman then goes on to elaborate further on why the Arabs could never really be admitted to Alexandrian, cosmopolitan society, in spite of their earnest efforts to look and act as Europeans: This odor was so unmistakable and so overwhelming that one could immediately distinguish Westernized Egyptians, who used strong aftershave, from those who affected Western habits but whose minds, homes, and regimes were still steeped in the universe of hilba. Even if an Egyptian had completely adopted Western ways, shed his native customs to become what my parents called an evolut, and wore a suit every day, learned table manners, kissed mazmouz’s hands whenever he greeted them, and knew his wines, his cheeses, and the required number of La Fontaine fables by heart, the fact that his clothes gave off the slightest trace of that telltale scent would make one think twice about his professed inclination for the West and suspect that not everyone in his household— himself included—had risen above the dark, sinister underside of Arab hygiene. 34 In the travel literature from mid-nineteenth century Egypt the present inhabitants of this ancient city come across as ‘a degraded nation... It is a continuous theme of this tourist literature to associate, or rather to identify (Egyptians) with earth and with their habitations.” 35 The intimate connection that the ‘Arab’ population is believed to have always had with earth and mud proved to be an enduring characteristic of much of the writing about Alexandria. In a letter to a friend, for example, Forster writes of Egypt “the soil is mud, the inhabitants are mud-moving, and exasperating in the extreme.” 36

The Ambivalence of Smell

Smell plays an ambivalent role in the discourse on cosmopolitan Alexandria. On the one hand, through its association with memory, the olfactory sense is evoked to refer to the ‘essence’ of Alexandria, i.e. the belief that it can only be approached as a lost city. Hence, the attempt to retrieve this lost essence by talking about memories, by searching for lost time, and by the remembrance of things past. In the process, an idyllic city is created, a city whose credibility is premised not on faithfulness to historic realities but on its approximation to a poetic image. Here the essence of the city persists precisely because of its fragility, its unsubstantial form. This city, the Capital of Memory, cosmopolitan and open, endures and persists through the countless memoirs and literary works that struggle to retrieve those memories that ‘cling to the minds of old men like traces of perfume upon a sleeve’. 37

On the other hand, the olfactory sense is poignantly used to refer to those who do not belong to this idyllic city, those whose presence in the city is only accidental, and never essential, and who, in fact, pollute and defile it.

This double role that smell plays in the discourse of modern Alexandria is also a reflection of the ambivalent nature of the olfactory sense itself. In both the Western and the Arab-Islamic medical traditions, smell occupied a curious position amongst the five senses, the number and order of which were fixed from early times. Unlike the immaterial qualities of light and color, smells were thought to have a material quality, making the odor of a rose, for example, linger in the air even after the rose itself has been removed. But at the same time, the very materiality of smell was thought to be quite distinct from the materiality of taste and touch. Not only was the materiality of smell different from that of touch and taste, it was also different from the immateriality of sight and sound: “The nose was not equivalent to the eye in seeing, the ear in hearing, or the tongue in taste. In smell alone the brain was the primary organ of perception.”

It is this ambivalent nature of the olfactory sense that partly explains the contrasting manner in which the “cosmopolitan” and the “Arab” Alexandrias are written about: given that the first is believed to be a lost city, smell, through its close association with memory, i.e. with a cerebral function, is evoked to reconstruct it by piecing together the unsubstantial, immaterial fragments of memory. By contrast, in describing the second city, smell is again evoked, but in a drastically different manner. Here it is the filth and squalor of the city that are provided as keys to understanding it, and it is the very debased functions of the bodies of their residents—their eating, urinating, defecating and procreating functions—that are stressed as markers of that “Arab” city.

### Memory of the body

Building a body’s memory of Lygia Clark’s artistic propositions was the way I found to activate their poetic power against the grain of its neutralization in their recent return to the art institutional terrain. I had set out to accomplish that task through the creation of a series of filmed interviews. The memory that I wanted to evoke with the interviews was not that of the external forms of those actions or of the related dispositions and objects and their representations. My goal was to bring to the surface the memory of the potencies mobilized by Lygia Clark’s propositions, making possible an immersion into the sensations that had been lived through those experiences.

The temporal logic of sensations does not obey the chronological order proper to the time of perceptions. Sensations have no past, present or future: they are always there, waiting to be accessed, so that what was experienced in the past, as well as the living experience of the present that lies under the rifts of its actual forms and representations, can always be embodied, leading to the reconfiguration of the current cartography. Activating those politics of desire as they were performed in the experiences that the work of Lygia Clark had produced, and their relation to the world today, was the main goal of the project.

Limiting the interviewees to those who had been directly connected to the artist, her life, and her work was not enough: it was also necessary to produce a memory of the experiences that an entire generation had shared. The intention was rather to update the sensations of that affirmation of an artistic potency that was particularly daring in its critical spirit, in its inventiveness, and in its freedom of cultural and existential experimentation. Such an affirmation became possible in Brazil in the 1960s because it was supported by a large collective movement. Inciting a work of reactualization of the intense experiences that an entire generation had shared was of primary importance to the creation of the archive. Such work and its incitement could never have taken place in Brazil until that time due to the superposition of the effects of dictatorship and of cultural capitalism, which both, in different ways, undermined the exercise of critical thinking. Finally, it was also necessary to produce a memory of the movement that had occurred over the same period in Paris, where the artist moved in 1968 and where she stayed for eight years; a move which would affect her work. In order to complete this task, I drew from my experience of over thirty years of psychoanalytic practice, especially those with Institutional Analysis and Psychotherapy, which provided me with an expanded sense of the theoretical and clinical psychoanalytic practice as a human science.

Therefore I aimed neither to develop a work of recording the past and archiving it for the glory of a sterilized sense of cultural patrimony, nor to turn the artist into a diva of Brazilian experimentalism, and even less to turn her work into a monument. On the contrary, my aim was to allow the strength of the event carried by those works and by the cultural movement in which they were inscribed.

---

Institutional Psychotherapy originated during the Second World War, with the Catalan anarchist psychiatrist François Tosquelles, who took refuge during that period in the Hospital of Saint Alban in France. In this context, he proposed new innovations in the psychiatric practice, such as the introduction of psychoanalytic practice and theory, problematized and expanded on the basis of the work with psychosis in an institutional environment, and the incorporation of collective self-management as a therapeutic resource, which includes ‘care givers’ (soignants) and ‘care receivers’ (soignes) in a horizontal relationship. Institutional Psychotherapy was consolidated in the Clinique de la Borde founded by the psychoanalyst Jean Oury after the war. In the 1950s, Felix Guattari was involved with this institution almost since its foundation and remained working there throughout his life, being its co-director for a long time. Led by La Borde and influenced at the beginning by a certain direction of the Lacanian movement in the institutional ambit and in the treatment of psychosis, Institutional Psychotherapy expanded in the decades of the 1960s and 1970s, a movement that played a central role in the revolution of psychiatry in France and in many other countries. In Brazil, this approach had a significant reception from the 1980s onwards, and produced a significant advance for the current field of mental health. The movement had several unfoldings, such as in the Institutional Pedagogy, created by Ferdinand Oury, brother of the psychoanalyst, and Institutional Analysis.

Schizoanalysis is a philosophical and psychoanalytical proposal developed in collaboration with Gilles Deleuze. Due to the vast theoretical work produced by both of them, Psychotherapy and Institutional Analysis—which had in Guattari one of its main theoreticians and practitioners—became more complex and expanded, as they were integrated in the philosophical field introduced by the collaborative work of the two authors. For Schizoanalysis, the exercise of clinic goes beyond the specific institutional field in which it is supposed to be located, namely the private and its traditional setting, to assume itself as a theoretical and practical approach of reality. The radicality of psychoanalysis in its origins is reactivated as a dispositive of micropolitical intervention at the points where life in its essence as force of creation and differentiation is suffocated. Its field of action is the vital movement of response to one’s environment in the moments of tension in which the state of things goes beyond the limits of the tolerable, mobilizes the potency of thought, and in so doing, generates new landscapes. In other words, what is inscribed in the memory of the body is the desiring impulse, which triggers creative imagination, provoked by the new problematics of the present. What was important to recall and register in the making of the archive was the memory of perceptions, the activation of such an impulse, which found the right conditions for its emergence during those decades.

Activating that memory could intensify the revival of the artistic movement of the new generations of the late 1990s, not only in Brazil but possibly in the whole of Latin America. Such revival occurred in those countries after the persistent micropolitical effects of the dictatorships that had paralysed the continent over the course of the two previous decades, even after their dissolution.

The young artists, critics, art historians and curators in those countries only knew this past to the body’s memory of the potency of artistic creation and of the openings it promoted in its return to the territory of art.

For that purpose I conducted sixty-five interviews, filmed in France and in the United States by Babette Mangolte, and in Brazil by Mustapha Barat, which together form the archive. During the filming, Corinne Diserens, then director of the Museum des Beaux-Arts de Nantes, invited me to conceive an exhibition of Lygia Clark’s work, the core of which would be the archive and its concept. Yet another challenge arose: would it be a productive unfolding of the dispositive I was creating with the archive? Would it make sense to bring Lygia’s work to the museum space and, moreover, to present it in the form of an exhibition, knowing that she had deserted both museums and exhibitions in 1963 as an essential gesture for her artistic thought? Would Lygia accept Diserens’s invitation (or anyone else’s) to do it if she were alive? We will never know. What we can be sure of is that each one presupposes the way in which her work has been brought back to exhibitions and to the institutional art field. Lygia is no longer among us, and the decision of how to enact that return can only be made by us. Assuming the responsibility and risk inherent in that decision, I decided to accept the invitation. I was motivated by the recognition of a receiver who had become active as part of the work, occupied two thirds of her production (1963–1988). Secondly, I wanted to show that the work produced during those twenty-five years was not a kind of undifferentiated magma composed of objects described by the artist as “sensorial” or “relational”, whose respective meanings were supposedly vague or even naive. This apparatus, for example, in the misunderstanding about the term “sensorial”, which tends to be wrongly applied to the “participation of the spectator” and, more recently, confused with the aesthetic theory concept put forth by Nicolas Bourriaud. Instead, these propositions differ greatly from each other, grouped by the artist herself in five phases, which she designated with specific names. Each of these consists of a wide range of propositions that shared a certain direction of research with its own complexity, and it is the investigation of each field of questions that leads to the next stage.

To show this in the exhibition at the Pinacoteca do Estado de São Paulo, we presented the original objects in their frames. Each photograph for each piece. There were also brief texts that suggested a hypothesis of interpretation of the central problems that the artist had explored at that particular moment; the name and date of the specific phase, as well as

1. Suely Rolnik, Arquivo para uma obra-acontecimento Image by Rodrigo Araujo / Bijari

Lygia Clark goes back to the museum?

In order to answer these questions, I had certain curatorial principles from which to conceive the exhibition project. First, it was necessary to communicate that Lygia Clark’s investigations involving objects and dispositives that appealed to the memory of a receiver who became active as part of the work, occupied two thirds of her production (1963–1988). Secondly, I wanted to show that the work produced during those twenty-five years was not a kind of undifferentiated magma composed of objects described by the artist as “sensorial” or “relational”, whose respective meanings were supposedly vague or even naive. This apparatus, for example, in the misunderstanding about the term “sensorial”, which tends to be wrongly applied to the “participation of the spectator” and, more recently, confused with the aesthetic theory concept put forth by Nicolas Bourriaud. Instead, these propositions differ greatly from each other, grouped by the artist herself in five phases, which she designated with specific names. Each of these consists of a wide range of propositions that shared a certain direction of research with its own complexity, and it is the investigation of each field of questions that leads to the next stage.

To show this in the exhibition at the Pinacoteca do Estado de São Paulo, we presented the original objects in their frames. Each photograph for each piece. There were also brief texts that suggested a hypothesis of interpretation of the central problems that the artist had explored at that particular moment; the name and date of the specific phase, as well as
of the various propositions grouped around it. We also presented the only two documentaries that have ever been made with the artist, about her practices involving visual arts, such as a film about touching the world of Self (Structuring the Self), which was shown next to the material on that specific proposition, and another on some of the works from the earlier phases, placed between their respective materials.

The third principle consisted in showing that the questions that Lygia Clark pursued with her experimental adventures had particular strings up since the beginning, when she made paintings and sculptures. The artist directed towards the singularity of her research the legacies of Russian Constructivism and of Mondrian’s Geometric Abstraction that had marked Concretism and Neo-concretism—the key artistic movements in Brazil during the 1950s, of which she had a partnership with the Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofía (MNCARS), which considers such collaboration as one of the central dispositions under the direction of Manuel Borja-Vitier. One of his main statements is the dissolution of hierarchies that characterizes the built-in map of the visitors between Europe and its former colonies, especially between Spain and Latin America.

5 Baetite Mangote is a Franco-American filmmaker who, among others, worked as a camerawoman in several of Chantal Akerman’s early films, including Jeanne Dielman, 23 Quai du Commerce, 1080 Bruxelles (1976). In the 1970s she settled in New York, where she made documentaries on the experimental art scene of the city during the decade, including the works of Trisha Brown and Yvonne Rainer in dance. Stephen Moustapha Barat is a Franco-American filmmaker who now lives in Rio de Janeiro, and has a wide range of experience in short and feature films, both in Brazil and abroad.

6 Proof of Clark’s bravery when faced with misrepresentations of her work was provided by the artist’s reaction to the exhibition of her Bichos and Calços at the Studiengalerie of the Studium Generale at the Politechnik of Stuttgart, whose curator was Max Bense. Both Bense and the exhibition were key factors in the international recognition that her work was starting to acquire. Despite this, when she arrived at the gallery, just a few minutes before the opening, she saw her Bichos hanging from the ceiling, converted into a kind of mobile and out of reach for visitors’ handling experience. Lygia reacted furiously and without hesitation: she managed to get hold of a pair of scissors in order to cut the wires that held the Bichos to the ceiling, freeing them from that serious mistake. In this regard, see Lygia Clark and Hélio Oiticica, Cartas, 1964–1974 (Rio de Janeiro: Editora UFR, 1996), 29–32.

7 Nicolas Bourriaud, Oiticica, reach for visitors’s handling experience. Lygia reacted furiously and the gallery, just a few minutes before the opening, she saw her

8 This wager is confirmed in the collective dialogue undertaken by Lygia’s work was an opportunity that the exhibition offered to the public, in order to get over the reduction of the experience of those earlier works to a simple perception of their forms, summoning up the other capacity of the eye (its resonance to the living forces), so that one could begin to see beyond these documents and objects, by turning them into elements of a living memory, potentially producing differences in the present.

In the exhibition at the Pinacoteca, the screening room was always full. Some people, especially young artists, returned every day over the course of a week, and sometimes even more than that. However, any attempt to predict the effects of their encounters would be empty rhetoric, moved by an omnipotent desire that is destined to fail. What was offered to the visitors was simply the gesture of facilitating the encounter. Its effects would happen (or not) in the proliferation of that experience in different times and spaces, and not necessarily in the realm of art.
Separated from the living experience allowed by their practices, those art propositions often become relics of the past, destined to be worshiped and classified in the categories of official Art History. The attitude to adopt in the face of this kind of artistic production ought thus seek the opposite: the way we bring the works up to date should have the power to go against the totalizing will that moves “that” history, produced by the academic colonial spirit of Western Europe and the United States. Those proposals have real potential to put into crisis the categories in question, and to force us to outline another story (or stories)—the multiple and infinite process of creation and differentiation that cannot be defined, and will never be possible to define, once and for all in the name of an imperial geopolitics. If we don’t do so, we risk losing precisely the very essence of art as destiny, making neutrality impossible in every one of its unfoldings. The first one was the “retroactive” mentioned above, which has this archive at the core of its dispositive. After that, many other unfoldings took place and are still taking place today.

The second unfolding is its insertion in museum collections, in Brazil and abroad, which is currently under negotiation. The discussions to make it possible have the effect of bringing forth a no man’s land where the institutional structure is problematized. It does not make sense to locate it in the area of research, as the content is not made of original documents but of material that has been produced in the present. The same applies to the archiving department, as we are not dealing with an archive in the traditional sense of the term. The reason for being is to accompany the work of Lygia Clark in the museum collection itself, trying to make it accessible in its very essence of an unusual aesthetic experience.

In that sense, this archive should be placed in the collection itself. But such a thing is not obvious. On the one hand, the archive is not the artwork itself, and neither does it belong to it; and on the other, the propositions by Lygia Clark that it explores do not invent, and I thought the same thing. In a television show, Gullar pointing at the Bicho, said: “Lygia if that is a sculpture, it is worth nothing, but if it is considered a non-object, it has a high significance.” I told him: “Ferreira Gullar, theory passes, the good artwork remains.” That was the moment in which the group fell apart.” (Unpublished, undated, Lygia Clark’s archive). For further details, see Suely Rolnik, “Molding a Contemporary Soul: The Empty, Full of Lygia Clark,” in Rina Carvajal and Alma Ruiz, eds., The Experimental Exercise of Freedom: Lygia Clark, Gego, Mathias Goeritz, Hélio Oiticica, Mira Schendel (Los Angeles: The Museum of Contemporary Art, 1999, 55–108). Bilingual edition (English/Spanish).

The problematization of museum structure does not stop there, however: even if we decide to place the collection of objects belonging to the Archive for a Work-Event, the conception of it—on the contrary, they are essential and unfolding of this project, related to exhibiting the archive itself, is absolutely not neutral. Another challenge is posed here: how can it not be classified within the collection of visual artworks? That is because they exist in a borderline territory between art objects and body art or performance—categories into which they cannot be tidied either. Lygia had always insisted on pointing out the difference between her propositions and such practices, and she used to react violently when this confusion took place. As for the archive, it could eventually be classified as a film work, as the interviews were filmed by Babette Mangolte, an artist/filmmaker whose work has been shown in museums and biennials and is included in several museum collections. But this is also problematic, because she is neither the author of the project nor the editor of the films that belong to it. They were conceived and edited by me, as part of a dispositive that can neither be placed within the category of visual art, nor within that of art cinema or documentary film.

Such a set of ambiguities causes problems for the classification of the objects within the museum’s organizational chart, as it belongs to an insufficient territory: between archives, research and collections, and within the collections, between different sort of artworks. Might we conclude that this archive echoes, now inside the museum’s structures, the effects of Lygia Clark’s unique territory, which she created through her work? Perhaps this is a pretentious question. The only thing we can say here is that, through this unusual and uncomfortable position, the presence of the archive in the museums has been causing a degree of uneasiness that demands collective work between the different departments in order to decide where and how to insert it. This makes apparent the inadequacy of a certain kind of compartmentalization of the museum, whose departments do not make sense in regard to contemporary art practices, which mix together existing means and invent others. This obliges the institution to rethink its traditional structure. Ultimately, what is called into question is the very logic that governs the museum. The third unfolding of this project, related to exhibiting the archive itself, is absolutely not neutral. Another challenge is posed here: how to present it to the publics in exhibition contexts without emptying it from its active essence? Such
It is exactly by actualizing the relational nature of Lygia Clark’s propositions, in their very form, that those exhibitions become active in the field of the debate brought forward by the challenge that this type of artwork imposes, when it does matter to us to make them public, thus preserving their power.

Finally, the fourth unfolding is the box set: its purpose is to increase public access to the archive material, with 1 000 copies of twenty DVDs of interviews, selected among the sixty-five films, and a booklet that accompanies them. But, again, in this case, it was also necessary to think of a format that would preserve the concept that permeates this project as a whole. The demands of certain museums (the ones that participate actively in the debate mentioned above) to translate this box set and its contents to different languages suggest that this unfolding of the archive responds to a real need.

Of course we can neither predict the effects that such a dispositive and its unfoldings may have in their reception, nor can we guarantee that there will be any. We can only affirm that a will towards questioning the neutralisation of the artistic propositions in an international art circuit was the source of their invention.

Lygia Clark’s work invites us, precisely, to partake in that questioning: the courage and radicalism with which the artist assumed the singularity of what was imposed on her thought in her time compel us to face the current problems of the terrain of art and to help us see it clearly. Obviously, this does not mean that we should do “as” Lygia Clark did. The dispositives she invented belong both to her poetics and to her time. If Lygia Clark, like many other artists of her generation, in Brazil and elsewhere, still summons us, it is because the questions raised by the legacy of its critical force remain alive. Where and how does the political potency immanent to artistic actions appear in the broad and diverse contemporary production? I am referring to its power to inaugurate possibles in relation to the supposed impossibilities of the present. What curatorial, archival and museum strategies allow us to keep that potency alive? What other dispositives can we invent to give body to the problems raised by our vital affects—a body with enough density as to break with the perverse enclosure that tends to dominate the art circuit, allowing it to interfere effectively within its landscape? Let us stay with those questions.
In 2010 the Norwegian media declared queer theory to be history. A ‘queer theoretical hegemony is over’, the editor of culture in the intellectual newspaper Morgenthaladet stated in an article: “The paradigm shift is absolute. Try to say the sentence: ‘The war in Afghanistan isn’t happening. Or: Everything is text. Or: Biological gender doesn’t exist. You won’t have any success, I promise. The truisms of postmodernism have gone from being powerful to being slightly embarrassing.’ The editor in chief of the left-wing newspaper, Klassekampen, formulated it in similar terms, explaining that he had ‘shied no tears’ upon the death of the ‘postmodernist hegemony’ in Norway, ‘with its theoretical branches such as queer theory, where some theorists hubristically insisted that biological gender didn’t exist.’ “Now,” he continued, “the goal is to get back to a healthy and truth-seeking culture in academia and in the public sphere in general.” Furthermore, the editor of culture in the newspaper Aftenposten explained that he had found queer theory to be nothing but “wishful thinking,” remarking that he ‘couldn’t think of any queer theorists in Norway who write engaged and understandable prose. They all use a terrible and obscure tribal language.’

It was indeed the Norwegian comedian Harald Eia who initiated the criticism of queer theory in his popular television show Hjemevask (Brainwash) that ran on the state channel NRK in the spring of 2010. Re-launching himself as an investigative journalist, the show used a simplified ‘nature vs. nurture’ debate as a starting point in order to praise evolutionary biology on behalf of poststructuralist feminism and queer theory. In response to queer theorist Agnes Bolsa’s criticism that she had felt abused by the program, Eia quipped to the newspapers, “If you are a dictator that has run the business for years, you might not be very receptive to criticism.” Finally, it seemed, Norway had freed itself from the grips of the queer “dictators” with their tribal language that nobody understood, and their far-out ideas that were nothing but “wishful thinking.” Truth would prevail.

Queer theory is history in Norway—finally dead and buried. After the ‘tribe’ had been exposed on TV, the backwash of its thinking and language was made obvious to all, and the anarchonism had finally been cleared out of the way by the winds of progress. This is an untimely moment for those of us working with queer theoretical and activist perspectives in Norway. Not only are we told that we have ruled the country and the academy for decades (why didn’t they tell us before? We could have done something!), but we are also positioned as an undeveloped species, speaking in ludicrous, indecipherable tribal language. It is indeed an untimely moment to be at the threshold of a career as a queer-informed researcher, as it is obvious that I am too late, that my material is already dated and out of sync with the present. Over the last few years I have worked on a PhD project, preliminary entitled Touching History: The Affective Economies of Queer Archival Activism that explores the ways in which contemporary queer activists and artists have turned toward history in order to rethink notions of politics, progress, and action. Yet last year’s events made me realize that one does not always need to turn toward history—often one finds oneself positioned as history, in the dustbin of history. As such, it is perhaps a timely moment to work on querying the politics of history. Positioned as I am as a living anarchonism, my situation seems to symptomize the argument in my research on the political nature of historicizing and archival gestures: the violent act of cutting something off—metaphorically, practically, systemically—from the present.

The obituaries for queer theory in Norway made me start pondering the question: when does History begin and end? For a long time I thought that queer theory and politics were still to be properly introduced in Norway. But when I found that the queer thinking that I had thought had a future in the Norwegian debate did indeed reach the mainstream through a series of preposterous obituaries, I got temporally disoriented.

The intense media burial of queer politics in Norway cannot be described as a simple ‘backlash.’ It is more complex than that, akin to the double movement that Angela McRobbie in The Aftermath of Feminism (2009) argues has characterized the assaults on feminism in the UK, where neo-liberal and conservative critics invoke feminism only to position it as already achieved and no longer needed—‘a spent force.’ The situation in Norway seems to be yet another example of what McRobbie calls the process of ‘disarticulation’ that works to ‘foreclose the possibility or likelihood of various expansive intersections and inter-generational feminist transmissions. Articulations are therefore reversed, broken off, and the idea of a new feminist political imaginary is increasingly inconceivable.’ The Norwegian TV show worked as a dispersal strategy where a hysterical and monstrous version of queer theory was presented to the public only to evidence the need to put it to rest. The effects of ridiculing political movements in this way are severe, according to McRobbie: ‘When important historical moments of liberation become somehow no longer transmissible, or when such moments are caricatured and trivialized, if not forgotten, then there is perhaps a crisis for the possibility of radical democratic politics.’ When is history? The question is one of political urgency. What are the effects of positioning ongoing and unfolding political cultures as history; as something one can look back on, retrospectively, from the perspective of the present?

The artists and activists I think with in my research project focus on the political effects of the disarticulation of the so-called past from the present. In aesthetic practices by artists such as Pauline Boudry & Renate Lorenz [http://www.boudry-lorenz.de], Sharon Hayes [http://www.shaze.info], Nanna Debois Buhl [http://www.nannadeboisbuhl.net], MEN [http://blog.menmakemusic.com], and others, I find attempts to think to the side of the ideologies of progress that inform the political imaginaries in the Former West. These aesthetic practices explore ways to disturb or break out of straight time frames by entering into anachronistic, melancholic, nostalgic, and desirable relations with a past that is not past. By posting historical and archival practice as arenas of political dispute, works such as these highlight the importance of paying attention to the chrononormativity of the status quo.

4 See the book version of the program, Harald Eia og Olav-Martin Ihle, Fått sånn eller blitt sånn? Uto kvinner, sjalu menn og hvorfor oppdraget ikke virker (Oslo: Gyldendal, 2010).
5 Harald Eia quoted in Raymond Haslien, ‘Killer forskere diktatorer’, DagenMagasinet, 28 September 2010. Author’s translation.
7 Ibid., 25–26.
8 Ibid., 49.
In my practice, I have tentatively described these artistic interventions that revisit unfinished political histories as forms of archival activism. This is an attempt to highlight the ways in which aesthetic practices reactivate political cases and histories that have been relegated to the drawers of unsolved or forgotten files in the sociopolitical imaginary. A central feature in these archival activist practices is that they question the logics of the dominant understanding of history, using affective and performative historiographical methods to engage the “still living” remnants of the past in the present. As such, they address and assert the importance of long-overdue issues of injustice that risk being neglected or positioned as anachronistic within historical logics invested in chronology and ideologies of progression. Artistic practices that interrupt the separation principle that safely distinguishes “then” from “now” lead us into the difficult negotiation between feeling historical and being historicized: between the desire, pleasure (and frustration) of touching unfinished histories—and the aspiration to avoid the violent historicization of ongoing struggles.

By giving room to consider the duration of struggles, the stickiness of history, and the fragility of progress, we can complicate political chronicles and chronological narratives that move forward by relegating ongoing fights to the archives of outmoded pasts.


“The train for Deraa broke down. My uncle helped our neighbor. Sami has watches in his shop.”

Reading Lesson for primary class.

“The young boy kissed the officer’s boot!”

The young boy, a teenager from Deraa, kissed the military’s boot. Maybe he was the intelligence officer, or the adjutant. He is yet without identity. The only clue we have left that was shot is the boot in which he anchors his sense of security. The camera’s angle films from the top, above the teenager kneeling to kiss the boot that holds the keys to life.

In this episode, there are two heroes: the teenager, and the boot. The teenager appears, acute and clearly, bare-bones. He is called… he is called… I don’t know his name. The second hero is the boot. This is the staging in the film.

We are unable to know from the teenager what provoked his first fitful stirrings. What did he dream of the night before the scene? When was the last time he tried to dream before slipping into this hell? Did he see himself kissing his beloved, as we kiss our own?

We can neither ask him that question, nor can he answer us. To whom was that kiss intended? A teenager’s kiss… Totally bare, livered with fright, stupor, terror… As if he had survived Hiroshima. Looking for new premises, for another life; hoping that this time, it would not simply end there…

When the teenager rested his head on the pillow, he awoke to the kiss without daring to rouse anyone. Locked into moral codes and cultural mores... in the chivalrous nobility of the Arabs and their poems...

Maybe he keeps that first kiss secret from his beloved; from the one he fancies, or will one day. The one he will come to know. In the kiss, he will discover life gushing… He could never imagine, our teenager, that he would come to betray life, love and his beloved by delivering that first-ever kiss to the boot; the very first time, and in the nude. His nails, clutching the boot as he kisses, naked. He is kissing the boot, the second protagonist of the episode.

The boot is being kissed. It abducts the teenager’s kiss; his terrifying nightmare. The boot is the quintessence of security and repression.
Stripped of hopefulness, the teenager kisses that ‘security boot’. Crouched in the corner of his cell, he delivered his kiss to the boot, and forfeits it for good. He will remain without that kiss… When I saw what I saw, I saw him, and then the boy… I saw myself in the boy and I kissed the boot with him… Complying with the first premise of cinema, the kind manufactured to appeal to the masses; intended to errupt the spectator’s heart, soul and senses… The kind that manipulates all sorts of tricks and images to drive home a single question, or a single message, in a single seamless instant. Is that not how it works?

The message got to me. This moment, widely referred to as the awakening of conscience, has come to every Syrian. Every one of us, from Deraa to Qamishli, from Douma to Homs, and all along the coastline. I am sure that, with the exception of a few boots, all feel shame and dread whilst witnessing this crime. The mere image is enough to drive people to go out into the street to protest against the boot. Is it conceivable that a group might split apart, that a family and its neighbors might clash, that two beings might fall into discord, that a woman and a man be ambivalent over the sense of shame? Such a moment is a true referendum. Every day at the end of the day, when Syrians lay their heads to rest on pillows laced with anxiety, might they still vote for the boot?

This is my waking nightmare… the vote on the pillow. Is it possible that Syrians are divided on that point? Can they forget this episode? The answer is yes. I myself have forgotten it. True, it woke me up at three in the morning and impelled me to write this text, but I have already forgotten it. Even if I had kissed the boot along with the teenager, I’ve forgotten it.

The next episode: Rendez-vous with murder.

The teenager is in flight, surveying the surface of the planet. His arms and legs are carrying him aloft, like the gladiator from the movie The Gladiator. In the movie, the gladiator does not die, because it is a movie. The earth recoiled on the back of the flying Syrian. He wonders… and yet does not wonder at all. He was stunned, dumbfounded… It was the first time he died this way in Syria. The first time, he was protesting; seeing the other, seeing death. He was protesting for the sake of living, not for the sake of dying. He was protesting against his own death. He died a martyr; he just died. Those who rescued him implored him to hold on to his new identity in the name of God the Merciful.

He exhaled his soul to the lens of the universe’s camera. Not a single martyr has appeared on the news broadcasts of Syria’s public television stations. The teenager’s soul was not broadcast. The teenager who exhaled his homeland was himself exiled. Can the Syrians fall into discord over this point? Can they forget this episode? The answer is yes. I, myself, have forgotten it.

I saw him alive at his funeral. In the peaceful protests that were broadcast on YouTube, in the protests for freedom on YouTube. A peaceful protest for a living martyr. Not a single image of a martyr on the news broadcasts of the public television stations in Syria. In those news broadcasts, the teenager was killed by “unknown gangs”, in their plot against the Homeland.

When the murderer is “unidentified”… the murdered also becomes unidentified. The murdered was dismissed from the episode, replaced by the murderer. He is out of focus in the frame; he is without image. He is represented by words; they come in lieu of the image. The environment of mediocre cinema. The cells of the words multiplied and formed an imaging. Imaging without images… simply identified as “The Gang”.

In the official episode, the coals of the collective imaginary were stoked by the teenager’s soul that was exhaled. They were the coals of collective fear, in whose heat the image of terror became more perceptible.

One image against another image! Fear or freedom!

Then the teenager’s image was obliterated, and in its stead came the imagery of “The Gang”. One kind of fear replaced another kind of fear… the latter lain to rest on a pillow. Is it possible to let fade the image and sound of that Syrian teenager’s soul, exhaling its last breath from memory?

What was the word he tried to speak when his mouth was filled with earth? Can anyone guess a word other than “homeland”? Someone can.

“The Gang” shoots dreams of life’s first gushes with live bullets. These dreams will not become real and taste freedom unless they are allowed to live.

What will happen to the referendum when Syrians raise their heads from their pillows? Will they vote for the murder of a youngster crying out for freedom, peace and unity? Will they vote “yes” on Facebook? Will the majority of the country say before surrendering to sleep? Will they agree to the slaying of the teenager?

The teenager’s image has to amplify and undercut “The Gang” for consciencees to rouse during the referendum. In order to preserve his own image, the assassin had to cut out the murdered teenager’s image—the contours of his body, his name, his beloved name, his stories, his secrets, the lightness of his being… The color of his eyes, his favorite singer, his military service record, where he served, the friends he may or may not have made across the country… Perhaps he has been the one calling for the unity of the country? Has he called them, do they miss him, does he trust them? “The Gang” made sure he does not appear on screens, so that he would never tip the referendum to his favor.

Censors erased his image, as they had all the other images. A peaceful image of freedom. They replaced it with word games about an unknown evil that shoots to kill anything that moves. In official news broadcasts, the murderers do not appear, but language creates their representations. They are images of fear.

The peaceful protestors annihilated their own fear. They buried it along with the bodies of their martyrs. Fear, on the other hand, has not accepted its own end. It was revived by reenacting massacres. Massacres are the work of fear. Fear fears the referendum. It does not want pluralism; it wants a single, frightening ‘other’, like that one single man and the boot. The murderer is a chain, bound by fear that produces victims in the plural.

Massacres also kill the referendum in which all participate—those thirsting for freedom and those who fear it, those allied, those dissident, and those who hesitate. The referendum will determine our tomorrow.
no matter its outcome. Corruption does not want a peaceful referendum on corruption. Security forces do not want a peaceful referendum on impunity, live bullets, jail sentences or the torturing of the wounded... A peaceful referendum could draw a majority from all ends of the horizon, for the unity of the country, for a state of law. The murderers are in a race against time. They would like to stop it. To kill an innocent soul is like killing all souls. But the perfect crime does not exist.

The image of the murderer hides behind a simulacrum that contrives to conceal itself. It lurks in the folds of the language spoken in the official news broadcasts. The censored images of innocent citizenry are themselves the martyrs of smoke screens... Official broadcasts deny that they are martyrs of Syria as a whole. Screens of official broadcasts continue to hold captive the bodies of the martyrs of the first referendum.
en un mot faire le part de chaque chose

et voire

j'aimais bien cette personne normale
dont le Snake

bagues en or à la TGV

a room with a view
(mode d’emploi)

somme moyen
remplacé pour le clos
(rempave)

n’est pas toujours mensonger
sans parler

un peu simple
satisfaits de son travail

good behavior

make me a candidate which rise in the window

des fleurs sur la table

suggestions, desire, request

efforts

su paroles

des frappes à la porte

voici l’urgence toute vue blanchi

http://www.thebanger-uman.org/index.php/project/16/0/2
Pelin Esmer’s first narrative feature, 10 to 11, films Mithat Esmer, her uncle, who has been collecting everything—newspapers, watches, milk bottles, pencil sharpeners—literally everything, since the 1950s. He lives on the fourth floor of the Emniyet Apartment Building in Istanbul, in an apartment stacked from floor to ceiling with his collections, and has been tirelessly scouring the streets of the city to complete their coherence. His collection is not only a fantastic everyday archive of Istanbul, it is the city itself. The Emniyet Building is old; its residents want to knock it down and build a more “modern” and solid structure. Moving out of the building—even temporarily—means the end of Mithat’s obsessive collecting. His only ally is Ali, the building’s superintendent, who moved from the countryside to Istanbul looking for a better way of life. They both stand steadfastly against its demolition. Gradually, Ali becomes the custodian of the completion of Mithat’s collections and thus the chronicle of Istanbul. Unbeknownst to both of them, the two men’s destinies are suddenly changed. Released in 2010, the film received several awards and critical acclaim across the world.

Trailer for the film: http://www.10to11.com/trailer.html

Can I ask you to briefly introduce yourself...?

My name is Mithat Esmer. I was born in Antakya, in southern Turkey, in 1926. I received my education in the United States. I was trained as an electronic engineer at Stanford University. I don’t have much more to say about myself...

When did you come back to Turkey?

In 1950. My first job was at Ankara Radio. There was no television in Turkey back then. I did not work there by choice; it was compulsory, the government had sent me to the United States to earn my diploma and I was beholden to them. After working at the radio station, I taught. I was an associate professor at the Middle East Technical University.

When did your passion of collecting things start?

You are asking me to travel a very long journey in time. In order to answer you, I have to remember when I was three years old. That is when I actually began collecting. My father would for instance buy several kilos of tomatoes for my mother to juice and store. I would pick the nice tomatoes, the ones that were round, and then steal them. That was my first experience as a collector. I would put the beautiful tomatoes I stole inside a cupboard and hide them. I would forget them and my mother would find them days later, all rotten, and she would raise hell!

When I was five, I began to collect Qurans, because I began learning the Quran when I was four years old, and eventually started collecting them. Maybe some are still in my collection. Shortly thereafter this collecting business got out of control and I began to collect everything.

Before you went to America, you had a collection here in Turkey?

Yes, there was, but it was different, it was random. It didn’t have a theme.

So after you returned you finally had a place of your own where you kept your collection?

Yes, that’s absolutely true. I came back from the U.S. with seventeen pieces of luggage. The customs officer raised his eyebrows stunned when he saw my luggage. I told him that they all contained books I used during my studies.

And what was really inside this luggage?

Books, really. For my collection. Many other things as well, but now I can no longer recall. My memory is fading.

[Senem Aytaç interrupts] I opened those suitcases for the film so I remember, do you want me to recall? (She laughs) I’ll never forget what I found, there was bottled Evian water for instance, a pink bottle. Matches, bonnets, loads and loads of things...

So, how do you select objects for your collection? In Pelin’s documentary about you, you mention that you even collect fishbones?

I am not happy with myself about this habit. There are no limits to my collecting, I collect everything. There is one prohibition, I never collect organic things because they decay.

What about fishbones?

They are dry, so they don’t go bad. You can’t keep the flesh of the fish but you can keep the bones.

Still, don’t you think you should set boundaries for yourself at a certain point? How do you keep yourself from collecting everything?

It tears my heart apart not to collect. I also do not collect big objects. Cars, for instance, or refrigerators. I would have loved to collect those
If I were a millionaire, I definitely would have, but with my salary it was impossible.

How can you collect everything? For instance do you collect salt and pepper shakers? [the nearest objects on the table]

Of course. I have a broad array of shakers. For instance, I have approximately 160 watches. Wall clocks, wristwatches, alarm clocks, all different sorts...

How do you keep the watches for instance, do you have a system?

I wait until they stop working and I set them aside. I take notes during that time, for instance, I write “in six months the watch had a delay of one minute”. This is very important. I also list its properties, if it has seconds, if the numbers are in Roman or Latin alphabet, if it is mechanical or digital... In the old days, watches used to vary a lot but the trade seems to have fallen into disgrace, and nowadays, all watches are digital. Everything is on chips. There’s no pleasure in collecting them, I must confess.

You have a number of newspapers and magazines. Do you have a system for archiving them?

I buy two copies. I cut out the important clippings from one newspaper and preserve the other, untouched. But my household complained a lot because the newspapers were occupying so much space. I agreed, so I had to reduce their numbers. Life was becoming really hard in the house. Recently, I donated my newspaper archive to Mimar Sinan University. I’ve also donated my book collection to Bahçeşehir University.

You’re very much interested in archeology and history and yet you don’t collect things that have a historical virtue such as antiques.
If they have a unique feature and if I can afford the price, I also buy antiques. But very rarely, I collect everyday objects. I am not concerned with old objects. If an object’s make, its technical or mechanical structure has a special virtue, then I keep it.

Is there a particular object you’ve wanted to collect, but haven’t been able to?

A lot! So many that it breaks my heart to think of them. For instance, I’ve always hesitated about collecting objects that might break. Glasses for example. This glass is so beautiful (he holds the glass on the table) but you can’t collect it, because it can break so easily. It is hard to store glass, but I would have loved to collect glasses. Also I’ve always wanted to collect toys.

Are there objects in your collection that you favor more than others?

No, I can’t make such distinctions. If I started to favor some objects over others, then I would have to keep them apart to protect them from everyone or hide them so they don’t get damaged. I can’t do that.

So, collecting in itself is what is important for you, not the objects specifically…

Definitely! For that reason, the price of each object is not important. I have objects that are worth 10 liras or a 1 000 liras. It doesn’t matter to me; they all have the same value.

How is the act collecting satisfying? What does it fulfill?

This is an interesting question. It certainly satisfies me, but what kind of satisfaction? I don’t know. I can’t find the answer. I never think about it, and never ask myself why. It is something instinctual. As I told you, I was three years old when I collected tomatoes. There is no reason behind it.

Thanks to Pelin Esmer for her help and contribution.
Sense Mind Map 1999–Today

Lia Perjovschi

STATEMENT
Once upon a time, far away in the East, there was a Great Nation proud of its rich culture and tradition which had flourished on the vast land for thousands of years. Being blessed with such a long history, the people of the land lived through many rich and happy years. They witnessed times of ascent and prosperity, but also times of stagnation and decline. After one such long period of uncertainty and poverty, signs of change and optimism could be seen everywhere. The new culture was starting to emerge, while unusual forms of art were appearing in many places. In the beginning, this new art, named ‘contemporary’ looked very strange, since its origins were in the West and it did not have much in common with the great masters from the past. Nevertheless, contemporary art was embraced by many young, adventurous artists who were attracted to the ideas of individuality and originality. For a few decades, this art flourished and could be seen in many new galleries that opened in all big cities of the land. However, after some time, people began to ask: “How could we have had contemporary art at all without art history? What is contemporary art without the memory of modern art? Where are our museums of modern art? Wasn’t it modern art that invented the ideas of uniqueness and originality?”

It is impossible to know what the answers to these questions would have been, if one day in the southern metropolis of the land known as the City of Flowers there hadn’t unexpectedly appeared a Museum of Modern Art. This was a most unusual museum, such as had never before been seen anywhere in the world. Indeed it had a magnificent collection of the most important works of modern art of all styles, arranged according to the famous diagram: from Post-Impressionism, Fauvism, Cubism to Abstraction, Suprematism, Constructivism ... and even later, Dada and Surrealism.

As if all the masterpieces of modern art had by some force of magic been taken from the West and brought to the East, this Great Nation had suddenly become the owner of the entire Modern tradition. Yet it came as a great surprise and disappointment for everybody when it was realized that in fact none of the exhibited works were originals! Instead, they were all copies made by the local artists from the City of Flowers. Some learned people began to complain at once: “What kind of modern art is this? These are all worthless copies. How can we have modern art without the originals? We all know that the originals are in the great museum, far away in the West, called The Modern. That is the real museum of modern art, not this pathetic, newfangled imitation!”

What these wise men did not understand was that they were looking into the past, and it was only in the past that the originals were admired and valued, while copies were despised and considered to be worthless. They could not see into the future, since in the future they would see that it would be the copies that are valued and respected, while the originals are perceived to be simple and trivial. A copy of an original abstract painting will look just as abstract. But as a copy, such a painting will also be both realistic and representational. As time goes by, nobody knows how many new meanings a copy may acquire; how many new roles in how many different stories it may play.

That is why our Museum of Modern Art made of copies is not a museum of the past; it is rather a museum of the future. Moreover, by being both modern and non-modern at the same time, it will become the only true memory of modern art, the only true Museum of Modern Art in the entire world.

That is how it happened that this Great Nation unexpectedly, and for the first time, got not only its modern art, but at the same time the first Museum of Modern Art as well.

From The Tales of the Artisans
When the Yugoslav People’s Army vacated the barracks at Metelkova in 1991, some of the space became available for contemporary art. But the emptied space had lost all of its previous performative functions. Instead it became “susceptible to being diverted, reappropriated and put to use quite differently from its initial one,” thereby enabling different configurations of forces, performative acts and social relations that called the future museum of contemporary art into being. Zdenka Badovinac has pointed out that it was the war that “brought the museum of contemporary art into being. Zdenka Badovinac has pointed out that it was the war that became available for contemporary art. But the barracks at Metelkova in 1991, some of the space, events, gestures, forms of behaviour, and affects, constituting so-called counter-knowledges within such performative environments, but also connecting them with the body, with desire, really interesting things emerge. What does this “counter-knowledge” do? Through it, identities, borders, disciplines, hegemonic narratives and automatic responses are being questioned and deconstructed, subsequently leading to the production of a different sort of space. Now, this contradictory new space is being produced out of differences that are found, for instance, in “lived bodily experiences,” “socio-spatial tactics” and “rhythmanalysis” and should be considered, as Henri Lefebvre pointed out, “with all the senses, with the total body” in order to become aware of “the conflicts at work within it,” or, more specifically, to become aware of the forces that demand its normalisation, its abstraction. In art, for example, once the particular environment recognises it, the difference between inside and outside cannot disappear again. In the context of the contemporary museum the repetitive acts that grant the artwork its identity are inevitably linked to the subversive repetitions that question that very same identity. Subversive repetitions may be seen as analogous to the Deleuzian model of time, where a repetition actually makes itself the form of time. It is this antagonistic relationship between repetitions-as-time and performativity that has legitimised the idea of contemporary art, and later on, that of the contemporary museum over the last fifty years.

The barracks on Metelkova Street were built between 1883 and 1885 for the Austro-Hungarian army. Michel de Certeau put it very precisely when he said that the tendency of functionalist totalitarianism was to erase everything that compromised the univocity of the system. Following his idea, the relationship between spatial practices and constructed order can be observed more clearly. The same logic could be discerned at the Metelkova complex. The formalised and strict architectural order of the military complex fostered authority, hierarchy, discipline and control [Figure 2]. All of these operations subsequently effected the routinization of human actions, efficiency, and disciplinary bodily activities; in other words, the construction of a “docile body”.

The regulated bodily acts and the repressions of desire that prevailed in these military spaces were an inevitable part of the “performative exercises of power”. In military barracks, any potentially dangerous or disturbing behaviour was sanctioned, life was strictly planned and regulated, and time was dictated and organised in schedules. In other words, "the space of a (social) order [was] hidden in the order of space".

I would argue that what has given this space a specific meaning was neither its architectural frame, that is, its representational and ideological function, nor the notion of space as a ‘historical idea’. Instead I would like to call attention to various performative functions; performative acts and repetitions that have defined it, and vice versa. In performativity, as it is generally understood, repetitions through time play a vital role and are connected with the concept of identity. When something: a sentence, an utterance, an act, is repeated often enough, it gains power; it constructs an identity. For example, in communist Yugoslavia the slogan “Protect brotherhood and unity” became a kind of a performative speech act, where, according to J.L. Austin, to say something actually means an action has to be performed to realise its effect. The slogan “Protect brotherhood and unity” designated the official policy of ethnic relations in former Yugoslavia, and the authority behind the particular performative speech act was the Yugoslav People’s Army. Whenever the effect, i.e., the unity of the country was put into question, the sanctions that followed demanded an intervention. In the eighties, when the political situation changed, this normative ideology regained new performative functions and repetitions, which no longer demanded unity but instead, fragmentation of the country, leading to the breakup of Yugoslavia.

Similarly, the museum’s legitimation consists of those discourses that have the capacity to produce what they name. What they name are the works of art. And this is what performativity in an art context means: the way the identity of a work of art is constructed and invested in the art environment. This was the museum’s main objective until the second half of the twentieth century. When we not only investigate conflictual acts, events, gestures, forms of behaviour, and affects,
When the Yugoslav People’s Army moved in after the Second World War, it exercised its power precisely through these same regulated forms of behaviour, instrumental actions and punitive social conventions, outwardly manifested also in embodied performances such as military parades and other highly performative acts and spectacles. In order to impose an authoritarian order, these performative acts had to be repeated in time.

As previously mentioned, performative acts, which are inevitably linked to power, make us rethink the disciplinary boundaries not only of embodied behaviour in culturally restricted, regularized spaces but also of the counter – behaviour that occurs in those very same spaces.

The first gesture of such rebellion is, as philosopher Mladen Dolar says, an “epistemological rupture, which establishes authority as an object.” The subversive acts then occur as interruptions disturbing the stability of the system, where the ideology of those in power is called into question and can therefore no longer be valid as such or taken for granted. Its performative power is lost forever.

The list of various “subversions” in the context of the former Yugoslav People’s Army and the dominant ideology of that time is too long for the scope of this talk. But there were also cases where artistic subversions which could somehow be considered “events” disturbed the continuous linear time of the dominant ideology to such a degree as to enable the beginning of something different. Many such works are now part of the Moderna galerija’s collections. What makes all of this especially interesting is the antagonism between two environments / two spaces: one that banned subversive (artistic) expressions and persecuted their authors, and another that has recently, or to be more precise, since the beginning of our contemporaneity, included and conceptualized those expressions within the museum narrative.

In 1969 Želimir Žilnik filmed Early Works, which is set during the time of the student riots of 1968 in the former Yugoslavia and has four young people as the leading characters. They leave home and travel around the country looking for genuinely revolutionary socialism, with the intention of raising the workers’ and peasants’ revolutionary consciousness. But theirs is a mission that cannot be realised and the film endeavours to express this state of helplessness on the part of the revolutionaries who are trying to change society. Throughout the film, slogans such as “Down with the red bourgeoisie!” can be heard, although instead of performative utterances they can be interpreted as a mocking of the system. The film was banned.

In 1972 Karpo Godina made a short film, which was originally commissioned by the Yugoslav army as a propaganda film. Instead, the picture called On Love Skills was pacifistic and took the hippie maxim “Make love, not war” as its point of departure. Where the army repressed and encoded differences and desires, the film not only openly showed them but constituted a desire in itself. It was an act of rebellion, a threat to the system, doubting the authoritarian ideology via embodied counter-behaviour, in the sense of Lefebvre who said, “Any revolutionary project, whether utopian or realistic, must make the reappropriation of the body, in the association with the reappropriation of space, into a non-negotiable part of its agenda.” All copies of the film were destroyed and Godina was forbidden to direct any new films for ten years.
While the military complex in Metelkova corresponds to a repressive, dominant space legitimated by repetitive performative acts and “man’s servitude to quantified time”, the Museum of Contemporary Art Metelkova corresponds to the appropriated, differential space, or, to be more precise, to an ideal/utopian projection of that space, which Michel Foucault would have called heterotopia.

Why so? Because the fact is that there are various frictions at work: not only antagonism between the forces of domination and differentiation, but also between abstract space and the space of lived experiences, of the *in-time*, which demands of us an answer to the question of how to preserve human temporality and its “pure historical essence”. When back in the early 1990s the Moderna galerija acquired a building at the southern end of Metelkova, a new kind of museum model had been envisioned, a future model which would foster a relationship to those practices from the 1960s onwards in which artists would manipulate time in a variety of ways, not only in order to become historians of their own time but to challenge dominant, ideological time. For this to be possible, what was needed was “not a new chronology but a qualitative alteration of time” with, as Giorgio Agamben might have said, an authentic history. So it is actually the antagonistic relationship between the “liberating time” of authentic history and the “continuous linear time” of dominant ideology, or between repetitions-as-time and performativity, that defines our idea of both contemporary art and the contemporary museum.

In his 1971 work *Streaking*, Tomislav Gotovac runs down the street in Belgrade naked shouting, “I am innocent!” Gotovac’s performances were embodied subversions par excellence of the existing socio-political order, where his naked and desiring body was the protagonist of the action. Such expressions were dangerous because they questioned the very system based on control and discipline, destroying the established culture of normality in a society that did not tolerate nonconformity and difference.

In 1987, New Collectivism (or shortened, NK) took part in the visual design competition to commemorate The Day of Youth, May 25, President Tito’s birthday, which was one of the major performative acts/spectacles in the former Yugoslavia. NK won the competition, and the poster it designed was to be distributed and displayed all over the country. However, a striking similarity to Nazi artist Richard Klein’s painting was soon discovered in the design, only there, the Nazi symbols had been replaced by Yugoslav ones. The events led to the so-called Poster Scandal, embarrassing the “ideology of those in power”.

NK stated that a political poster should have some disturbing appeal to the masses and that its slogan was humanistic propaganda. Tomaž Mastnak, a political philosopher, pointed out that the key moment of any social or political struggle was the outbreak of the “strange utterance”, leading to a restructuring of ideological speech. This was also the case with the Day of Youth poster.

In 1971 work *Streaking*, Tomislav Gotovac runs down the street in Belgrade naked shouting, “I am innocent!” Gotovac’s performances were embodied subversions par excellence of the existing socio-political order, where his naked and desiring body was the protagonist of the action. Such expressions were dangerous because they questioned the very system based on control and discipline, destroying the established culture of normality in a society that did not tolerate nonconformity and difference.

In 1987, New Collectivism (or shortened, NK) took part in the visual design competition to commemorate The Day of Youth, May 25, President Tito’s birthday, which was one of the major performative acts/spectacles in the former Yugoslavia. NK won the competition, and the poster it designed was to be distributed and displayed all over the country. However, a striking similarity to Nazi artist Richard Klein’s painting was soon discovered in the design, only there, the Nazi symbols had been replaced by Yugoslav ones. The events led to the so-called Poster Scandal, embarrassing the “ideology of those in power”.

NK stated that a political poster should have some disturbing appeal to the masses and that its slogan was humanistic propaganda. Tomaž Mastnak, a political philosopher, pointed out that the key moment of any social or political struggle was the outbreak of the "strange utterance", leading to a restructuring of ideological speech. This was also the case with the Day of Youth poster.

While the military complex in Metelkova corresponds to a repressive, dominant space legitimated by repetitive performative acts and "man’s servitude to quantified time", the Museum of Contemporary Art Metelkova corresponds to the appropriated, differential space, or, to be more precise, to an ideal/utopian projection of that space, which Michel Foucault would have called heterotopia. Why so? Because the fact is that there are various frictions at work: not only antagonism between the forces of domination and differentiation, but also between abstract space and the space of lived experiences, of the *in-time*, which demands of us an answer to the question of how to preserve human temporality and its “pure historical essence”. When back in the early 1990s the Moderna galerija acquired a building at the southern end of Metelkova, a new kind of museum model had been envisioned, a future model which would foster a relationship to those practices from the 1960s onwards in which artists would manipulate time in a variety of ways, not only in order to become historians of their own time but to challenge dominant, ideological time. For this to be possible, what was needed was “not a new chronology but a qualitative alteration of time” with, as Giorgio Agamben might have said, an authentic history. So it is actually the antagonistic relationship between the “liberating time” of authentic history and the “continuous linear time” of dominant ideology, or between repetitions-as-time and performativity, that defines our idea of both contemporary art and the contemporary museum.

In his 1971 work *Streaking*, Tomislav Gotovac runs down the street in Belgrade naked shouting, “I am innocent!” Gotovac’s performances were embodied subversions par excellence of the existing socio-political order, where his naked and desiring body was the protagonist of the action. Such expressions were dangerous because they questioned the very system based on control and discipline, destroying the established culture of normality in a society that did not tolerate nonconformity and difference.

In 1987, New Collectivism (or shortened, NK) took part in the visual design competition to commemorate The Day of Youth, May 25, President Tito’s birthday, which was one of the major performative acts/spectacles in the former Yugoslavia. NK won the competition, and the poster it designed was to be distributed and displayed all over the country. However, a striking similarity to Nazi artist Richard Klein’s painting was soon discovered in the design, only there, the Nazi symbols had been replaced by Yugoslav ones. The events led to the so-called Poster Scandal, embarrassing the “ideology of those in power”.

NK stated that a political poster should have some disturbing appeal to the masses and that its slogan was humanistic propaganda. Tomaž Mastnak, a political philosopher, pointed out that the key moment of any social or political struggle was the outbreak of the "strange utterance", leading to a restructuring of ideological speech. This was also the case with the Day of Youth poster.

While the military complex in Metelkova corresponds to a repressive, dominant space legitimated by repetitive performative acts and "man’s servitude to quantified time", the Museum of Contemporary Art Metelkova corresponds to the appropriated, differential space, or, to be more precise, to an ideal/utopian projection of that space, which Michel Foucault would have called heterotopia. Why so? Because the fact is that there are various frictions at work: not only antagonism between the forces of domination and differentiation, but also between abstract space and the space of lived experiences, of the *in-time*, which demands of us an answer to the question of how to preserve human temporality and its “pure historical essence”. When back in the early 1990s the Moderna galerija acquired a building at the southern end of Metelkova, a new kind of museum model had been envisioned, a future model which would foster a relationship to those practices from the 1960s onwards in which artists would manipulate time in a variety of ways, not only in order to become historians of their own time but to challenge dominant, ideological time. For this to be possible, what was needed was “not a new chronology but a qualitative alteration of time” with, as Giorgio Agamben might have said, an authentic history. So it is actually the antagonistic relationship between the “liberating time” of authentic history and the “continuous linear time” of dominant ideology, or between repetitions-as-time and performativity, that defines our idea of both contemporary art and the contemporary museum.

In 1987, New Collectivism (or shortened, NK) took part in the visual design competition to commemorate The Day of Youth, May 25, President Tito’s birthday, which was one of the major performative acts/spectacles in the former Yugoslavia. NK won the competition, and the poster it designed was to be distributed and displayed all over the country. However, a striking similarity to Nazi artist Richard Klein’s painting was soon discovered in the design, only there, the Nazi symbols had been replaced by Yugoslav ones. The events led to the so-called Poster Scandal, embarrassing the “ideology of those in power”.

NK stated that a political poster should have some disturbing appeal to the masses and that its slogan was humanistic propaganda. Tomaž Mastnak, a political philosopher, pointed out that the key moment of any social or political struggle was the outbreak of the "strange utterance", leading to a restructuring of ideological speech. This was also the case with the Day of Youth poster.

While the military complex in Metelkova corresponds to a repressive, dominant space legitimated by repetitive performative acts and "man’s servitude to quantified time", the Museum of Contemporary Art Metelkova corresponds to the appropriated, differential space, or, to be more precise, to an ideal/utopian projection of that space, which Michel Foucault would have called heterotopia. Why so? Because the fact is that there are various frictions at work: not only antagonism between the forces of domination and differentiation, but also between abstract space and the space of lived experiences, of the *in-time*, which demands of us an answer to the question of how to preserve human temporality and its “pure historical essence”. When back in the early 1990s the Moderna galerija acquired a building at the southern end of Metelkova, a new kind of museum model had been envisioned, a future model which would foster a relationship to those practices from the 1960s onwards in which artists would manipulate time in a variety of ways, not only in order to become historians of their own time but to challenge dominant, ideological time. For this to be possible, what was needed was “not a new chronology but a qualitative alteration of time” with, as Giorgio Agamben might have said, an authentic history. So it is actually the antagonistic relationship between the “liberating time” of authentic history and the “continuous linear time” of dominant ideology, or between repetitions-as-time and performativity, that defines our idea of both contemporary art and the contemporary museum.
Hi Everyone!

Welcome to the Draft for a Performance Museum. Thank you so much for joining me in this tour that addresses the recent trends in the conflicted relationships between Performance and the Museum. Here, we’ll get into questions such as, “How have museum practices, methodologies and stakes engaged with performance in recent years?” “How do museums attempt to incorporate performance?” “How do performance artists ‘hijack’ these attempts, or propose new models?” and “Is a love affair between Performance and the Museum so impossible?”

During the tour, you will encounter several projects, both by museums and by artists themselves, addressing such issues as collecting, displaying or even restoring performance. As you will notice, our focus is a mainly Eurocentric one, as Europe (and perhaps the United States) is a fertile terrain for an obsessing desire to “museumize” performance—or, perhaps the United States) is a fertile terrain for an obsessing desire to “museumize” performance—or, beyond the usual. The space is empty. You will see no description, no name, and no date. Only, sometimes, people kissing on the floor… Oh, by the way, taking pictures in this room is forbidden!

On the Ground Floor, the Main Hall is dedicated to Tino Sehgal, an ecumenical hero cherished by the worlds of both visual arts and dance. Indeed, by refusing any written contract and selling his performances only through an oral agreement between himself, a notary, and a collector or an institution, he managed to turn the act of acquiring a piece into an artistic gesture in itself, subverting the usual procedures of collecting and exhibiting, hereby engaging the responsibility of the museum far beyond the usual. The space is empty. You will see no description, no name, and no date. Only, sometimes, people kissing on the floor… Oh, by the way, taking pictures in this room is forbidden!

The Catharsis Room is dedicated to the re-display of exhibitions that both shocked and shocked some venerated institutions. Currently on view is a reconstruction of Paul McCarthy’s Head Shop/Shop Head. Works 1966–2006, originally installed in SMAK, Ghent, in 2008. There, the artist staged an impossible retrospective of his process-oriented oeuvre, notably activating large-scale installations with scattering performances that were filmed and then projected within the same installations; the status of each work being constantly redefined by the discovery of the next. Overwhelmed with sounds, objects and images infecting each other throughout the rooms, the visitor was left with the impression of wandering a former battlefield while not being spared any details of the massacre that had happened before the opening. McCarthy was one of the first performance artists to abandon live happenings in the 1980s for performances staged for video only—thus turning the commodification of documentation into an actual part of his practice. He produced a stunning performance of the museum itself, hijacking and revealing its mechanisms of desire and death into a burlesque mise-en-abyme. Watch your feet, Sir, there is ketchup all over the floor behind you!

By the way, museums will not wait very long before taking their revenge and playfully co-opting / annihilating these attempts at destruction: for more on this, see Trashing Tate Modern, organized by Performance Matters, last autumn, in London!

To your left, The Fossil Room is dedicated to the groundbreaking role of certain major museums’s performance departments in the mummification of performance. Here you will find respectfully-hung, large-scale retrospectives crammed with documentation, often offering the viewer a touch of participation, and accompanied by a two-day symposium on the issue of collecting performance. Their most striking innovation is perhaps the expansion of the notion of repetition: they turn a singular event into a ready-made, to be experienced again and again during opening hours for the whole duration of the show, thus reframing fifty years of performance reception theory. If Amelia Jones once stated that one ‘didn’t have to be there’ to experience the agency of the performer’s body, it is its presence itself that is now commodified and mechanically reproduced in the flesh, in the accumulated time of display. Here, yes, you can take pictures!

Visual Arts, the meetings curated by Ana Janevski and Joanna Warsza at the Museum of Modern Art in Warsaw in 2011, among many others.

A vast array of possible times shall unfold through the spaces we will cross, hopefully leading us to redefine our apprehension of duration, our habits of exhibition consumption, and our relationship to memory in the museum context. In these rooms, immateriality challenges immortality, opening up new perspectives on the relevance of the museum model for today’s art practices.

But let’s not wait any longer at the doors of this draft for a performance museum. Do follow me inside!

---

On the opposite side, the Practicable Room5 gathers pieces that were recently shown in Move: Choreographing You.6 Hayward Gallery, London 2010, Haus der Kunst, Munich and K20, Düsseldorf 2011, an exhibition which, I quote “invited the audience to become a participant—or even a dancer—in installations and sculptures by internationally renowned visual artists and choreographers”, among whom were William Forsythe, Robert Morris and Franz Erhard Walther. (Pause)

Yes, you can enter this sculpture by Lygia Clark, but please, take your shoes off… Here the visitor is led to experience (copies of) works that were conceived by choreographers to challenge the body of the dancer, as well as (copies of) works conceived by artists to renew the perception of the viewer’s body in space and to cancel the autonomy of the artwork. Although you have most likely had the chance of “practicing” artworks in other museums before, here the succession of variable gestural qualities questions the potential transposition of past experiences into the body of the viewer through the intermediacy of the objects. How does it impress you?

Moving on to the next part of the tour, the Auto-Collection room is dedicated to practices of performance that work on actualizing an already existing museum collection, whilst simultaneously enhancing it. On June 19, 2010, the Slovenian-based Via Negativa organized the Via Nova series in the Museum of Contemporary Art in Zagreb. Seven performances were staged in simultaneous groups of four in the permanent collection of the museum. They responded to its structure and its themes, and to the museum’s program to “initiate and show motions in presentation, communication and interpretation of the MSU art collection and at the same time point to essential characteristics of contemporary art movement, change, inconstancy, and uncertainty”. The produced video documents were then exhibited as video installations and included in the museum’s collection, thus transgressing the autonomy of the (consenting) institution.

Behind this next door is the Scientific Department, run by Atelier Boronali, a restoration studio founded in 2007 by the performance artist Laurent Prexl and the contemporary art restorer Stéphanie Elarbi. Acknowledging the growing amount of performances acquired by museums, they are working on a methodology of conservation and restoration for performances, based on existing models from the visual arts field. Diverging from reenactment, their proposal appropriates, among others, the notion of lacunae: in painting, when a missing part is too big, a restorer shall not attempt to reinvent the (consenting) institution. On June 19, 2010, the Slovenian-based Via Negativa organized the Via Nova series in the Museum of Contemporary Art in Zagreb. Seven performances were staged in simultaneous groups of four in the permanent collection of the museum. They responded to its structure and its themes, and to the museum’s program to “initiate and show motions in presentation, communication and interpretation of the MSU art collection and at the same time point to essential characteristics of contemporary art movement, change, inconstancy, and uncertainty7. The produced video documents were then exhibited as video installations and included in the museum’s collection, thus transgressing the autonomy of the (consenting) institution.

Please check the program of our Theater,8 located just down these stairs to your left. Although performances are staged on an ongoing basis all over the museum space, we felt the need to frame others into the specific temporality and frontality of the theater. We like to consider it as an exhibition room with a different set of rules, and it is often included as a step in our temporary shows, providing a break in the linear consumption of the other rooms. It has served as an exhibition space for La Monnaie Vivante,9 a touring exhibition initiated by Pierre Bal-Blanc in 2006, and as a theater for Il Tempo del Postino.10 an opera curated by Hans Ulrich Obrist and Philippe Parreno; two projects very different in scale and content yet which both reformulate the relationship between visual arts and theatricality—the latter wholeheartedly embracing the body’s dependence on the economy and the consumption of leisure that the first had problematized through its reference to Pierre Klossowski’s thought. It also hosts specific programs, such as the Performing Memory seminars; a project by the bo-ring curatorial collective dedicated to artists, choreographers or directors who base their practice upon preexisting documents that may be connected to the history of the arts, or to more or less recent history. Alternatively, the production of documentation may be inherent to their performance practice. So, the historical narrative that is produced by the museum is constantly reassessed from within.

Let’s now take the stairs up to the second floor, where we’ll encounter alternative models conceived by artists or independent curators. Often time-based, process-oriented, and at times barely visible, the link between their performance practices and this very museum is a permeable one. Few objects will be on view on this floor… yet pay attention! There are movements and words to grasp between these walls, adding to an immaterial collection which (no pressure, eh?) you will also become the bearers of...

---

5 http://archives.villa-arson.org/communique-de-presse/2008NEPA_CP_FR_Ne%20pas%20jouer%20avec%20des%20choses%20mortes%20%C3%A0%20l%20voir%20(comme%20les%20cho%20%20things
6 http://move.southbankcentre.co.uk
7 http://erthwaite.com/media/website/koncept/
Via-MSU-catalogue.pdf
8 http://www.bo-ring.net/?page_id=18
9 http://www.cactelegny.com/ihal#ILA_MONNAIEVIVANTE.html
10 http://www.frieze.com/issue/review/Il_Tempo_del_Postino

---
To your right, the Mise-en-Abyme Room\(^{11}\) hosts a branch of the Musée de la Danse, a complex, exciting project started in 2009 by the French choreographer Boris Charmatz in the Centre Chorégraphique National de Rennes et de Bretagne. The very act of renaming a "Centre Chorégraphique" (a type of public institution dedicated to producing and showing dance pieces in France) as a Musée de la Danse is quite radical. In spite of its universalizing name, the Musée de la Danse is acting as a laboratory to question how dance may be shared in other ways than the ephemeral moment of the show; and how the ongoing processes of research, production and discourse might work together to form the core of a "live museum." So far, the Musée de la Danse has investigated the exhibition format through several projects, such as Brouillon ("Draft"), "a dancing museum" which gathers visual artworks that had been moved around by dancers during opening times; or Expo Zéro,\(^{12}\) an ongoing exhibition of gestures and stories embodied by dancers, artists or theoreticians who had been invited in residency by the museum for specific periods of time, which took on different shapes when it travelled with different guests, from Rennes to Singapore and even to New York... and now, here! While each project actualizes the idea and the form of the museum, a collection of experiences (expanded online in a digital version of the Musée) has begun to take shape.

The Curator’s Room\(^{13}\) is dedicated to Mathieu Copeland’s A Choreographed Exhibition, first shown in the Kunsthalle St. Gallen and La Ferme du Buisson in 2008, for which he invited artists, dancers and choreographers to provide scores and instructions that are performed by three dancers on an ongoing basis during the museum’s opening hours. Here, it is not the spectator who revolves around works but the works that revolve around him or her, to borrow Copeland’s words. (Pause)... Why is it called "The Curator’s Room?" Because he himself chose the order in which each piece would be presented, adding his own score to the ones composed by the guest artists, producing his own arrangement, his own montage, and the narrative movement of the exhibition. It is a room where the curator produces a model which he or she may invite artists to slip into, and in doing so, appropriates the means of choreography to authorize a new approach of exhibition making...

Please take these headphones with you; for the Choreographer’s Room\(^{14}\) is only filled with music. Their volume can be adjusted by turning the dial on the right-hand side. Each space displays a soundtrack from Jérôme Bel’s The Show Must Go On, which is activated when the visitor enters the space. This so-called museum adaptation was first installed in the Musée d’Art Contemporain de Lyon during the Lyon Biennale in 2007, while the ‘original’ danced version of The Show Must Go On was on view at the city’s opera house. Oh, you will certainly recognize the pop songs that compose this soundtrack. Will they trigger visual memories of the choreography? Or imagined ones? Will they drive you to dance in the exhibition rooms, or perhaps to populate them with fantasized gestures?

The Performative Room\(^{15}\) here on the other side of the hall also exhibits evocations, but they are called in by words instead of music, and their scope is infinite. This room hosts the weekly meetings of the Eco-Musée de l’Homme Moderne, an ambitious collection of stories conceived by Benjamin Seror, the French artist, which unfold every time its participants meet to discuss objects and practices of their choice. They thus work together to produce a collective memory of the works. A "methodological fiction," the Eco-Musée borrows from experimental archeology and the pleasure of storytelling, and in so doing tackles both the myth of the Modern Man and the myth of the Museum at once, and not without a certain sense of tenderness.

What would a performance museum be without an Archive Room? Rather than exhibiting documents per se, however, ours displays projects that reflect on the very notion of the archive—as a collection of documents organized around certain aims—and its relationship to the practices of performance. As such, react.feminism\(^{16}\) is a growing "performing archive" dedicated to feminist, gender critical and queer strategies within performance. Gathered by Bettina Knaup and Beatrice Ellen Stammer, it has been exhibited here under one of its temporary forms, both activated and augmented by a set of new performances. But there is also space here for online databases such as the Anecdote Archive,\(^{17}\) a collection of videos of people interviewed by American curator Joseph Del Pesco telling about an event of their choice. These two complementary projects have driven the way the museum conceives of this room. Among the questions you’ll surely encounter here are: How does performance trigger alternative ways of conceiving the archive? And, How can this archive be used, reused, interpreted; basically, in a word, ‘performed’?

Two last things before ending the visit and letting you enjoy our souvenir shop. The museum’s education department is currently developing two programs for which you can sign up if you are interested: The School for Ignorant Schoolmasters is a weekly program of events that explore the ways of transmitting the history of performance art, and the performing arts, within the frame of the museum. The programs have been proposed by artists, curators,

---

11. [www.museedeladanse.org](http://www.museedeladanse.org)
12. [http://expozero.museedeladanse.org](http://expozero.museedeladanse.org)
13. [http://www.mathieucopeland.net](http://www.mathieucopeland.net)
16. [www.reactfeminism.org](http://www.reactfeminism.org)
17. [www.anecdotesarchive.org](http://www.anecdotesarchive.org)
critics and theoreticians, but also students and interested individuals. The Hors-les-Murs program consists in a collection of performances acting “as museums”, and in turn tours other spaces. I will only quote one example in this regard: in 37 Years Too Late, Julia Kläring and Andrea Salzmann examine the legacy of Gina Pane’s radical, feminist performances through a multi-layered dialogue between the past and the present, and include images, gestures and voices that reactivate the agency of her work.

Indeed, the “performatif” aspect of performances themselves is at the core of our draft for a performance museum. This is political gesture: we believe that, as institutions, museums have a significant role to play in society, and that the frictions operated by performance within the museum can help reshape this model and its relationship to representation. In so doing, we can produce empowering discrepancies. A recent example is the Van Abbemuseum’s acquisition of the Positions piece by Public Movement (2011), which required training the museum’s team to use the performance as a tool for the institution to take part in the public debate, for a period of seven years. Our museum does not intend to incorporate or homogenize performance. On the contrary, we believe that the institution ought to be constantly reassessed, rebooted, and performed in turn by various players: artists, researchers, the curatorial team, and you, the audience, as well. Thank you for taking part in this visit. Do come back: next time, the tour will be different yet again!

Note from the author: The images of empty spaces that punctuated our tour were gathered by Benjamin Seror, for a preparatory study of the Eco-musée de l’homme moderne. I am deeply grateful to him for letting me use them as projection rooms for this Draft for a Performance Museum.

18 http://www.bo-ting.net/?page_id=550
19 http://publicmovementenglish.blogspot.com
20 This is a very interesting example of the use of a contract to clarify the relationship between performance and the museum. See Henry Lydiate and Daniel McClean, Performance Art and the Law, http://www.artquest.org.uk/articles/view/performance_art_and_the_law:
“Positions, 2011, by the Israeli artist’s group Public Movement, is the performance of a political choreography in ‘public’ space: members of an audience respond to pairs of political, cultural and social positions read to them by members of Public Movement or its authorized ‘operators’. The audience then aligns itself spatially and physically with the consecutive positions read to them. Public Movement used a written contract to both define the rules for the work’s performance, and to transfer the exclusive right to perform it in the Netherlands to the Van Abbemuseum, Eindhoven. In effect, the artists transferred the exclusive performance rights to the museum, which became the artist’s agent, who was authorized not only to enact the work according to specified rules, but also to update and change the work’s content to reflect future contexts of its performance.”
This is not a paper.

I, for one, have experienced many unpleasant food performances at restaurants. But I always pay my bill and leave a tip (except in countries where you’re not supposed to tip).

Why is it so difficult not to perform a paper?

How does one perform “not performing a paper” at an academic conference?

Is a performance of a summary of a paper not a performance of the paper itself? Is a performance of a paper that doesn’t yet exist not a performance of a paper? Is it not a performance of a paper if I refer to the paper in the subjunctive: “Were I to read this paper, I would say...”

In the context of an academic conference, is not performing a paper the same thing as performing a non-paper?

Why do we as an audience accept people performing summaries of the papers they’re not supposed to be performing when we’ve been told they’re supposed to be doing something other than performing those papers? Do we applaud and then mutter to one another, now or later, about almost no one is actually doing what we’re supposed to be doing?

If I don’t perform some version of my paper right now, how many people will actually read it when it’s circulated? How many have read it already, following upon its initial circulation?

[This one goes out to Craig Saper.] The chairs in this room are very uncomfortable. If anyone would like to stand up and stretch now, please do so. [I always do requests.]

What do displays of technological incompetence have to do with performing an academic identity?

Why do we believe jazz musicians are improvising when we cannot hear the difference between improvised and non-improvised music?

I am writing these comments spontaneously as I act as if I’m listening to other people speak. They are improvisations. Are they still improvisations when I perform them?

Do we actually believe that jazz musicians are improvising or do we know that we are supposed to act as if we believe that they are?

Do we experience recorded jazz as improvised even though it’s the same everytime?
When I say these things, how am I performing my own identity as a jazz fan? Or am I actually performing my identity as a performance theorist? Am I performing my identity as a performance theorist when I raise these questions and my identity as a jazz fan when I simply listen to the music without worrying about such things?

Do I as theorist need to sit myself as fan down and give myself a good talking-to? Or do I as fan need to sit myself as theorist down and give myself a good talking-to?

Is there a difference between believing something and acting as if one believes it?

Does social interaction depend on truth, belief, or acting as if one believes certain things to be true?

Does it matter whether an event actually took place as long as it’s documented?

Which is the crucial relationship: the ontological relationship between the event and the document or the phenomenal relationship between the document and its audience?

One of the ideas I found most compelling right now is Walter Benjamin’s concept of *reactivation*.

Key Passage: technical reproduction can put the copy of the original into situations which would be out of reach for the original itself. Above all, it enables the original to meet the beholder halfway, be it in the form of a photograph or a phonograph record. The cathedral leaves its locale to be received in the studio of a lover of art; the choral production, performed in an auditorium or in the open air, resounds in the drawing room.

The document, therefore, does not enable the audience to experience the original event. Rather, it enables the audience to transport the event to its own time and place. What are the further implications of this?

When should I stop writing these questions and observations and offer to present? If I keep writing, will my computer’s battery run out of juice? Will I?

Above all, I must be sure that I haven’t written a paper.
This Is Not A Paper:  
A Performance by Philip Auslander

Written and Presented on May 25, 2007 at the Conference on Events and Event Structures, Denmark’s Design School, Copenhagen

As the date suggests, this score actually came after the performance recorded on the preceding pages. Can this be said, then, to be the score for that performance? And what is the status of the preceding text, from which I read at the conference? Is it a script (whereas this is a score)? Or is it now actually a record or archive of a performance of this score on a particular occasion? Or, since the performance came first, is it, in fact, the score while this image, which purports to be a score is actually a performance of that score?

• Paper

Philip Auslander
May 27, 2007
Do we experience recorded jazz as improvised even though it’s the same every time?

Is improvised music supposed to act as if we believe that they are?

Do we actually believe that jazz musicians are improvising or do we know that we are speaking. They are improvisations. Are they still improvisations when I perform them?

I am writing these comments spontaneously as I act as if I’m listening to other people between improvised and non-improvised music?

Why do we believe jazz musicians are improvising when we cannot identity?

What do displays of technological incompetence have to do with performing an academic identity?

Why do we as an audience accept people performing summaries of the papers they’re not supposed to be performing when we’ve been told they’re supposed to be doing something other than performing these papers? Do we applaud and then mutter to one another, now or later, about how no one is actually doing what we’re supposed to be doing?

If I don’t perform some version of my paper right now, how many people will actually read it when it’s circulated? How many have read it already, following upon its initial circulation?

This refers to an earlier performance of a paper if I refer to the paper in the subjunctive: “Were I to read this paper, I would say...”

Are these two comments should be in the opposite order.

Comment: These were direct references to things I had seen people do at the conference. But I think those familiar with the conventions of academic presentations will understand what I meant even if they didn’t attend this particular event.

This is not a paper. This refers to an earlier conference presentation by Karen Goldsmith. I don’t know if that connection will persist in the book.

Comment: This refers to an author.

If I perform some version of my paper right now, how many people will actually perform a non-paper?

In the context of an academic conference, is not performing a paper the same thing as performing a non-paper?

Do I as theorist need to sit myself as theorist down and give myself a good talking-to? Or do I as fan need to sit myself as theorist down and give myself a good talking-to?

Is there a difference between believing something and acting as if one believes it?

Does social interaction depend on truth, belief, or acting as if one believes certain things to be true?

Does it matter whether an event actually took place as long as it’s documented?

Which is the crucial relationship: the ontological relationship between the event and the document or the phenomenal relationship between the document and its audience?

One of the ideas I found most compelling right now is Walter Benjamin’s concept of reactivation.

Key Passage: “technical reproduction can put the copy of the original into situations which would be out of reach for the original itself. Above all, it enables the original to meet the beholder halfway, be it in the form of a photograph or a phonograph record. The cathedral leaves its locale to be received in the studio of a lover of art; the choral production, performed in an auditorium or in the open air, resonates in the drawing room.”

The document, therefore, does not enable the audience to experience the original event. Rather, it enables the audience to transport the event to its own time and place. What are the further implications of this?

When should I stop writing these questions and observations and offer to present? If I keep writing, will my computer’s battery run out of juice? Will I?

Above all, I must be sure that I haven’t written a paper.
This Is Not A Performance:
A Paper by Philip Auslander

Written and Presented on May 25, 2007 at the Conference on Events and Event Structures, Denmark’s Design School, Copenhagen

Philip Auslander
May 27, 2007
What was the impetus to resurrect Josiah Warren’s project/store? Is it the current financial crisis and belief that prevailing economic systems don’t work, in which case the project would be an eminently political action that uses the realm of artistic practice to come into being, or is it an essentially artistic project, strictly intended to address the realm of art (practice, audience, consumption)?

Anton Vidokle: Well, for me (and it may be something else for Julieta) there is something poetic in revisiting a project that existed briefly in 1827. It’s interesting how alternative and utopian proposals keep resurfacing in history again and again. Most of the time they have a short lifespan or remain unfinished or unrealized, but stubbornly keep coming back. I’d like to think that maybe someone else a hundred years from now will open yet another time store somewhere, and this time it will be so successful that it will really transform everything. Or maybe it will fail, but someone will try it again, and again… until it succeeds. What is reassuring is the continuity of a desire for things to be different.

Julieta Aranda: I agree with Anton, and would just want to add that I don’t see how we could think of a project such as Time/Bank as purely symbolic, even though I would actually say that Time/Bank is definitively an artist’s project. You see, the realm of art is not limited to practice/audience/consumption. That may be true about a certain amount of historic romanticism.

What is infinitely more interesting is to think about this project as a chance to create worlds, to imagine and produce other realities; to further the focus of the project is not exactly to resurrect Josiah Warren’s Cincinnati Time Store, as that implies a certain amount of historic romanticism. This would mean that currency is what is circulated in society in general is a certain difficulty to imagine things as being different. For example, while a lot of people are attracted to the idea of time-based currency or economy, most have a really hard time imagining what they can do with it. So it’s very helpful to have a store with all sorts of commodities that one can obtain in exchange for time—it makes a rather abstract concept visceral.

That said, Time/Store is a practical outlet for Time/Bank—so that it is possible to have real access to the alternative economy that the project proposes. And while we acknowledge each and every one of the previous iterations of time currency propositions, the focus of the project is not exactly to resurrect Josiah Warren’s Cincinnati Time Store, as that implies a certain amount of historic romanticism.

Money, or currency, is a fiction that societies (antique, pre-capitalist and modern) have and continue to abide to, often when national economies collapse, governments have reacted by simply creating a new one, pegged to a sizeable multiple of the previous one. Brazil is one of the so-called success stories of such experiments, with the invention of the Brazilian real in the 1980s, when inflation crippled the economy. Currency, or assigning a monetary value to labour and production, is only a facet / aspect of the economic system; one of many columns on which the edifice rests. Is the intention to bring the edifice to a collapse from within (an anarchist strategy), or is it to build a parallel edifice that would undermine the validity of the prevailing model? Is Time/Store intended to propose a new horizon of possibility, or sabotage the present one?

AV: Yes, I think we are trying to create a parallel structure that would place the burden of explanation on the prevailing system: if things can be done better (with more quality and pleasure) in other ways, why does the current arrangement dominate? Is its legitimacy derived from the fact that it’s good, or because it is simply imposed putatively, enforced by police and armies?

JA: There is a slight difference between currency and money, I think. Currency can be defined as “transmission from person to person as a medium of exchange; circulation,” while money is “a measure and a store of value”.

Recently, I was walking around a small occupation that sprouted in Mexico City, and it struck me that, in the same way as in Zucotti Park in NY, there was evidence of art everywhere—painting, theatrical situations, musical performances. While the manifestations of work that I witnessed may not have particularly conformed to the quality standards upon which contemporary art is judged and interpreted, I believe that the said work came into existence because of an internal logic inherent to art, which has to do with expressing affects.

This would mean that currency is what is circulated and money is what is hoarded. Currency is something that can be used to represent an exchange—a written note, a loaf of bread, a stone, a string of beads, a promise—and it doesn’t have to be pegged to money or to the notion that one of its main purposes is self-enrichment. If we succeed at least marginally in showing that it is possible to peg currency to something more humane—like time—new horizons of possibility may indeed open up.
Comprised of the artistic community, which in essence is a group like any other: a group of senior citizens, an association of plumbers, immigrants, etc. So if these other groups can organize mutual aid societies and other alternative economic networks, why shouldn’t we—artists, curators, writers—try to do this as well?

JA: I think that it is possible—and logical—for actions and projects to have multiple readings and to work on multiple levels. If Time/Bank operates in two or more realities, hopefully that can only be beneficial for the project as it would then not be reduced to either a symbolic artistic gesture, or an act of good will. I actually think that it is important that Time/Bank enjoys visibility at the level of the art world where value is produced, so the notion of an alternative way of doing things becomes part of the conversation. How else might one interject a rupture in the way of doing things?

I am curious about your reflection on evaluating creative capital, or the immaterial labour in the arts and creative industries, that the text describing the project refers to. So much in the arts—especially creative capital, or the immaterial labour in the arts and projects to have multiple readings and to work in forms that are not fixed and that are determined by the actual person who requested the help, and this type of help to be compensated, not necessarily directly with money. This compensation takes place elsewhere in forms that are not fixed and that are determined within the community, by its own set of needs and resources.

Finally, is it important for you to evaluate (and if so, in what way) certain types of interest groups, affinities, communities that arise and relate to one another within the project?

AV: I would not really know how to evaluate such groups...

JA: I don’t really think that this would be something that pertains to us. If there are productive affinities and communities that result from a project, they will manifest themselves, in their own way and in their own time.

You have clarified very eloquently where you locate the project, and you are right in that it does render an abstract idea (whose soil or sky are utopian) concrete. While the project is wilfully located outside the realm of art practices driven by the market, it nonetheless circulates and takes form in a world that orbits very closely around the market. Do you foresee a potential conflict arising from the daily, concrete, material lives of users who experience an alternative economic system, and the art world in which the project has acquired recognition and value as an art project?

JA: The Time/Bank is not only about creating a valuation system for immaterial labour—that would be like substituting money with money. More important is to create an alternative notion of compensation, rooted on the weaving of a community that can be dependable to perform a range of functions for itself within the boundaries of the community. I am not talking about volunteering, but also I am not referring to a square system of valuation where time and/or labour are equivalent to a proportional amount of money. This compensation takes place elsewhere in forms that are not fixed and that are determined within the community, by its own set of needs and resources.

I think that what we were specifically interested in is the kind of work that takes place in the arts and is extremely necessary, but is not valued by society and always falls through cracks. For example, a couple of years ago I was editing a film and really needed someone to view a draft, and give me critical feedback. It needed to be someone who was not necessarily a friend and who would be objective about the work, and also someone who had experience in filmmaking. Eventually I found a friend of a friend who watched the film and spent a couple of hours giving me feedback, which was incredibly useful and productive—I really could not have finished the film without this. I would have never thought of paying her and she would have never asked for money as compensation—it would have really confused the situation and have also made the possibility of critical feedback somewhat suspect. Nevertheless this sort of work that we in the art community often perform for one another is really important. Time/Bank creates the possibility for this type of help to be compensated, not necessarily by the actual person who requested the help, and certainly not in money, but through the system of Time/Bank itself.

This is important because if such valuable help is compensated and brings something back that is more than simply gratitude, it enables me to help more—to do more of something that I really like and value, without jeopardizing my economic situation by spending too much time volunteering free work (which is not sustainable in capitalist society in the end).

AV: There are many different definitions of immaterial labour that have nothing to do with volunteering, but simply with work that does not immediately result in the production of concrete commodities: writing, research, software development, and the like. Quite a lot of such “immaterial labour” is extremely highly compensated. Sometimes immaterial labour is bundled with the notion of affective labour, which is often unacknowledged but is fundamentally important in our society.

It is fairly clear that things are not working quite right with the present system, and that there is a massive mistrust in governing and regulating institutions as they are established at the moment. So, while the collapse of the present arrangement comes about (or not), it is important to lay the grounds for different ways of doing things, which is what I consider we are doing with this project.
How to Play the game:
This is a game for two players. It is a game of embodiment, communication and connection. Every time the game is played, a new form is created. To play the work, read through the script together, choosing lines at random, as if you were in conversation. The game can continue ad infinitum.

Rules:
You may not say anything to one another during the read-through other than what is scripted. Each player can choose to read at random from any line, and in any order. You may choose when to talk and when to listen. If you want to interrupt each other then you can. If you interrupt each other by mistake you can choose whether to stop or to continue. You are talking to one another. You are each the audience of this play.

NOTES: The title ON IN + AN ONE is a breakdown of the origins of the word “anon”, commonly used by Shakespeare: “I come, anon!” Anon simultaneously refers to the immediacy of the present and another time in the future through a term that resides in the past. The proximity of “anon anon” to “and on and on” is a further reference to time and duration and the potentiality of the work to create an eternal play. In a more abstract way, the title also reflects the form of the work; a game of appropriation “on in” and communication with “a/an one”.
